

# HORACE MANN, JOHN DEWEY AND “THE STATE AS MORAL EDUCATOR”

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*Horace Mann is best known in American history as the “father of the public school system,” because he engineered the nation’s first uniform, state-managed school system. Mann’s speeches and his Seventh Annual Report to the Board of Education, however, illustrate a broader contribution: encouraging state officials to teach children moral values in the place of parents. By comparing Mann’s philosophy of education philosophy with that of John Dewey, America’s premier educational philosopher, it is shown that America’s school system is framed to value group conformity over individual virtue, a pattern that persists to this day.*

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In recent years, the role of morality and religion in public schools has been widely discussed among Americans. Some, belonging to the so-called “religious right,” argue that the United States was founded upon a Christian moral ethic, and that to preserve democracy, public schools should reflect this ethic through school prayers and a strong focus on morality. Others rebuke this approach as a threat to American liberty, contending that state education should not broach the topic of religion, so as to serve the greatest number of individuals. While it superficially explores ideas about church and state, this debate also hits upon the deeper question of the purpose of public education. Educators, parents, and policymakers can agree that the purpose comes down to preparing students for society, but they question how much religion and character development should play a part in the process. How can a common school touch upon character and morality while serving a diversified society? Such questions about the purpose of US public education are extremely important, for they ultimately ask about the course of the nation’s future.

Throughout the history of the United States, many have asked how moral education, which is defined here as that aspect of education which develops the character of a student, should factor into American curriculum. One of the most influential of these figures was John Dewey (1859—1952), who has come to be known as the “father of the modern school system.” By contending that education ought to create democratic citizens, and that it should be the “process of living and not a preparation of future living,” Dewey is still relevant today in educational theory, and his philosophy has formed the liberal arts approach and the modern understanding of democratic education.<sup>1</sup> A generation before Dewey, another US educational reformer, Horace Mann (1796—1859), was developing his own philosophy of moral

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed,” in *Foundations of Education in America: An Anthology of Major Thoughts and Significant Actions*, ed. James Noll and Sam Kelly (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1970), 237.

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education. Mann served as the Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education in the 1840s, and he was one of the key faces in the common school movement, the United States' first major educational reform movement. Mann is most remembered for his push for government—regulated, tax—based primary schools with uniform curriculum and professional teachers—much like what the United States possesses today. Scholars have also praised Mann's battle against sectarian curriculum in schools, or teaching which promotes a particular religious denomination. Mann's position was highly controversial at the time, but it eventually gained acceptance in all states, establishing a separation of church and state in education that is the norm today. Long before Dewey came onto the scene, Horace Mann was shaping the nation's definition of moral education.

Nevertheless, as the following argument will examine, Horace Mann's legacy in moral education is much broader than the current historiography suggests. Over the past century, scholarship on Horace Mann has predominantly concentrated on the humanitarian's structural reforms within US state schools. Jonathan Messerli's 1971 biography on Horace Mann, still the authoritative biography on the reformer's life, mostly documents Mann's fight for standardized schools free to the public, but rarely mentions morality and religious education.<sup>2</sup> S. Alexander Rippa's *Education in a Free Society: An American History* is a later example which studies Mann in the broader context of US education history.<sup>3</sup> Again, most of the discussion on Mann concerns his structural reforms. When the research does address the reformer's views on moral education, the discussion is always limited to his nonsectarian reforms. This unitary focus is found in early works, such as Neil McCluskey's 1958 book *Public Schools and Moral Education*<sup>4</sup> and *A History of the Problems of Education*,<sup>5</sup> as well as more modern ones like Messerli's biography and Rippa's survey history. However, Mann's lectures on education, as well as his rarely—cited *Seventh Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education*, betray a philosophy of moral education that goes beyond guidelines for religious instruction. Such sources show Mann's broader ideology that the state, not parents, must take a lead role in how morality is taught at the elementary and high school level. Whereas previous generations had given the family and the church significant roles in the child's development, Mann and the common school movement instigated a trend in which the organized apparatus of the state, which involved professional teachers and school boards, had a more important say in instilling morals in children than domestic influences.

Therefore, the claim of this essay is that Horace Mann set forth a philosophy of education in which the state was the child's primary moral educator, and that by the time Dewey entered the scene, Mann's work had already established a moral pedagogy that was collectivist and intellectual, as opposed to individualist and experiential. Traditionally, Dewey receives credit for creating an American moral education, but a comparison of the two reformers shows that Mann's philosophy formed the framework for Dewey's ideas. To establish Mann's crucial role in American education, the argument first defines moral education as Mann viewed it. Then, it explores Mann's unprecedented philosophy on the state and moral education,

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Messerli, *Horace Mann: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> S. Alexander Rippa, *Education in a Free Society: An American History* (8<sup>th</sup> ed., New York: Longman, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Neil McCluskey, *Public Schools and Moral Education: The Influence of Horace Mann, William Torrey Harris and John Dewey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

<sup>5</sup> John S. Brubacher, *A History of the Problems of Education*, McGraw—Hill Series in Education (New York: McGraw—Hill Book Company, 1947).

