

Durkheim and Dewey and the challenge of contemporary moral education

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John Dewey and Emile Durkheim are philosophical giants in the field of moral education. This paper compares and contrasts their respective visions for moral education and contextualizes the comparison in the profound intellectual and social changes modernity was casting throughout the world. They were transitional figures that attempted to make education responsive to those novel conditions and forces. Toward this end, Dewey and Durkheim, though they differed in key areas, articulated the moral sources and authority on which their respective visions for education depended. In as much as the contemporary discourse on moral education lacks this articulation, there is much to be learned from examining their work. Though the current cultural context differs from that of Dewey and Durkheim, their approach to addressing these questions can inform our task in the present.

Introduction

The era marked by the close of the nineteenth century and the dawn of the twentieth gave birth to fundamental changes in the social order of the world. It was a time of tremendous intellectual creativity, a period pregnant with powerful ideas. The romantic ideal of the liberated, freely choosing self was celebrated in the prose of Emerson and the poetry of Whitman and lamented in the pages of Kafka. Hegel (although somewhat earlier) and Nietzsche had both, in their own ways, rocked the philosophical foundations upon which the world had rested for centuries. In the middle of it all, Darwin dropped a bombshell that structurally re-oriented the understanding of the human race and the world in which it is situated.

While these profound cerebral notions were circulating, equally monumental alterations were taking place ‘on the ground’. The economy was transformed through technique and industrialization, giving rise to the large corporation and witnessing the shift from a producer-based to a consumer-based market. It was the time of Rockefeller and Carnegie, railroads and factories, telegraphs and wires.

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Social life rapidly adjusted to keep pace: most families no longer lived and worked together on farms or in local communities. Workers descended upon cities, and urbanization and immigration significantly altered the landscape of the USA and Europe.

Although the seeds for these changes were planted centuries before, the unique confluence of all these forces working together produced in this period a radically mechanistic view of the world. With this mechanized and individualized perspective, the weight of the modern age began to be experienced and embraced at both a theoretical and practical level. The complexity of this new world profoundly altered the capacity for the moral and civic cohesion necessary for collective identity and shared public life. As John Dewey, one of the most important philosophers of the era, put it: ‘Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible’. (1927, p. 142).

John Dewey (1859–1952) and Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), on separate continents in very different societies, both saw education as a promising answer to the problems and challenges of the day. Schools would offer the social cohesion and shared experience that was lacking in a fragmented and mechanized world. Seeing it as a way through the morass, the two contemporary social theorists took up the task of making education responsive to the unprecedented conditions of modernity. They were both concerned with the radical individualism that was taking new forms through industrialization and specialized labour. They were also, however, persuaded by individual freedoms and rights that they saw as beneficial consequences of the modern age.

Their thinking was marked by the monumental changes of modernity; their challenge was to harness the strengths and weaknesses of these modern forces for pedagogical purposes in the schools in order to sustain society through the evolving changes in the social order. This paper begins with a direct comparison of Dewey and Durkheim¹, demonstrating that both had a distinctly moral vision for the role of education in modern society that held great promise for the future; it was a rational, secular morality that would bind pluralistic society together for a common end. While Dewey and Durkheim had somewhat similar conceptions of the sources of this morality in society and experience, their opinions diverged about the role of the individual and the relative moral authority of society. After tracing this difference to the particularities of their cultural contexts, the paper concludes by holding up their articulation of moral sources and authority as a model for discourse on moral education² in our own day, though our contemporary moment is marked by new challenges.

The social role of education

Both of these influential thinkers conceived of education as the mechanism for cultural and societal transmission. Dewey explained this continuation process organically: ‘Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life. This transmission occurs by means of communication of habits of

doing, thinking, and feeling from older to the younger' (1997, p. 3). Social life cannot survive without this process of transmission through communication. Dewey believed the most effective (but not the only) tool for this communication was education. 'Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life' (1997, p. 2).

At about the same time, across the Atlantic Ocean, Durkheim perceived the trans-generational function of education for his French society in much the same way in that it was responsible for social continuity: 'All educational practices, whatever they may be...have in common one essential characteristic: they all follow from the influence exercised by one generation on the following generation with an eye to adapting the latter to the social milieu in which it is called upon to live' (1956, p. 95). This common understanding of education historically situates it; each society uniquely approaches education for its own purposes and thus it is always embedded in a particular cultural context. Successive societies build upon the notions of education in previous societies. For Durkheim, the common thread for all societies, including the modern one, was to see education as the mechanism to transmit knowledge from one generation to the next (1956).

