

Dear Stewart,

Thank you for your response to this here April 9 C.C.TIMES letter of mine attacking your TIMES letter attacking Leo Coveney's TIMES letter. We make an odd trio! Conservative-Catholic Leo wants no sex ed in our public schools but thinks speech-freedom in America should entitle teachers to teach their religion in public schools. He & I think it's an illusion to believe, as you do, that adequate moral education can proceed on a nonreligious base (ie, not values-neutral but religion-neutral). You & I worry that if Leo had his way, the whole camel of Catholic religiomoral dogma would soon be in the public-education tent. I am a pro-abortion evangelical, you are a self-professed secular humanist, & Leo is equally suspicious of us both. Have we got an equilateral triangle, or what?

1 Our three-way letters-department conversation in Cape Cod's daily is a microcosm of what needs to go on if the citizenry is going to make decisions in our public-education crisis instead of letting the public-school socialist-monopoly establishment, a profoundly flawed & visibly failed system, continue to make decisions for us.

2 We Protestants were happy with the public schools up till '25 (yep, the Monkey Trial: a highschool teacher had tried to sub evolutionism for theism; he lost his case but won his cause--so when I entered jr.high four years later, theism was out. This WASP creation had gotten out of our hands by raids of Catholics, Jews, & evolution-believers [ie, those who instead of combining theism & evolution, rejected theism & made a religion of evolution, viz evolutionism, later broadened into your religion, viz secular humanism]). Americans' foundational-majority culture, the Anglo-Saxon Protestant, has been more or less alienated from the secular-humanist public schools, &--with the deepening dire failure of the latter, with horrendous consequences for our present & future--the alienation is increasing.

3 Secular humanism is not a religion? It's cryptoreligious, continues to be so so as to appear religion-neutral & therefore the proper controller of public education--as you in your April 4 TIMES letter said you could teach morals "without the impediments of differing religious dogmas that may lead to highly immoral actions among competing religions." I concur with Walter Eno's April 13 TIMES letter against you: "Is he disingenuous or merely naive? Secular humanism is indeed a religion according to a 1961 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, along with, in the court's words, 'Buddhism, Taoism, ethical culture and others!'" Ethical Culture (it should be capitalized)? Yes, an atheist religion since 1875 (as is another, more recent, atheist form of Judaism, viz Reconstructionism). If it doesn't seem to you to be a religion, why doesn't it? For the reason a fish doesn't know it's in water. The education-&-media establishments have been so long atheist that atheism seems to millions of Americans truth, obvious truth.

4 You say it's "inaccurate" for me to say you propose to teach atheism, for you claim you want to teach only morals. That the two can be educationally separated is one of the illusions of the Enlightenment, which is the historical parent of secular humanism. But the Enlightenment was & is sectarian! That was the main point in

Spiritual values seen as bedrock

Stewart MacMillan (letter, April 4) offers to teach atheism "a day each week in a parochial school." I offer to teach theism a day each week in an atheist private school.

But in speaking for "the right of free speech for atheist school-teachers who would like to teach in a church-sponsored school," he fails to notice that this would require violating one of his moral values -- peaceful solutions. The government would have to force the school's trustees to permit atheists this right.

Further, Mr. MacMillan, in touring "common moral values," fails to mention spiritual values. Does he suppose there are none, or that moral values are engendered independently of spiritual values? In either case, he has precious little historical support. This is the Achilles heel of his "secular humanism."

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the recent swansong of an eminent U. of Chicago professor. In our increasingly pluralistic world, philosophers of all traditions are increasingly viewing the Enlightenment & its "secular values" as provincial, an atheist form of Westernism. Also, what morals would you propose to teach? How complex an issue this is appears in the April 6 WALL STREET JOURNAL (B1,B8). Reporting a Gallup Poll, S.L.Nazario: "About 84% of school parents want moral values taught in school, and 68% want educators to develop strict standards of 'right and wrong'--& "values such as honesty, respect, and patriotism....But polls also show that most teachers object to the concept of moral education on philosophical or practical grounds; many fear that such programs will stir up controversy." But Louis Harris survey show a moral morass out there in the schools: "47% of students would cheat on an exam;...66% said they would lie to achieve a business objective. Teen pregnancy, drug abuse and juvenile crime are among the highest in the industrialized world." Children get their "values mainly from peers and television." Says a SUNY prof., "kids have very little sense of right and wrong. Schools must step into the breach." Various programs are on trial around the nation, including a "Value of the Month." The "acceptable list of values" developed here & there by groups of "diverse professionals" usu. includes "respect, responsibility, compassion, honesty and civic participation." A NH teacher: "Some values--like courage and honesty, responsibility and self-control--...aren't debatable"; & America is "impoverished" without them. But a NH school administrator, reacting against "pushing Judeo-Christian culture" (our foundational culture!), said "I can see the [Nazi] brown shirts." Grotesque! The Nazis were pushing *against* Judeo-Christian culture; & the closer Germans were to that culture, the more they resisted Nazism. Besides, how would that administrator have responded to the question "What are you pushing instead?" Would not the response have been "I'm not pushing anything...."? Quite impossible. If you're teaching, you're pushing something. Maybe tolerance (instead of commitment), a teaching that encourages the anomic personality, the type of personality so many of our public-school children have developed...."Some teachers fear foisting white, middle-class values on highly pluralistic classes." But those are the values of our founding documents, of our political & economic structures, & of our laws: they are what we are all judged by, rewarded & punished by. It's cruel as well as stupid not to teach those values, & then turn the children loose to suffer the consequences of their ignorance. ("Texts describe the Pilgrims not as seekers of religious freedom but as 'people who take long trips.'")....Teacher resistance derives in part from the fact that so many of the teachers are themselves spiritual & moral illiterates. Teacher-training schools are beginning to wake up to the problem, & inservice education is exposing teachers to Socrates, the Bible, & other religiomoral resources; last year BU opened its Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character. Schools that make a serious try at morals education are experiencing decreases in truancy & disciplinary problems.