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using evidence from his lectures and personal letters (courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society), and from the incredibly revealing *Seventh Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education*.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, the essay presents Dewey's views on moral education in the context of Mann's ideology, to demonstrate the lasting effects of the latter's philosophy of education. Dewey did not agree with Mann on all points of his pedagogy, but the comparison will suggest that Horace Mann set a definition for the purpose of education that every reformer after him, including Dewey, had to respond to.

Before continuing, it is important to define the vague terms "ideology," "pedagogy," and "philosophy of education." As it is used here, "ideology" refers to one's underlying assumptions about human nature and the understandings of social institutions which emerge from those assumptions.<sup>7</sup> Every individual possesses some underlying principles to his or her actions, especially political actions, which betray a conception of the purpose of social institutions. As this conception develops, it necessarily reveals some interpretation of human nature. By exploring Horace Mann's ideology, the following argument will touch on his philosophy of human nature and how he believed social institutions should operate in light of that nature. In addition, pedagogy is understood as one's belief about how to best educate others based on a particular value system. In this way, pedagogy directly relates to ideology. For instance, the pedagogy of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746—1827), who influenced Mann, stated that learning happens best through engagement of the senses and hands—on activities. This belief, though it applies strictly to education, connects to an underlying philosophy that human nature is not beyond repair, and that, as Pestalozzi believed, society's role is to raise the poor from their dire circumstances.<sup>8</sup> Pedagogy is connected with ideology, so throughout this essay, discussions of Mann's pedagogy will often be intertwined with an understanding of his ideology. Likewise, the term "philosophy of education" will be used interchangeably with the word "pedagogy" throughout the argument.

One cannot fully understand Horace Mann's philosophy without first grasping the definition of moral education in his day. As controversial as Mann's reforms were in the early nineteenth century, most all agreed that education needed to cultivate the student's moral character. In 1856, one acclaimed writer perfectly summarized the sentiments of Americans when he said, "Moral education is the great want of the age."<sup>9</sup> All Americans agreed that this moral education was a pillar of education as a whole, so understanding what they meant by the term is of utmost importance. A critical point is that during the mid—1800s, the moral culture of the Republic was overwhelmingly Protestant. In 1790, Catholics made up only 1% of the population. This proportion steadily rose to 17% in 1907, but the rest of the population

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<sup>6</sup> Horace Mann, *Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Education, Together with the Seventh Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1844).

<sup>7</sup> This definition partly takes inspiration from Carl Kaestle's discussion of common school ideology in chapter 5 of *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780—1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983). Thomas Sowell expresses a similar conception of ideology, which he calls a "vision," in his *Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York: Basic Books, 2007). For Sowell, all political ideologies are founded on some distinct "vision" regarding human nature and social institutions.

<sup>8</sup> Rippa, 48; Brubacher, 214.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid—Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 128.

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was almost all Protestants.<sup>10</sup> As a result, moral education in the early 1800s was defined based on Protestant principles. According to Carl Kaestle, Americans frequently presented the goals of a common school education in terms of Protestant virtues. Aims of education included “unity, obedience, restraint, self—sacrifice, and the careful exercise of intelligence.”<sup>11</sup> While developing intelligence was important, it was superseded by the cultivation of Scriptural virtues of character. One of the virtues which Protestants took seriously was respect for authority, so a large part of moral education in schools involved corporal punishment to teach respect. Finally, because moral education was faith—related, it traditionally rested under the jurisdiction of the family as well as the church. Overall, moral education as discussed in this article refers to the practices employed by various institutions to instill discipline and virtue in a child. Mann and the common school movement would be the first to rely on the state for this inculcation, and as a result would develop a new moral pedagogy.

Mann’s greatest legacy in redefining moral education was changing the institution responsible for it. While the family and church had always been the primary means of developing character in children, writers and reformers in the mid—1800s worried that these traditional institutions were unfit to resist the growing evils of convenience and technological advances. In 1850, Mann warned,

What we call civilization and progress, have increased temptation a thousand fold....In this country, all that is base and depraved in the human heart has such full liberty and wide compass...as has never been known before....Those external restraints of blind reverence to authority, and superstitious dread of religious guides, and fiery penal codes, which once repressed the passions of men and paralyzed all energy, are now lifted off.<sup>12</sup>

In this harrowing caveat, Mann is not only pointing out the strong tendency toward vice in a technologically advanced society, but he is also rebuking the inadequacy of children’s upbringing to teach them moral principles. While Mann thought that “blind reverence to authority” and “fiery penal codes” were poor moral teachers, he knew that they were the extent of moral training at the time, and that they were disappearing with disastrous results. Indeed, many critics balked at the lenience of parents at the time, arguing that their “indulgent” and “yielding” attitude had created a spoiled generation which made teaching extremely difficult.<sup>13</sup> A passage from the *Common School Journal* summarizes this idea among reformers that parents and local authority were morally failing the nation’s children: “in the present state of society, a vast majority of parents are unable, either on account of their own deficient education, or from want of time, to attend, in person, to the discharge of this duty.”<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, the common school reformers concluded that parents were ineffective for imparting moral education.

It is no surprise, then, that these same reformers emphasized that the state had an obligation to morally develop its citizens. Once again, Horace Mann was a champion of this view. In one lecture, he points out that modern institutions encourage vicious tendencies through their technology and convenience. As a result, he says, “If

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<sup>10</sup> David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard College Press, 1974), 86.