In this way, for Dewey and Durkheim, education was a social function. Both men understood education as a genuine institution in the sociological sense of the word, because it was the most social of all human organizations and provided the context in which normative patterns of thought, behaviour and social interaction could be learned in community. The school was a microcosm for society, socializing the young through its environment for participation in public life. Dewey explained education as 'a social function, securing direction and development in the immature through their participation in the life of the group to which they belong' (1997, p. 81). Almost identically, Durkheim framed education as 'the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life' or 'methodical socialization of the young' (1956, p. 71). Durkheim's education is a social function because it is the 'means by which a society prepares, in its young, the essential conditions for its own existence' (1972, p. 203).

Acknowledging the social role of education clarifies how Dewey and Durkheim believed the profound changes their societies were enduring needed to be addressed through the schools, and that education needed to be contextualized for the larger forces behind these changes. 'It is radical conditions which have changed, and only an equally radical change in education suffices' (Dewey, 1905, p. 25). Neither man felt that orienting education to merely facts and figures or hands-on skills would effectively answer the challenges modernity was raising. Education needed to have a directional or moral agenda for the sake of social cohesion. Dewey explained it in terms of community and social life: 'we must conceive of [schools] in their social significance, as types of the processes by which society keeps itself going, as agencies for bringing home to the child some of the primal necessities of community life' (1905, 27). But cultural pluralism was leaving its mark on modern society, and religious and ethnic diversity threatened the possibility for socially unified moral cohesion. For Dewey and Durkheim, a moral

vision rooted in rationality and the scientific method was the best hope to accomplish this task in the modern age.

Shifting authority: moving to a rational, secular morality

The radical individualism that cast its long shadow over the USA and France was equally troubling for Dewey and Durkheim. Modern society, in Durkheim's mind, was drifting towards *anomie*—detachment from obligations to others beyond the self—due largely to occupational specialization. 'The state of *anomie*', he said, 'is impossible wherever interdependent organs are sufficiently in contact and sufficiently extensive' (1972, p. 184). Forced division of labour eliminated mutual dependence and laid the groundwork for *anomie*.

Dewey's concern was similar and he postulated about the massive footprint of industrialization on the community life needed for democracy.

The Great Society created by steam and electricity may be a society, but it is no community. The invasion of the community by the new and relatively impersonal and mechanical modes of combined human behavior is the outstanding fact of modern life...Till the Great Society is converted into the Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. (1927, pp. 98, 142)

How can the Great Society be converted into the Great Community? The isolating forces of individualism must be combated through the strengthening of collective ideals and solidarity.³ Both he and Durkheim set out to achieve this goal by embracing a common morality with the tools of modernity—reason and science.

Durkheim explicitly tackled this task in a series of lectures given in 1902–1903, collected under the title *Moral education: a study in the theory and application of the sociology of education*. Because it had such a 'close relation to Durkheim's central sociological concerns' (Lukes, 1972, p. 110), this project had special significance. The agenda of the lectures was to make sense of recent changes to France's educational system, changes that led to state-supported schools invoking a purely secular moral education. 'It is essential to understand that this means an education that is not derived from revealed religion, but that rests exclusively on ideas, sentiments, and practices accountable to reason only—in short, a purely rationalistic education' (1961, p. 3). Durkheim's efforts in this work focused on providing philosophical and sociological foundations for this shift to 'rationalistic education'.

Modernity's faith in the methodological and epistemological power of science made a 'rational moral education entirely possible' for Durkheim. The societal transformations that appeared quite radical were actually the result of a gradual process solidifying scientific explanation as the primary source of knowledge. 'Not only does a purely rational education seem logically possible; it seems to be determined by our entire historical development... The secularizing of education has been in process for centuries' (1961, p. 6). Because there is nothing outside the scope of human reason (a truth evident in history), Durkheim believed that a rational scientific method could be applied to morality: it could be studied, observed

and explained in a positivist science of morality (Lukes, 1972). This is the morality that would be the focus of the schools in France.

The difficulty lay in the residual interconnected relationship between religion and morality that was still widely embraced in society. He explained: 'Certain moral ideas became united with certain religious ideas to such an extent as to become indistinct from them... In a word, we must discover the rational substitutes for those religious notions that for a long time have served as the vehicle for the most essential moral ideas' (1961, pp. 8–9). The morality Durkheim desired for his social purposes in the school needed to be divorced from revealed religion because religion had irrational tendencies and it could be divisive in society. The bond between religion and morality needed to be demolished: 'If ever a revolution has been a long time in the making, this is it' (1961, p. 7). Although already in process, the task was not simple. Stripping the supernatural out of the moral would only leave a 'colorless and impoverished morality'. Losing the sacred quality of morality would significantly weaken its authority, leaving it lifeless and toothless. Instead, he believed that 'we must discover, in the old system, moral forces hidden in it, hidden under forms that concealed their intrinsic nature' (1961, p. 14). The goal was to lose the religious elements of morality yet retain its authority; Durkheim offered a way to achieve this goal through reason and the power of the *conscience collective*. We will return to this method in a moment, but first we move to Dewey's approach to the question of morality in modern education.