5 But would I be happy if passive-atheist moral education succeeded? Of course not: the commonest sin, says the Bible, is God-forgetfulness, God-amnesia, the direct result of passive atheism (your type: you're not an aggressive atheist, though you're at least active-promotive atheist enough for an occasional letter to the editor!). The passive atheist is more dangerous to biblical religion: the active atheist calls attention to God, albeit negatively (what causes God-amnesia is the not calling attention to God: said a Hollywood wag, "I don't care what they say about me so long as they keep talking").

6 "Values" you would teach have the virtue of vagueness. Tolerance? Surely you've a long list of what you believe children should be taught to be intolerant of! WSJ: "Some...parents have already protested when the teaching of tolerance raised the issue of homophobia." "Respect for life"? WSJ: "Teachers expect tricky questions about abortion and the death penalty." "Some...teachers...fear that they will foster family discord by lifting the moral standards of students above those of their parents." Brother Stewart, it's not as easy as you secular humanists think. Virtues are rooted in values, values are rooted in religion, morals are inseparable from any of the three.

7 You say "We differ on the thesis that morality has its roots in religious teachings." "Moral values are not predestined [ie, predetermined] by any religious order [of the universe]....the mores of a society were determined by moral actions which made for a compatible existence and were subsequently adopted as teachings of the church." To think otherwise, you claim, pollutes fact (history) with faith (mythology). But you haven't noticed that you're in the same boat: it's your mythology, your world-story, your faith that supports your belief that (in my words) the "religio-" of "religiomoral" succeeds, as an afterthought numinous support, the "-moral." Historical-anthropological-ethnological evidence is inconclusive as to which is the egg & which the chicken. Psychosociology tends to reject both & claim the religiomoral as an undifferentiated emergent. In history, your view gets no sustained defense till the post-French-Revolution atheist sociologists, who had a need (eg, Comtean positivism) to tell the world-story leaving God out (as, later, Marx-Lenin & Freud; & as Hume & Dewey). The polemical basis of your view is apparent to anyone aware that it's the opposite of the biblical, where the process is first the religious & then the moral: Moses experiences God, then (after confronting Pharaoh) receives the Decalog; the early Christians experience God (in Jesus before & after the resurrection, & in the Spirit), then struggle to shape up a Christian ethic & Christian ethics (a process we can observe in the New Testament & the immediately succeeding extant Christian literature). You'll not be surprised that I find the biblical order more probable & its logic more cogent (which includes my believing your order to be less logical--you who so pride yourself on logic & see it as the primary stumblingblock to theism, to your own believing in God). So I return on you the statement you turned on me: "I think you would have trouble proving your case except on the basis of faith--in which case I would not argue further with you."

8 Note that the editor titled my letter "Spiritual [not "Religious"] values seen as bedrock." Your letter misreads me, as though I'd said "religious," ie the values of particular religions & their institutions. A religion is the bodying forth of a spirituality: religion was made for spirituality, not the reverse (as Jesus said "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath"). But spiritual formation occurs within institutions that embody & continue spiritual & religious traditions. Last year Frances Kostarelos got her U. of Chicago PhD on the ethnography of a Chicago storefront church. The Spring/90 U. of C. MAGAZINE, p.35: "Interested in urban anthropology and trained in the Chicago tradition of symbolic anthropology--i.e., 'how a system of ideas shapes and gives meaning to the group, how those ideas influence the way the group thinks about the universe and gives order to it'--she found in the storefront a vibrant social gospel, a power born of religious vision." You are aware that churches are into spiritual formation: you seem innocent of the fact that an atheist public school is in the same business, pushing a particular symbolic anthropology, "a system of ideas" (including atheist evolution) shaping the children's minds, outlook, way of seeing the world. ("Humanist" is the positive of which "atheist" is the negative, both covering the same symbolic territory. [In our home yesterday, when I said "atheist" a Unitarian-Universalist minister immediately said "humanist," & we both smiled.] For an objective study of the words "atheism" & "atheist," see my #858A, herewith.) You think to escape from pushing your spirituality-religion? You're doing it when you identify yourself as an atheist, or only proceed to teach "morals only" without reference to God. From this there is no escape. If you'd see & concede this, you'd be able to come off your "logic" arrogance.