<sup>11</sup> Kaestle, 81.

<sup>12</sup> “The National Convention of the Friends of Education at Philadelphia,” *Common School Journal* 12 (Aug. 1850), 236.

<sup>13</sup> Katz, 119.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Katz, 120. While other scholars have recognized this dissatisfaction with parents in the common school movement, the idea as discussed in this essay largely comes from Katz in Part II of *The Irony of School Reform*.

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these institutions give greater scope and impulse to the lower order of faculties belonging to the human mind, then they must also give more authoritative control and more skilful [*sic*] guidance to the higher ones.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, society had a responsibility to train citizens’ moral character in order to combat the temptations which it had released. Later in the same lecture, Mann reiterates that “Society is responsible” for the training of its children. For effect, he lists specific groups which should take up this task, including clergymen, intellectuals, the media, and finally, “legislators and rulers.”<sup>16</sup> While he appeals to his more conservative listeners by listing traditional moral educators, he ends it with this new group which he believes is equally—if not more—responsible for the moral development of the nation. (Interestingly, and perhaps intentionally, Mann does not include parents in the list.) Mann’s philosophy shines most clearly in his *Seventh Annual Report*, where, in all capital letters, he declares “that, in a republic, ignorance is a crime; and that private immorality is not less an opprobrium to the state than it is guilt in the perpetrator.”<sup>17</sup> Mann thus portrays private wrong as an assault upon the state, and in so doing, implies that the state is obligated to correct immoral behavior. The means of correction he proposes is, of course, a centralized education system.

It is worth noting that Mann’s exaltation of the state in moral matters betrays two political trends at the time, one national and one international. Nationally, his views align with the ideology of the American Whig Party, a new and influential political party at this time. In 1834, around the same time that the common school movement gained momentum in America, the Whig party came into existence as a reaction to the presidency of Andrew Jackson. This party decried Jackson’s excessive executive power, while creating a political agenda of reform and internal improvement in antebellum politics. Their agenda formed a coherent ideology about the state which one historian has called the “positive liberal state.”<sup>18</sup> For the Whigs, the state had a positive responsibility to act in defense of moral and humanitarian principles by means of economic intervention, reform movements, and free education. Not surprisingly, Horace Mann identified as a Whig. His stress on the state’s role in education in many ways embodied the larger Whig platform which was as innovative in American politics as it was in education.

More importantly, Mann was echoing the global trend of nationalism in the 1840s. During this time, nations across Europe were taking active (and violent) steps to advance national identity, and to aid this process they turned to universal, compulsory education systems to teach their citizens patriotism and national loyalty. The best example of this trend was the nation of Prussia. The first in the world to implement a universal state schooling system, Prussia built a model of education to instill nationalist unity in its people after defeat to Napoleon had left them in an identity crisis.<sup>19</sup> The system was such an inspiration to educators that anyone interested in reforming American education, such as Calvin Stowe and Henry Barnard, praised the Prussian education model for its free tuition, state oversight and nonsectarian doctrine. Not surprisingly, Mann was among the greatest admirers of the Prussian system and advocated for the United States to adopt aspects of its pedagogy.

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<sup>15</sup> Horace Mann, in *Life and Works of Horace Mann, Vol. II: Lectures and Annual Reports on Education*, ed. Mary Mann (Cambridge: 1867), Google Books, 150.

<sup>16</sup> Mann, *Life and Works*, 187—8.

<sup>17</sup> Mann, *Seventh Annual Report*, 198.

<sup>18</sup> Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 103.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism: The Transformation of Prussian Political Culture, 1806—1848* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 42—6.

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Mann's *Seventh Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education* provides a narrow look into the Prussian system and how it influenced Mann's philosophy. Although Mann wrote the report to compare education models used across Europe, almost two-thirds of the report is exclusively about Prussia. Studying this report, as well as the history of the Prussian model, sheds light on the purpose of the state as moral educator.

First, the nationalist trend in education altered the focus of moral education from individual to collective, even if that change was not intended. In Prussia, the educational vision was largely inspired by Johann Gottlieb Fichte's (1762—1814) nationalist philosophy, which stated that individualism was a force of "complete sinfulness" which weakened the state.<sup>20</sup> This anti-individualism manifested in the schools of the 1840s. While Mann highly praised the critical thinking and independent spirit in the Prussian schools, he also recognized a hidden curriculum of submission and unquestioning obedience to the state inherent in their nationalist agenda. Perhaps the most jarring example of the hidden curriculum comes from the section on Prussian religious education in Mann's Seventh Report. During his visit, Mann noted that many teachers taught religious material which they themselves did not espouse. At one point, he asked a Prussian teacher "how he could teach what he disbelieved." The response came unequivocally, "It is a lie of necessity. The government compel [*sic*] us to do this, or it takes away our bread."<sup>21</sup> This frank retort provides a blatant picture of the necessary implications of a *nationalist* moral education. Regardless of the individual character traits it develops, in a nationalist setting such a system will teach those traits according to the will of the state, inevitably leading students—and teachers—to learn submission and obedience as key moral values. Intellectual curiosity and the development of personality are encouraged, but only to the extent that they benefit the state's interests. It is no wonder that Karl Marx noted that the Prussian system "was only calculated to make good soldiers."<sup>22</sup> As Mann discovered, such a development in moral education is a natural consequence of granting the state the role of moral educator for the sake of exalting nationalism.