Durkheim's American counterpart was embarking on a somewhat similar project to philosophically ground a rational, secular morality. Dewey, like Durkheim, constructs his approach scientifically, rooting it in the experimental method. Knowledge (and morality) depends on its testability and 'observability', and in this regard, the scientific method should be widely applied: 'For the most part, [the scientific method] is regarded as belonging to certain technical and merely physical matters. It will doubtless take a long time to secure the perception that it holds equally as to the forming and testing of ideas in social and moral matters' (1997, p. 339). This would mark a revolution in the seat of authority: the scientific method could provide the authority that earlier centuries sought in unchanging doctrines (McCluskey, 1958). Ultimately, this method should dethrone non-empirical beliefs fixed by some external authority and free men from 'the crutch of dogma'. Citing John Stuart Mill, Dewey suggested that historically schools have done the reverse and have been better equipped to 'make disciples than inquirers'. It was this conception of inquiry that was key for Dewey; inquiry was to be used in a scientific approach to morality, where it was not used in traditional systems rooted in revealed religion. The moral validity of a particular act was tested and discovered through the experience itself, not from an external source. In fact, he went so far as to say that 'this inquiry is intelligence' (1920, p. 164).

Dewey outlined this pragmatic epistemology (1997) as a way for schools to transcend the limits of dogmatic religion yet to retain the moral and social goods that bind people together in community. Morals, like tolerance and responsibility, were to be experientially learned through the social setting of the school. When academic

studies were ‘acquired under conditions where their social significance [was] realized, they [fed] moral interest and [developed] moral insight’ (1997, p. 356).

The environment for this experiential learning needed to be free of religion. Dewey adamantly and forcefully makes his case against religion in *A common faith*, a series of lectures given in 1934, late in his life. His task in this work was to emancipate the religious from religion and create a sacred common faith for mankind that transcended sect, class or race. In this effort, he stands in a tradition of American intellectuals in the nineteenth century—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Adams, William James—that sought a cultural authority outside the bounds of traditional religion. ‘Religion’, Dewey explains in *A common faith*, was a body of beliefs and doctrine organized on an institutional basis; the ‘religious’, in contrast, was an attitude toward an object or ideal experience. Religion was dangerous because it negated process and progress, both fundamental elements of pragmatic epistemology and experience itself.

The claim on the part of religions to possess a monopoly of ideals and of the supernatural means by which alone, it is alleged, they can be furthered, stands in the way of the realization of distinctly religious values inherent in natural experience... The opposition between religious values as I conceive them and religions is not to be bridged. Just because the release of these values is so important, their identification with the creeds and cults of religions must be dissolved. (1991, pp. 27–28)

A spiritual sense of religious values was needed because it would make community possible; religions were not because they limit the ability for rational experience to discover truth on its own. The morality of the school, the social setting for these learning experiences to occur, must therefore be patterned after this rational, secular model.

Shifting sources: from religion to experience and society

Dewey and Durkheim both solidified a rational, secular morality and both understood the need to unshackle morality from its religious sources. In spite of the gradual secularization process that was already in motion, burying the religious sources of morality was a monumental task, given the millennia societies had bound them together. Their chosen method for this difficult task remains an important contribution to modernity.

Just as education was a social function for Dewey and Durkheim, morality itself was a distinctly social endeavour. Having rejected the supernatural world as a moral source, they shifted to finding its source in concrete social experience; in other words, the moral source was experience and society itself. The embedded relationship that was previously shared between religion and morality shifted to a similarly entwined relationship between morality, experience and society.

For Dewey, all ethical and moral values originated in experience, which was always embedded in society. Dewey argued: ‘morals are as broad as acts which concern our relationships with others’ (1997, p. 357). In other words, morals were any acts that were social in nature. To be even more specific: ‘the moral and the

social quality of conduct are, in the last analysis, identical with each other' (1997, p. 358). The self was continually evolving through experience—this experience was necessarily social in character.

The school, of course, was the environment where these moral forces are created and sustained within a social context: 'apart from the thought of participation in social life the school has no end nor aim' (1903, p. 12). More directly: 'the moral responsibility of the school is to society. The school is fundamentally an institution erected by society to do a certain specific work, to exercise a certain specific function in maintaining the life and advancing the welfare of society' (1975, p. 7). Dewey goes on to explain that the school must be animated by a 'social spirit' in order for it to achieve its social function and morally orient its students through social experiences and relationships (1997, p. 358). The spiritual language was intentional. It was this spirit within a school that makes its moral training effective.