9 This inescapability, once the public (& the public-school establishment!) is sophisticated, savvy enough to see & concede it, probably dooms the present sectarian public-school system (the "sect" it's pushing, it's spiritually forming its students to, being the one you belong to, viz "humanism" or, more precisely, "secular humanism"). Until Catholics & Jews forced it to, our public schools weren't aware they were Protestant both in becoming (ie, in origin) & in being. The result was not a positive incorporation of Catholicism & Judaism but a jettisoning of Protestantism &, with it, the western spiritual heritage. Into this vacuum rushed what was in America a minority spirituality-religion, viz yours, which through public-

school spiritual formation is pressing to become America's majority spirituality-religion --a tendency increasingly resisted by representatives, laic as well as cleric, of the western spiritual heritage. Compounding this hopeful undermining of the present socialist-monopoly school establishment is its failure to engender character, an essential in a democracy, & its failure to teach the basic knowledge & skills necessary to productive citizenship--its failure even to hold its students (the Chicago dropout rate, eg, is 50%). Too, teacher-quality declines as teachers are the primary victims of "promotions without qualifications." And "the choice movement"--extending American freedoms by adding parents' freedom to choose their children's schools, the choice that would reform & invigorate public education by another American value, viz competition--has already increased from a whisper to a roar. Will you join your voice with ours? Long I remained aloof from this movement, but have now sadly concluded that the school establishment is too intransigent for change & the calamity of public education too serious for me to remain aloof any longer. I held off because of my fear that without the single public-school system, America could not sustain a single culture. But honorable & efficient pluralism is to be preferred to arrogant & effete monopoly, & perhaps we can work to engender basic American values through a multiple-school system that does a better academic job than the present single system can hope to. (Various U.S. Dept. of Ed. studies show that choice & local control-accountability correlate with higher academic achievement. See Warren T. Brookes [speaking in an education conference including Mortimer Adler & Alber Shanker], "Public Education and the Global Failure of Socialism," Hillsdale College's IMPRIMIS, Apr/90.)

10 Thanks for sending me a copy of your letter to Walter Eno, in response to his TIMES attack on your position. In it you define religion in a curiously constrictive way, viz "accepting a power beyond human experience." How could anything "beyond human experience" have any effect on humanity? What's going on at the heart of the Bible, & that explains the existence of the Bible, is simply this: human beings are "experiencing" God, who therefore is not entirely "beyond human experience." If you mean "beyond scientific proof," think how little that has meaning for human beings is amenable to scientific verification! And hear prof. emeritus Langdon Gilkey (UCDS CRITERION, Aut/89, p.4): "I fault the scientists...for misunderstanding science,...for claiming to be the only way that reality is known....Something beyond both science and the humanities undergirds them both," viz "a theonomous [God-ordering] basis," which is necessary to "the reality of the person," a reality that's beyond the reach of science. Consider, Stewart, how little your own personal values are grounded in science, & how loath you would be to follow the logic of your social relativism of values (that they are shaped by particular societies): what fulcrum does your relativism have against, say, Alfred Rosenberg's "scientific" Nazi morality? The truth is that your self-proclaimed "free thought" is not really free but is bound to a morality historically & existentially dependent on the West's spirituality, including the Bible & the synagogue, & the church. You are a would-be ingrate, denying the connection; & that is an aspect of your secular-humanist dogma: your telling Eno "secular humanists reject all dogma" made me smile. Your arrogance appears also in saying you don't intend to debunk religion but have "absolute respect for personal religious views" which you never lose an opportunity to declare illogical! Admit that yours is only a faith, not knowledge--as Eno puts it, "the secular humanists' naturalistic faith in human reason and science, unaided by the discipline of religion." Yes, "a faith." And no more logical than any other unless your faith defines "logic" in a self-serving way....One of the conclusions of my U. of Chicago PhD dissertation (on motivation) was that the questions "Why be good?" & "Why be pious?" are existentially inseparable. You see yourself as good, & I see you also as pious (& as dogmatic about your faith as any other fundamentalist of whatever religion). In the terms of the upcoming Craigville Colloquy, no "justice" (morality) without "justification" (spirituality-religion). A nonspiritual, pragmatic-utilitarian-relativistic ethic may make people clever, but not good; & you will admit, mere cleverness is not good enough.

11 We agree on "equal access" & "free speech." Grace & peace,