While Mann strongly critiqued (and tried to separate himself) from the blatant dangers of Prussian nationalist education, he still believed that the purpose of education was to instill patriotism, uniformity, and respect. He despised private schooling which operated outside the state, because it could not be trusted to teach patriotism and social cohesion. According to Carl Kaestle, the common school reformers balked when a large minority of students began attending private schools in America, because such a trend would make unachievable their own goals of instilling "moral training, discipline, patriotism, mutual understanding, formal equality, and cultural assimilation" in the general population. These values, not individual virtue, represented the reformers' hopes for moral education.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, while others despised the compulsory nature of Prussia's schools, Mann was hardly opposed to it, stating that a compulsory education system is extremely compatible with "free or elective government."<sup>24</sup> Lastly, Mann and the common school reformers believed that

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Eugene N. Anderson, *Nationalism and the Cultural Crisis in Prussia, 1806—1815* (New York: Farrar & Rhinehart, Inc., 1939), 42.

<sup>21</sup> Mann, *Seventh Annual Report*, 179.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx, "From the Minutes of the General Council Meetings of August 10 and 17, 1869," from [Marxists.org, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1869/education—speech.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1869/education—speech.htm).

<sup>23</sup> Kaestle, 116.

<sup>24</sup> Mann, *Seventh Annual Report*, 149.

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moral education was connected to citizenship, and even further, that education was an important tool for making new citizens loyal to the state. At a time when immigrants were flowing into the United States from Europe in record numbers, a free education system for all social groups was a way to instill native (Protestant) culture in these new denizens. As stated in an 1850s history textbook, in the United States the goal was that “the inferior races shall be educated and made fellow laborers in the great work of human progress.”<sup>25</sup> Such discriminating language, not uncommon in contemporary US media, clearly shows that the common school reformers were following Prussia’s lead and emphasizing the collective nature of moral development. Mann may have separated himself from the authoritarian aspects of Prussian education, but with his use of the state as moral educator, he betrayed an intention for schools to teach loyalty and conformity, instead of personality and individual liberty.

The proposition of “state as moral teacher” not only implied the collectivist nature of morality, but it also offered a new method for teaching children. Before Mann, a child’s education may have involved some time in school, but it largely came from daily experience in society. Jonathan Messerli describes the primacy of experience in traditional education this way:

Pluck, ingenuity, ambition, and ‘horse—sense,’ all present in the successful man of the day, were learned in the field, the shop, the marketplace....Admittedly, literacy was a necessary tool for the successful man, but many parents thought this was the result of a variety of experiences, one small part of which came from a few winters spent in the local district school.<sup>26</sup>

Messerli argues that when parents resisted the idea of state schooling, they were not opposed to education as a whole, but they were opposed to instruction which removed children from the world of experience. While his observation references literacy, it applies to moral education as well, for parents generally viewed church attendance, which was a concrete experience, as the primary means for their children’s moral education. In child—rearing in general, parents hailed experience as the best teacher. This trend did not only apply to families, however, for schools also depended on the experience of the community to function, since they were locally based. Reverend Leonard Withington, an influential Massachusetts critic of Mann’s approach, confirmed that experience lay at the heart of traditional education. “Our conviction,” he declared, “is much more to hope from the collected wisdom and common prudence of the community, than from the suggestions of the individual.”<sup>27</sup> Withington observed that in common schools, teachers were not accustomed to teaching based on theory proposed by individuals wanting to reform educational policy. Instead, they were used to teaching based on the collective experiences of fellow educators about what worked and what did not. Because central management to some degree diminished the training of community experience, Mann and state education were viewed as threats to traditional education.

Withington’s critique highlights a key dialectic in the common school era between what economist Thomas Sowell calls *experience* and *articulation*.<sup>28</sup> While parents and traditional educators favored community experience as the best teacher of literacy and morals for their children, the reformers believed that classroom teaching articulated by the *words* of educated individuals was most effective in raising the next generation. This notion encapsulated the innovative nature of the state as moral

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<sup>25</sup> Kaestle, 94.

<sup>26</sup> Messerli, 253.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Katz, 144.

<sup>28</sup> Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions*, ch. 3.

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educator. For instance, Mann often expressed the idea that state education was important because the “more fortunate classes” had an obligation to “bring up the rear of society.”<sup>29</sup> In fact, Mann’s biographer draws attention to this idea as central in his ideology: “The common man, at least for the present then, required guidance by enlightened men of good will and needed to be educated by an institution which taught him to live within existing legal restraints while paradoxically finding an expanding personal freedom.”<sup>30</sup> For Mann, and for the reform movement he championed, education meant “enlightened men” teaching the rest of society, not by example, but by articulated words in a schoolroom. This goal was best achieved by a centralized education system in which the “State should appoint a father” to those without one.<sup>31</sup> In this system, regularized curriculum and centralized supervision would rely less on the experience of the community and more on the articulation of an elite appointed by the state. Likewise, with a longer school year, experiences outside the classroom would represent a much smaller proportion of the child’s education. These two facets of the transition from experience to articulation underscore a new model for *how* children should learn to be moral.