Durkheim made a somewhat similar, but much more straightforward, shift to locate morality in society rather than in religion. He differed from Dewey in that he did not root morality in experience. Instead, the source of morality was society itself, independent of individual experience:

Moral goals, then, are those the object of which is *society*. To act morally is to act in terms of the collective interest... the domain of the moral begins where the domain of the social begins... moral life begins where collective life begins...we are moral beings only to the extent that we are social beings. (1961, pp. 59, 60, 64)

The key move that Durkheim made here was to replace a divine being with a social being as the source of morality. If there was no God beyond the individual as the external source of moral action, society took on the role as source of morality above the individual: 'There must exist, in the full meaning of the word, a social being... once we rule out recourse to theological notions, there remains beyond the individual only a single, empirically observable moral being that which individuals form by their association—that is society' (1961, p. 60). This notion of the social being was Durkheim's *conscience collective*. Society replaced God as the moral authority.

Dewey and Durkheim both understood that education needed to have an orientation towards a rational, secular morality divorced from religious dogma but maintaining some of its spirit. Authority shifts away from traditional religion and the sources of morality likewise shift to social experience and society itself. These sources, while both non-theistic, differ and lead to a diverging relationship between the individual and society in each of their frameworks and the implications this relationship has for moral authority.

Self and society: diverging conceptions of authority

Since Dewey and Durkheim located morality in experience and society itself, the society carried a particular force—an authority—that would motivate action and provide standards for behaviour. The nature of this moral authority of society and how it was created and sustained represents a crucial dividing point between these two great social theorists.

Dewey's explanation of the relationship between the self and society was not lucid. He was often criticized for completely abolishing distinctions between the two (McClusky, 1958). His thinking in this area was highly nuanced and crucial for understanding the distinguishing difference from Durkheim's position. Much of Dewey's efforts in *Democracy and education* was invested in combating typical dualisms evident in human life: body and soul, man and nature. He saw the individual and society as one of these mistaken dualisms and explained the relationship this way:

The individual and society are neither opposed to each other nor separated from each other. Society is a society of individuals and the individual is always a social individual. He has no existence by himself. He lives in, for and by society, just as society has no existence excepting in and through the individuals who constitute it. (1903, p. 8)

This mindset is understandable remembering the individualizing tendencies of industrialization that so greatly concerned Dewey. It is, however, unclear where the individual stops and the society begins; indeed, there is no real distinction between the two. Furthermore, when one is reminded of Dewey's use of the scientific method for experiencing moral development, this relationship between the individual and society is even more complicated.

Because moral principles are not learned from some fixed source but are experienced and created in different situations for different purposes, they are constantly evolving. What is the driving force behind the progress and evolution of morality? The individual, with the powerful aid of the experimental method, encounters a situation and reasons her way through it to make a moral decision. This conception offers a prominent place for the individual and in fact amounts to moral autonomy. This diffuses the moral authority of society and lends itself to an experiential and radical individualistic moral relativism, seemingly at odds with Dewey's words above.

Despite what seems like clear individualizing forces resulting from applying the scientific method to moral reasoning, Dewey strongly resisted this critique. He was opposed to a radical individualism. Morality was a complex of social relationships whose meaning was to be determined in actual experience. The 'experience' was inherently social and connected to others. Intelligent control of these experiences was scientific morality. So while an individual may enter the experience, the experience was never isolated from a social context. In his mind, this saved Dewey's system from sliding into subjective moral relativism. Society itself theoretically, if weakly, offered ontological grounding for his conception of morality. Therefore, for Dewey, the 'morality through experience' model created a common faith or common moral conscience for all of society. Late in Dewey's life, this moral conscience became democracy itself. He believed in the 'intrinsic moral nature of democracy...which provides a moral standard for personal conduct' (1939, p. 130). Social cohesion and mutual understanding of diverse individuals would be achieved through dialogue and critical engagement. Democracy was not a form of government; it was a spiritual community. Traditional moral and spiritual values were replaced by civic and social values; belief in *demos* replaced belief in a transcendent God.

The important component of Dewey's thinking on moral development is the progression from individual to society: 'Only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up, can society by any chance be true to itself' (1905, p. 19). The process began with the individual moral self experiencing through the scientific method and working through and in society. The moral development progression starts with the individual and then becomes a part of society. Though he resisted a radical individual autonomy and maintained a complex relation between the self and society (McClay, 1994), the moral authority of society in this scheme is limited. Rather than receiving morality from an authority above or outside the individual, morality is discovered through the experiences, dialogues and interactions of individuals. Dewey was at pains to distinguish this from individualized moral relativism, and saw it as a way to avoid dogmatic authoritarianism, but the prominent role individual experience plays in his scheme can nonetheless undermine the moral authority of society. This was precisely the opposite approach from that of Durkheim.