Naturally, one might hear from this argument a class—based interpretation of the common school movement, in which elite reformers imposed their highbrow theory upon the common man. While it is not the intention of this essay to make this argument (an argument which was first made by Michael Katz), it is still important to recognize that state education forced moral pedagogy to rely on articulation and to diminish the role of parents.<sup>32</sup> Whether or not the reformers *intended* to override the role of local experience in education, their reforms reflected an assumption that the old methods were not enough. One of Katz’ critics, Carl F. Kaestle, argues that the mid—nineteenth century witnessed a new trend in which moral education was assigned exclusively to schools (as opposed to homes or churches), as well as a trend that “the state...strenuously asserted the authority of teachers over children, *in competition with parents*” (emphasis added).<sup>33</sup> Whether or not an elite class was imposing middle—class values upon the worker, the emphasis on the state in the common school movement undoubtedly removed moral education from the home, placing parent and school at odds with one another. As the school wrested authority from parents, inevitably moral education would stem more from articulation by a teacher, instead of from experience in the family’s fields. Lastly, even if the common school movement did not give way to class imposition, reliance on the state did facilitate *pedagogical* imposition, in which state teachers used articulation to impose ideas on students. John Dewey would complain in his day of the forceful methods education had adopted, as it relied on words imposed on the student instead of on experience which could form the child’s character.<sup>34</sup> Even without Katz’ classist argument, state education was moving moral education from home to school, altering the *method* by which children learned from community experience to state articulation. As the coming decades showed, the new vehicle of pedagogy had to rely

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<sup>29</sup> Mann, *Seventh Annual Report*, 197.

<sup>30</sup> Messerli, *Horace Mann*, 281—2.

<sup>31</sup> Messerli, *Horace Mann*, 244.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Katz, writing in the 1960s, has received intense scrutiny from a variety of scholars in the field, and his views are currently out of favor with most historians of education.

<sup>33</sup> Kaestle, 67.

<sup>34</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, The Kappa Delta Pi Lecture Series (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938).



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on imposition to achieve its goals, creating a system diametrically opposed to Mann's intentions.

A final example of the shift toward articulation and treatment of the state as moral educator is found in the common school movement's resistance to corporal punishment. While past teachers relied on physical punishment to exercise discipline in the classroom, teachers of the new pedagogy were urged to rely more upon "moral persuasion" to secure order.<sup>35</sup> Mann's own writings embody this transition. In a lecture entitled "On School Punishments," he states that physical punishment fosters fear in the child, and that this fear possesses "a direct tendency to check the growth of every virtue, because fear of pain is not an atmosphere in which the virtues flourish."<sup>36</sup> Mann is thus arguing that punishment does not meet the requirements of good moral education, which ought to cultivate a child's character, not suppress it. He contends elsewhere that school supervisors ought to lift students' spirits with "advice, encouragement, affectionate persuasion," since "wise counsel from acknowledged superiors makes a deep impress."<sup>37</sup> Mann here is calling for articulated moral persuasion to inspire good behavior in students, in place of the physical punishment that had previously taught behavior via harsh experience. This avenue is yet another way Mann helped to replace experience with articulation, and it also reveals the practicality of this shift when the state is the primary moral educator. With school practice coming from a foreign central authority instead of a familiar local one, discipline through persuasion would both please parents and endear children more than physical force would. Whether in curriculum, classroom discipline, or elite instruction, the elevation of the state in common school practice altered how morals were taught to students, deemphasizing the traditional means of moral education and making articulation its primary vehicle.

Despite the puissance of Mann's educational philosophy, the fifty years following his death witnessed educational trends much the opposite of what he predicted. At first, common schools did show signs of adopting Mann's pedagogy and curriculum. By 1850, grade schools were becoming almost universal in urban areas. Michael Katz suggests that corporal punishment in Massachusetts schools almost disappeared in the 1860s, and some schools, like the ones in Lawrence, started teaching music and physical education.<sup>38</sup> For many at the time, these features made schooling more compassionate toward students, fulfilling Mann's vision of how students should learn in a forgiving, sympathetic environment. By the end of the century, however, the Prussian model which Mann had advocated was revealing its dark side, and public schools were succumbing to authoritarian tendencies. Joseph Mayer Rice, a journalist who compiled detailed accounts of urban schoolrooms in the 1890s, tells how the typical American classroom at the time was filled with rote question and answer routines, mind—numbing "busywork," and strict guidelines for when the students could speak or even move.<sup>39</sup> In Saint Louis, Rice blatantly concludes that the school system was based on an "absolute lack of sympathy for the

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<sup>35</sup> Kaestle, 67.

<sup>36</sup> Horace Mann, "Lecture VII. On School Punishments," in *Life and Works*, 342.

<sup>37</sup> Horace Mann, "First Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education," in *Life and Works*, Vol. II, 401—2.

<sup>38</sup> Katz, 136.

<sup>39</sup> Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1890—1990*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 27.

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child.”<sup>40</sup> Other observers noted similar environments, with one describing the teachers in a Massachusetts elementary school as “passive, routine, clerical.”<sup>41</sup> Mann had emphasized that the articulated words of a teacher, not child experience, was the main vehicle for moral education, and in so doing he inadvertently created a situation where submission was the greatest virtue. The condition of schools in the 1890s was not an accident, but a direct consequence of the philosophy of Horace Mann, because when the state becomes the sole moral educator, the definition of morality changes from individualist to collectivist with alarming results.

Mann successfully established a centralized system of education, the basic structure of which remains unchanged today. One of the results is that the moral implications behind state—led education have also continued to influence American schools. A look at Dewey’s time confirms that Mann’s philosophy of state as moral educator continued into the modern era, and that Progressives enthusiastically revived the fight for nationalist education. Some of them, such as John Dewey, tried to resist the moral implications of state education. But Dewey’s writings reveal that Mann’s new moral pedagogy created a framework which Dewey had to react to, and which, in many ways, was already fixed in the fabric of American education.

Like the common school movement, the Progressive movement in education made one of its central goals the assimilation of children into an American culture. As immigrants flocked to the nation’s cities, reformers realized the need to integrate foreign—born citizens into American culture and turn them into constructive contributors to the democracy. Even more than that, the Progressives witnessed the most extreme cases in which parents were failing to properly raise their children. In New York City, for instance, teachers often bathed their students every week because the parents did not have the resources to do so.<sup>42</sup> This dynamic combination of problems meant an urgent reliance on the state for education. The government at both the state and federal level needed to be the guiding force in any educational reform that happened, partly because many parents lacked the means, and partly because only a central policy could create a democratic education for the nation’s citizens. These goals and intentions can be well summarized in the words of the journalist Jacob Riis, who declared that the “immediate duty which the community has to perform for its own protection is to school the children first of all into good Americans, and next into useful citizens.”<sup>43</sup> Such a nationalist “duty” (reminiscent of common school obligations) was first and foremost to create citizens deemed worthy of being called “Americans.” As a result, the task could not be delegated to a single group of people: it required community cooperation.

Dewey is the best witness to this aim of Progressive education, and just as Mann contended that society was responsible for the education of its children, so too did Dewey consider it imperative that society should teach the next generation. The concept is a crucial one in “My Pedagogic Creed,” a profession of Dewey’s pedagogy written in 1897 toward the start of his career. Here, Dewey’s words resemble those of Jacob Riis, for he states, “In the ideal school we have the reconciliation of the individualistic and the institutional ideals. The community’s duty to education is, therefore, its paramount moral duty.”<sup>44</sup> Because the school is a community effort, it not only develops a child individually, but it also develops him in a social context.

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Tracy L. Steffes, *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern Modern America, 1890—1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 15, EBSCOhost.

<sup>41</sup> Cuban, 29.

<sup>42</sup> Ripa, 139.

<sup>43</sup> Ripa., 140.

<sup>44</sup> Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed,” 243.

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This fusion of ends creates a duty for the community, for without such an education society cannot endure. Both Riis and Dewey focus on the “community,” but, as with Mann, it was implied that the community would rely on articulated language in state schools to carry out its duty. Dewey could often be critical of the state, but as Tracy Steffes discusses, he and other Progressives still relied on it for the implementation of their ideas. Steffes explains,

As reformers like Dewey defined schooling as a modern project of socialization, they turned to the state—state government and a host of other mechanisms of public power at all levels of the federal system—for the authority, coordination, and coercion necessary to enact reforms across space, make schooling an effective instrument of socialization, and address social problems through the school.<sup>45</sup>

For Dewey and others, socialization was the key aim of the school, and the state’s overarching power was capable of fulfilling that goal. While Dewey believed the local community ought to be the primary educator, he still recognized the need for state management to achieve the social aim of education.

As already mentioned, it is important to keep in mind that though the state factored into Dewey’s moral education, he largely tried to resist Mann’s notion of “state as moral educator.” First, Dewey recognized the home’s importance in a child’s early development. For the simple reason that the child grows up there, the home plays an unavoidable role in a child’s moral development. The home is where a child first develops moral values, so it is a crucial place for that growth. Dewey states, however, that when the child has reached a certain age, “it is the business of the school to deepen and extend the sense of the values bound up in his home life.”<sup>46</sup> The school complements, rather than counteracts, the education of the home, but it also extends that training to be valuable to society. It must take the home’s experiences and “reproduce them in such ways that the child will gradually learn the meaning of them, and be capable of playing his own part in relation to them.” In other words, the school ought to develop the child’s understanding of “social significance” which enables him to contribute to society, as Dewey discusses in *School and Society* and *Democracy and Education*.<sup>47</sup> Mann would have agreed with Dewey that the home is important early on, but the main distinction between the two is that Dewey thinks that the school is never the sole moral educator for the student. In many of his works, Dewey is hesitant to invest full responsibilities of moral educator in the state schools as Mann did. For Dewey, the school provides only a small piece of a child’s moral education, with parents and the community playing a much larger role.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, his emphasis on the local community moderates Mann’s focus on state education, since experience in the community resists education that is exclusively articulated. Indeed, Dewey directly criticizes moral education that relies on articulation: “Character, in short, is something that is *formed* rather than something that can be taught as geography and arithmetic are taught.”<sup>49</sup> While some subjects like geography can be taught by

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<sup>45</sup> Tracy L. Steffes, *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern Modern America, 1890–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 195–6, EBSCOhost.