Durkheim began, however, in a very similar place to Dewey: the virtual merging of the individual and society.

Man is man, in fact, only because he lives in society... Thus the antagonism that has too often been admitted between society and individual corresponds to nothing in the facts. Indeed, far from these two terms being in opposition and being able to develop only each at the expense of the other, they imply each other. The individual, in willing society, wills himself. (1956, p. 76, 78)

Durkheim was careful to explain what he meant. He believed that two inseparable beings made up a person. The individual being consisted of the mental states that make up the personal life; the social being, in contrast, was the system of ideas, sentiments and practices that express in individuals the essence of the group to which they belong. This social being brings us back to Durkheim's *conscience collective* and education's role in appropriating it in the lives of individuals: 'To constitute this being in each of us is the end of education' (1956, p. 72).

For Durkheim, then, this *conscience collective* represented the 'supra-individual' goals to which all morality was directed. The only thing beyond the individual was society;⁴ only society can therefore provide an objective for moral behaviour. Believing this to be true, Durkheim argued that society could not be reduced to a collection of individuals because individual interests were devoid of moral character. Society, then, must have its own character, distinct from that of its individual members (1961). This character is the social being, the *conscience collective*, that exists *sui generis* of individuals. Durkheim believed individuals needed limits placed on their nature and that without them *anomie* would result: 'If man is to be moral, he must be devoted to something other than himself', and that thing was the social being represented by the *conscience collective* (1961, p. 79).⁵ This social being (society) would bring the cohesiveness needed to sustain itself; education was the means through which it would reach individuals.

Ultimately this was a question of authority for Durkheim; the moral authority needed to provide limits on individuals was found in society itself: 'it is therefore from society that all authority emanates' (1961, p. 91). Society was the external

source of authority that set the agenda and held people accountable to the common ideal:⁶

In molding us morally, society has inculcated in us those feelings that prescribe our conduct so imperatively; and that kick back with such force when we fail to abide by their injunctions. Our moral conscience is its product and reflects it. When our conscience speaks, it is society speaking within us. The tone with which it speaks is the best demonstration of its remarkable authority. (1961, p. 90)

In the end, this ‘remarkable authority’ was the formidable distinction between Durkheim and his American counterpart. Durkheim’s society had a weighty authority that enacted discipline (through sanctions and rewards) and called on individuals to conform to a standard. The school was the instrument of the state to enact this discipline and the teacher had the primary role. To help us understand the gravity of the authority embodied in the teacher, Durkheim offers an image of the teacher as priest. Symptomatic of modernity, where priestly roles were emancipated from traditional religion and given to various other professions—artists, scientists, psychologists—Durkheim suggests: ‘Just as the priest is the interpreter of God, [the teacher] is the interpreter of the great moral ideas of his time and country’ (1961, p. 155). The teacher was the priest of the divine social being called society and he carried the moral authority of that office.

The individual was subject to the authority of the society for Durkheim; the state was this representative authority and education was its primary tool. He and Dewey differed on their views of the individual and society. For Dewey, the moral self started with an individual ‘experiencing’ through the scientific method in the context of society. Durkheim’s approach differed in that the society stood over and above the individual, moulding her to its ideal. Society shaped the individual to conform to a moral ideal; for Dewey, in contrast, the individual shaped morality in a social context. This does not discount the social nature of the moral force embodied in society for Durkheim; indeed, it was flexible, not static (see Note 6). But nonetheless, once established, the authority of Durkheim’s *sui generis* society was further removed from the individual than Dewey’s and thus carried a more authoritative disciplinary force.⁷

The cultural embeddedness of ideas

All intellectuals are products of their historical and cultural context and Dewey and Durkheim are no exception. As noted earlier, the changes of industrialization, urbanization and the division of labour (not to mention the intellectual activity) in the nineteenth century profoundly shaped the thinking of both men and set their agenda for ‘restructuring and reorganizing’ (both used that exact phrase) education to fit the times. But to better understand their central distinction, the social and historical context of Dewey and Durkheim must be parsed even further. In large measure, Dewey’s approach to the relationship between the individual, society and moral education is embedded in the uniqueness of the American democratic experiment, while Durkheim’s has roots in the intellectual heritage of French republicanism.⁸