<sup>46</sup> Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed,” 238.

<sup>47</sup> Dewey, *The School and Society* (Rev. ed., Chicago: University of Chicago, 1915); Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (Waiheke Island: Floating Press, 2009), EBSCOhost.

<sup>48</sup> See his 1934 essay entitled “Character Training for the Youth,” in Simpson, Douglas J. and Stack, Sam F., eds., *Teachers, Leaders, and Schools: Essays by John Dewey* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 88–94. ProQuest.

<sup>49</sup> John Dewey, “Character Training in the Youth,” in Simpson and Stack, 89.

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articulation alone, morality requires more than just school lessons taught to a classroom.

Dewey's moral education attempted to break free from state articulation, but his own writings show that he was forced to work within Mann's pedagogical framework. Mann is rightly called the "father of the public school system," because he contributed heavily to the United States' adoption of a state school system that excelled in accessibility, uniformity, and universality. Mann's colossal influence means that even when reformers like Dewey tried to create a more experience—based education model, they had to work within a system that, as we have seen, was based on articulation, not experience, from its inception. Dewey comes to terms with this legacy, perhaps begrudgingly, when he questions how much schools can actually prepare students for real life in society:

As a consequence of the absence of the materials and occupations which generate real problems, the pupil's problems are not his; or, rather, they are his *only as a pupil*, not as a human being. Hence the lamentable waste in carrying over such expertness as is achieved in dealing with them to the affairs of life beyond the classroom....At its worst, the problem of the pupil is not how to meet the requirements of school life, but how to *seem* to meet them.<sup>50</sup>

Here, Dewey is recognizing that no matter how hard one tries to create *real* experience in the classroom, the environment of the school remains artificial to some degree because the problems are transferred from teacher to student by articulated words rather than by the student's own perceived need. This dilemma was recognizable in Dewey's day, but any 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher would agree that students studying simply to pass a test, or simply to earn an A, is still a problem in education. Once moral education is set to operate via articulation, where the majority of moral teaching occurs in a schoolroom rather than in the community, all educational reform must be conducted within those pedagogical limits. Dewey may have attacked the pedagogy of articulation, but Mann's basic assumptions about moral education still translate clearly into the way school functions today.

Despite their conflict over *how* morality should be taught, the two giants in education both use their methods to promote a fundamentally social notion of morality, which is another key consequence of "state as moral educator." Dewey's definition of overall education—"a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness"—hints at that conception, because for Dewey anything that takes place in the school ought to be developing the social consciousness.<sup>51</sup> Morals are key in that social school because he believes that character possesses an irreplaceable social element, as opposed to being a strictly individual matter. In fact, Neil McCluskey concludes that Deweyan morals in general are worthless outside of society's context, so by necessity, moral education is essentially social.<sup>52</sup> Dewey demonstrates the latter point when he contends that proper education "recognizes that this right character is not to be formed by merely individual precept, example, or exhortation, but rather by the influence of a certain form of institutional or community life upon the individual."<sup>53</sup> Character can only develop when the nurturing of the community helps foster it. Thus, character is not an individual affair that is simply taught in a collective setting of a school—it is an inherently collective affair taught in

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<sup>50</sup> Dewey, quoted in Beno Csapo, "Cognitive Aspects of Democratic Thinking," in *Developing Democratic Character in the Young*, eds. Roger Soder, John I. Goodlad, Timothy J. McMannon, Jossey—Bass Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey—Bass, 2001), 143—144.

<sup>51</sup> Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," 242.

<sup>52</sup> McCluskey, 217.

<sup>53</sup> Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," 242—3.

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a collective setting. With this understanding he hearkens back to Mann, who says that true religion is “the cultivation of social duty.”<sup>54</sup> With these thoughts, both men highlight a belief that the highest form of moral development—whether one calls it religion or not—occurs in collective settings. Thus, while Dewey thought the community should have a significant place in the child’s moral development, his belief that morality was inherently social confirmed the principles of Mann’s “state as moral educator” notion, since for both, an individual cannot fully develop without the aid of social institutions like the school.