The educational systems of France and the USA were interested in imparting civic duties and preparing students to be good citizens long before Dewey and Durkheim. But the particulars of the political society for which education was preparing students, although philosophically grounded in similar traditions, have always been different. The intellectual and political heritage of Rousseau's republic amounts to a strong centralized state. Tocqueville argues that the erosion of intermediary institutions and the strengthening forces of political centralization began long before 1789 and, in many ways, came to reflect a distinct French character (1983). As a result, in France, 'individuals have to show that they are worthy of their institutions more than institutions have to show that they serve individuals' (Meuret, 2004, p. 242). In the French republic, theoretically, personal interests should be subordinated for the public good. This causes some assimilation policies to infringe upon beliefs and values of certain groups (Asad, 2006). The influence of the *collective conscience* on the strength and particular orientation of social institutions is clear in Durkheim's thinking. The moral authority of Durkheim's society and education as a disciplinary tool of the state for this purpose is therefore an outgrowth of Montesquieu's republican government and its evolution into modern French socialism.

The USA has had somewhat different orientations towards institutions and individual interests. While notions of classical republicanism were, and are, still strong, the liberal tradition has had the most dominant influence on the understanding of the individual and her relation to society. This tradition is clearly embodied in Dewey's experimental approach to moral development and his ideal democracy of discourse and critical engagement. Conversation and deliberation in a social context is the seedbed for morality, education and democracy. In contrast, the French child is a *tabula rasa*, to use Durkheim's term, which needs to be shaped and moulded to the pattern of society. Durkheim was far from eliminating the individual and Dewey far from eliminating the society, but each system was uniquely situated for its own context.

Lessons for today: articulacy of authority and sources

In Durkheim's exemplary and sweeping history of education in France, *The evolution of educational thought*, he states that 'it is only by carefully studying the past that we can come to anticipate the future and to understand the present' (1977, p. 9). He felt (as did Dewey for the USA) that education in France was 'undergoing a grave crisis that is not yet, and is indeed far from being, resolved. Everyone feels it cannot remain what it is, but no one can yet see clearly what it is required to become' (p. 7). Our own day is marked by a similar situation; indeed, the 'education in crisis' mantra, to varying degrees for various reasons, has been continually repeated.⁹ The cultural pluralism that was emerging in the early twentieth century has burgeoned into a global reality in the early twenty-first. This is true in the USA and France and the rest of the West, but also true to varying degrees in the global East and South. The problems and issues that Dewey and Durkheim faced are, in many ways, our

own still today. We would do well to learn from Durkheim's method, looking to the past to understand the present and orient us to the future. This article has been a task in that endeavour. What can be learned from the unique intellectual projects (and the unique cultural contexts) of Dewey and Durkheim that may inform the challenges of moral education in the global context of twenty-first century pluralism?

While both men envisioned their projects as crucial in the preservation of social cohesion through the significant changes of modernity, the practical efficacy of their intellectual work is not certain. The success of the methodology used by practitioners in implementing these ideas in the USA and France is open to question. Dewey's ideal vision of a secular morality that would promote mutual understanding in a pluralistic democracy through dialogue and critical engagement has yet to be fully realized in the material reality of American schools. Whether evidenced in the protracted struggle against segregation, reconstituted in the 'achievement gap' issue (Jencks & Phillips, 1998), the relative lack of civic virtue and cohesion among younger generations of Americans (Ravitch & Viteritti, 2001) or the prevalence of cheating in schools (Callahan, 2004; Lickona & Davidson, 2005), contemporary public education in America is not exactly an exemplar of Dewey's vision. Similar questions could be raised about how closely the French educational system embodies Durkheim's vision for it. The government's social integration and assimilation principles in the schools have been challenged in the face of rising immigration and especially in the aftermath of the youth riots in 2005.¹⁰ Although the causes are complex, the alienation experienced by many of the young people involved in the riots has strong correlations with the *anomie* that concerned Durkheim and caused him to turn his attention to moral education. The great promise of moral education that Dewey and Durkheim embraced is accompanied by a degree of peril in how it is implemented and practised.

The relative failure of the educational systems of France and the USA to live up to the lofty ideals of Durkheim and Dewey has led some to draw rather drastic conclusions about their relevance for today. As Holmes argues, 'it is possible to appreciate Durkheim's ideal and the American myth [Dewey's ideal] and at the same time recognize that they are obsolete and counterproductive in the contemporary pluralist society' (2001, p. 188). While it is doubtful that the depth and breadth of their thinking is 'obsolete and counterproductive' today, Holmes' overstatement does raise questions about the relevance of Dewey and Durkheim in the context of pluralist and diverse societies. Rather than outright dismissal, perhaps we can come to a more nuanced understanding of their importance for the contemporary moment.

As this paper has attempted to demonstrate, Dewey and Durkheim spent a great deal of intellectual effort articulating the sources from which a new modern morality would draw. Although they have both been rightly criticized for the level of clarity in their articulations (Lukes, 1972; McClay, 1994; Feinberg 1998), their work to articulate a non-theistic source for morality remains a central contribution. While the project to create a rational, secular account of the nature of morality has received its share of criticism (most notably from MacIntyre, 1984), the important lesson is

that they did not ignore the question of sources itself. As Taylor's masterful work (1989) has pointed out, articulating moral sources, or constitutive goods as he calls them, is an achievement in itself that is rare in the modern world.

In addition to articulating the source of morality, Dewey and Durkheim addressed the important question of moral authority. This is where their schemes diverged from one another, and the authority of Durkheim's society was much stronger than Dewey's 'experience'. Even though they differed, attention to this question, rather than ignoring it, is a central contribution. Elshtain (2001) suggests that the crisis of authority in modernity poses the most serious threat to effective moral formation and education (see also Arum, 2003, who draws on both Dewey's notion of experience and Durkheim's moral authority in his conclusion).

The need to address the question of moral sources and authority in the discourse on moral education, as Dewey and Durkheim both did, can hardly be overstated. As any teacher knows, when addressing a moral issue in the classroom, the 'why' question is never far from the students' lips. Whether reasoning through a moral problem, dealing with a discipline issue or discussing proper treatment of others, students often demand to know why they should be good or why this norm is the accepted one. At issue in these inquiries is a question of motive. Most teachers come up with creative ways to appropriately address the 'why' questions in their particular contexts without feeling the need to stop and philosophize about the moral sources upon which they are drawing. But *they are*, indeed, drawing from certain sources, sources that the modern self is reticent to recognize. If Taylor's (1989) assessment is correct, this reticence is due to the deep divisions in the modern world about these sources, and that fragmentation has led to avoidance of moral questions or vague commitments to general ethical standards without reference to the sources. It has resulted in the 'colorless and impoverished morality' that Durkheim feared. In practice, this has generally been the morality employed by the public education systems in the USA and France and can become the peril of moral education if it leads to negative results like those noted above.

This practice is not exactly consistent with what Dewey and Durkheim envisioned. Rather than rootless platitudes, they offered strong articulations of moral sources. The sources they endorsed were secular, separating morality from religion and its dogma. They most likely did not, however, anticipate the lasting deep disagreement over the nature of those moral sources but rather expected widespread agreement on a rational, secular morality that found its source in society (Glenn, 2001). They assumed, as did most elites, the close relationship between secularization and modernization, and hence that a secular morality would provide the social glue to hold diverse societies together. The empirical realities of our global society in the twenty-first century seriously question this assumption. The secularization thesis, at least in the form of this grand narrative, has been widely challenged by the continued growth of new and old religious traditions around the globe and the persistence and transformation of religious belief and practice.¹¹ This results in 'multiple secularizations and modernities',¹² creating a complex cultural pluralism with global encounters between the religious and the secular and the

traditional and the modern that creates new challenges for moral education in these diverse societies.

If we are to follow the legacy inherited from Dewey and Durkheim, we must historically situate education in our own cultural context, accounting for these novel challenges. That context is increasingly pluralist, global in scope and both secular and religious in nature; our approaches to moral education will need to be appropriately situated in these diverse settings. From studying the intellectual projects of Dewey and Durkheim to situate and contextualize education, we learn the importance of articulating the sources of morality and the moral authority embodied in them. The focus of these earlier thinkers was on a non-theistic source that maintains a degree of sacredness without attachment to any religion. The century that followed them proved modernization would not eradicate religion. We find ourselves embedded in a different cultural context today and the global trends of our cultural moment may call for a wider discussion of sources. Without discussion of these sources, non-theistic and theistic, the efficacy of any modern society's attempt at moral or citizenship education is hindered. Because of the deep disagreement over these sources, such a task is fraught with problems, but we ignore them at our own peril.

The secular nature of morality that Dewey and Durkheim offered may indeed be a sufficient source, but not, as they seemed to understand, if it embraces a language of neutrality and ignores a sacred, religious quality that carries a certain authority. This means talking about morality not only as 'values' but also as 'beliefs', which may offer stronger motivation for behaviour. Gates (2006) has argued that we impede moral and citizenship education 'unless special attention is paid to the more interior motivational beliefs from which they derive real potency' (p. 571). He offers careful and informed suggestions for how appropriate attention may be paid to these sources. The focus on values in moral and citizenship education, he argues, has not given due attention to the importance of beliefs that may serve as 'springs of active participation' (p. 589). Orienting the focus to the level of beliefs, which can be both religious and secular, begins to name the various sources of morality and authority for moral education. Thickening the discourse in this way may harness the promise (without forgetting the peril) of moral education in the late-modern age. While Dewey and Durkheim could not have anticipated the particularities and complexities of cultural pluralism in the twenty-first century, they approached the grand questions of morality, education and social change in such a way that enables us to glean insights for answering the same questions in our day. As Durkheim believed, it is only through studying the past in all its richness that we can come to anticipate the future and understand the present. Let us hope that his legacy, and that of Dewey, will continue to inform us in that task.