Ironically, while Dewey assigned a crucial role to experience in education, he confirmed Mann’s belief that the intellect was important in character development. In his essay “The Moral Significance of the Common School Studies,” Dewey explains how character possesses an important intellectual aspect: “Effective character—and this is increasingly true under modern conditions of life—requires intelligence regarding the natural resources and conditions of action.”<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere, he states clearly that “the mind of an individual, his ideas and beliefs, are a part of character.”<sup>56</sup> This intellectual conception of character also taps into the Progressive ideology that moral development requires a sense of “moral imagination.” When dealing with the “modern conditions of life” in which technology, markets, and political complexities are always changing cultural standards, the Progressives thought that students needed to learn how to assess what was moral based on changing circumstances. To do this meant moral education had to depend on the mind and on imagination. The school’s function would thus be to “build on the immediate experiences of the children” in order to achieve “problem—solving and social learning” that would help modernize moral education.<sup>57</sup> Of course, Dewey knew that moral education was more than just intellectual education, but it is important to realize that the very presence of intellect in moral talk was new in the tradition of public education. As has been clear throughout this study, the common school movement focused heavily on moral education, but it mostly belittled the development of the intellect. One Illinois superintendent in the mid—1800s reiterated that in public education, “the chief end is to make GOOD CITIZENS,” and while he assumes that the solution is good moral education, he reminds readers that education’s purpose is “not to make precocious scholars.”<sup>58</sup> Carl Kaestle frankly concludes that this contrast was consistent in the period. During the common school era, he says that “intellectual education did not receive as high a priority as moral education in discussions of the purposes of common schools.”<sup>59</sup> The trend demonstrates that Dewey’s stance was revolutionary for education, for it not only stressed intellect in education, but it also prioritized intellect in *moral* education. In this way, even though Dewey tried to return experience to moral education in spite of Mann, he was actually reinforcing some of the results of the prior reformer’s actions. All the way back in the 1840s, Mann’s assumptions about the purpose of education—that it ought to focus on intellect more than body—was

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<sup>54</sup> Barbara Finkelstein, “Perfecting Childhood: Horace Mann and the Origins of Public Education in the United States.” In “Biography and Education,” special issue, *Biography* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1990), 13.

<sup>55</sup> Dewey, “The Moral Significance of the Common School Studies,” in Simpson and Stack, 86.

<sup>56</sup> Dewey, “Character Training for the Youth,” 88.

<sup>57</sup> B. Edward McClellan, *Moral Education in America* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 58.

<sup>58</sup> Kaestle, 98.

<sup>59</sup> Kaestle, 100.

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forming a framework for US education which every reformer afterward had to respond to.

The strong position of Horace Mann on state responsibility in education presented a new moral pedagogy which changed American education in ways still evident today. While many scholars point to the most obvious results of the common school movement, such as the development of a tax—based, uniform school system, the revolutionary nature of the movement reaches much deeper, as it altered the way education develops a student’s character. As the comparison with Dewey shows, Mann’s redefining of moral education was not a passing trend, for it created perceptions of morality and pedagogy which continued to influence American culture through the 1900s. The study of Horace Mann’s philosophy of education, then, gives a comprehensive look into America’s historical answer to the question, “Why public education?” In short, the answer is that public education was designed to teach the population democratic cohesion and unity with the dominant culture, all while instilling a collectivist, rather than individualist, form of morality.

This “statement of purpose” is incredibly significant for modern education, for it shows that our system was designed to teach not individual morality, but cooperation with the group. Therefore, if the nation is worried about how schools are preparing students for society, its largest concern should not be whether prayers are said in schools. Rather, it should be to what extent schools have been following the model of Horace Mann and the Prussians, teaching conformity and passive obedience at the cost of individual virtue. John Taylor Gatto, a high school teacher in the New York schools for 30 years, quit his post in 1991 because he saw this exact kind of Prussian education manifesting in the schools. In his resignation letter, which was later published in the *Wall Street Journal*, he summarized why he stopped teaching.

I can’t train children to wait to be told what to do; I can’t train people to drop what they are doing when a bell sounds; I can’t persuade children to feel some justice in their class placement when there isn’t any, and I can’t persuade children to believe teachers have valuable secrets they can acquire by becoming our disciples. That isn’t true.<sup>60</sup>

From 30 years of experience, Gatto is identifying the fruit of an education system that is collectivist and nationalistic: it teaches obedience above all and sets up a false reality that leaves them ill—prepared for the world. One further point is that in a system where students are taught to merely fall in line, dialogue between viewpoints is not encouraged. This was a problem in Mann’s day, when schools rejected the viewpoints of “inferior races” to create cultural assimilation, and it is also the case in today’s schools, where education usually glosses over sensitive topics instead of teaching students how to critically discuss them. In such a system, unity is more important than dialectic conversation, just like in Prussia, where religious unity was valued over discussing opposing views. This is a much greater issue in morality, for it emphasizes conformity to the dominant culture over the virtue of critical thinking.

The only solution for this quandary is for the home to regain its standing in education. Even though the aims of the public school have remained constant through history, the local community still remains a settled influence. John Dewey once stated, “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.”<sup>61</sup> Mann and Dewey both argued that the larger community has an obligation to educate the

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<sup>60</sup> Brittany Hunter, “John Taylor Gatto (1935—2018): Remembering America’s Most Courageous Teacher,” *Foundation for Economic Education*, Oct. 29, 2018,

<sup>61</sup> Dewey, quoted in Robert B. Westbrook, “Public Schooling and American Democracy,” in *Democracy, Education, and the Schools*, ed. Roger Soder, Jossey—Bass Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey—Bass, 1996), 142.

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youth, but perhaps the students' home ought to possess a similar moral obligation to teach students morally since the home is in the best position to teach individual virtue to the student. As the public school seeks to preserve the collective aspects of (moral) education, so the home ought to teach students to value conversation and maintain upright character. Without this addition, the state can easily control students' thinking under a Prussian—like system, which in Marx's words, only "makes good soldiers."<sup>62</sup> If history teaches anything, then guarding against such a system is crucial for conserving the American way of life.

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<sup>62</sup> See note 22.

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