Notes

1. It is difficult to assess the degree to which they were in intellectual dialogue or dependent on one another on the topic of moral education. Durkheim gave lectures on pragmatism in 1913–14, largely arguing against some of the foundational elements of that system. His

primary critique in those lectures, however, concerned William James. John Dewey's work on the social implications of pragmatism came later and, while Durkheim addressed it, it was not a central concern. See Durkheim's *Pragmatism and sociology* (1983), Lukes' excellent discussion of the lectures (1972, pp. 485–496), and Rawls' helpful essay, which addresses misinterpretations of Durkheim's critique of pragmatism (1997). Although direct intellectual dialogue seems limited, see Kloppenborg (1986, p. 485, Note 7) for a brief discussion of Durkheim's 'counterpragmatic thrust' and Dewey's criticism of Durkheim as too positivistic. Durkheim is in dialogue (at least tangentially) in his lectures on pragmatism (1983) while Dewey offers criticism of the 'Durkheim school of collective mind' in an essay on social psychology (1985, p. 60). The focus of this paper is the educational implications of Dewey and Durkheim's ideas.

2. The term 'moral education' is used broadly here, particularly to include what is formally termed 'citizenship education'. Though there are important differences (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006), I use moral education to include both concepts because Dewey and Durkheim did not necessarily distinguish between them in their own thought.
3. It was generally a certain type of individualism that Dewey and Durkheim denounced. Both men embraced individualism to varying degrees. Dewey's acceptance will be clearly evident later; Durkheim saw individualism as 'a social product, like all moralities and religions. The individual receives from society even the moral beliefs that deify him. This is what Kant and Rousseau did not understand. They wished to deduce their individualist ethics not from society, but from the notion of the isolated individual'. It was, for Durkheim, therefore 'possible without contradiction, to be an individualist while asserting that the individual is a product of society, rather than its cause' (quoted in Lukes, 1972, pp. 339–340).
4. In fact, the individual is a *product of society*. See Note 3.
5. In this aspect, Durkheim was persuaded by Kant's insistence on the imperative or obligatory character of moral rules. But he was probably only Kantian to that extent. He differed from Kant in that the obligatory nature of moral law did not derive from its content, but from the authority vested in the source of the rule: society itself. (See below, and also Giddens, 1978, p. 65).
6. It is important to note that this is not external in the sense of a transcendent, unchanging order. The substitution of society for the divine bears significant changes, namely a relative rather than universal characteristic to authority: 'Authority does not reside in some external, objective fact, which logically implies and necessarily produces morality. It is a matter of opinion, and opinion is a collective thing. It is the judgment of the group...all moral authority must be social in its origin' (Durkheim, 1961, p. 91). Like Dewey, Durkheim has been charged with a subjective relativism in his understanding of morality. Because of its social roots, it will vary from society to society. For Durkheim though, the morality a society constructs nonetheless carries a divine-like authority.
7. Joan Goodman (2006a, 2006b) has traced nuanced differences toward school discipline in the theoretical work of Dewey and Durkheim. See also Arum (2003), who advocates drawing upon both Dewey and Durkheim to restore an appropriate moral authority for school discipline.
8. While this contrast merits much deeper reflection, my purpose here is to briefly suggest that approaches to moral education will always be localized in particular cultural and historical contexts.
9. Although there are many voices in this chorus, see Emirbayer (1989), Hunter (2000) and the essays in Ravitch & Viteritti (Eds) (2001) for varied critiques on American moral and civic education. For a perspective on a 'crisis' in European education, see 'Where the future is a dead end' *Newsweek*, 12 June 2006. Available online at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13124097/site/newsweek/> (accessed 10 January 2006).
10. For a timeline, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4413964.stm>; for analysis, see Catharine Wihtol de Wenden, Urban riots in France, *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 26.2.2006, 47–53. See also Asad (2006) on the 'Islamic veil affair'.

11. See the Spring/Summer 2006 issue of *The Hedgehog Review* 'After secularization' Vol. 8 (1 & 2), especially José Casanova, Rethinking secularization: a global comparative perspective.
12. Although the terms do not originate with him, see Casanova (2006).

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