

A Critical Examination of Human Values in Tertiary Education

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Values are traits or qualities that are considered worthwhile. They represent an individual's highest priorities and deeply held driving forces (Heathfield, 2). Some things which are regarded as valuable in contemporary society may be said to include life, wealth, happiness and education. These are more immediate values in themselves and for other benefits that they may be regarded as having; but they may be said to be relative to individual and social needs. Other values are less immediate and more general.¹

It is probably clear that there is a paradox concerning the nature of values. This paradox relates to the fact that values tend to change as human society and people evolve through space and time, and as these changes occur we all need to be careful not to lose sight of the core values which have become very fundamental to the survival of humanity and which, as a consequence, should guide our lives. But at the same time, it seems quite clear that there are some enduring values in all societies which humans deploy all kinds of resources to procure; one particular value that may be mentioned here is the value of "human life", or put another way, that sanctity of human life.

One way of preserving and imparting these values is to train not only educators but individuals in tertiary level institutions with the values needed to uplift and build nations. Some persons are of the view that one should model desirable values.² If we assume that one absorbs behaviour patterns, as observed or witnessed by persons, then we can say that modelling affects children values as well as their behaviour.

The most serious problem for the modelling approach to value development is that, in our complex society, conflicting models exist for almost every value one could name.³ A parent or lecturer could model the values of hard work, for example, but a friend, a sports star, a rock star or pop singer or movie star, might present the opposite model. The models from the home front might then be necessary but not sufficient to help young ones and young adults to clarify value positions. Also, it is difficult to garner key values, such as self-esteem, dedication to hard work, honesty and positive attitude to life and wholesome aspirations and loyalty, as these are not often perfectly reflected in the public behaviour of public personalities and leaders in society.

One approach that is key to the understanding and development of the concept of values at the tertiary level is the Clarifying Liberal Arts Approach, as it encourages students to read widely, think deeply and experience broadly – not to find universal values, but to find themselves.⁴ The key to understanding the outside world is to first

¹ Reid, Louis Arnaud. *Philosophy and Education*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1962, 49.

² Kirschenbaum, Howard & Sidney Simon. *Reading in Values Clarification*. Minneapolis: Winston Press. 1973, 7.

³ Kirschenbaum, Howard & Sidney Simon., 7.

⁴ Kirschenbaum, Howard. 12

know yourself before you can begin to understand and appreciate others. This approach, however, might not be enough as it might be difficult to find 'yourself' in a constantly fluid and changing world. The question which begs for serious consideration is: Is continued training the key to solving the mystery of how education and especially higher education can help society in the development of wholesome and positive values in society? Answering this question affirmatively may prove to be a Herculean task, as a lot depends on who does the training, what are the instruments used in the training and to what end.

It has come to the forefront mainly in this century that education is one of the most effective tools for cultivating social, moral and ethical human values. This education is not only to survive in the work world, but also to be able to participate in decision making that relate to the changing needs of societies, of which values play an integral role.

It is also to be understood that an attempt should be made to understand the others' values as well, in order to avoid hostility and chaos. This will allow individuals to gain a view of the world that is other-regarding. The important notions of nationhood, society, community, universality of humanity, respect for the other and for nature, tolerance, truth, respect for the self and responsibility to the self and to others are slowly diminishing, as individuals gravitate toward an idea of crass individualism that tends to undermine value and worth of "the other".

Contemporary society exhibits these negatives and the problems are more evident in societies. It is arguable that the overall decline in values attendant on extremes of globalization and domination of the poor by the rich has undermined what could be said to be the rich value systems that Caribbean nations always had, which has made it possible not only to survive plantation slavery, but also to survive in the topsy-turvy world of winner takes all and loser goes hungry. It is imperative that we find ways of keeping the values, even in this era of rapid change by using tertiary education as the vantage point, with the hope that the positive effects will gradually permeate down to other members and sectors of the society.

Even as we indicate this challenge for tertiary education, we must acknowledge that the task that the tertiary educational system is faced with is a difficult one. The DES/HMI [1977] paper "Curriculum 11 to 16" is aware of the possible difficulty by stating the responsibilities this system is charged with. It states,

the educational system is charged by society with equipping young people to take their place as citizens and workers in adult life. Secondly there is the responsibility for educating the 'autonomous citizen', a person able to think and act for herself or himself, to resist exploitation, to innovate and to be vigilant in the defence of liberty. These two functions do not fit easily together.⁵

⁵ Pring, Richard. *Personal and Social Education in the Curriculum*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. 1984, 5.

DES (1977) consultative document *Education in Schools* which sets out the major aims of education.

HMI indicates the wide front on which these objectives must be pursued.

Although these two functions might conflict, it is important not to ignore any one aspect, since in doing that the 'person' that should be developed will be lost. It is important that the tertiary education system seek to develop the whole individual. If this is not accomplished then the system would have failed.

But how can tertiary education play a role in the overall development of worthwhile values for Caribbean and other nations? One way that could be suggested is that there is need to start with the development of the social spheres of interaction as the medium which would foster good values that society can be proud of. Parents have always played a part in the inculcation of wholesome values in the young, but we cannot only rely on that kind of charity, especially as parents are now more pressed than before to earn enough to keep body and soul together.

Kant has remarked, not without some truth, that "parents usually educate their children merely in such a manner that, however bad the world may be, they may adapt themselves to its present conditions."⁶ The underlying idea here is that parents believe in the ideology of: Train them to fit in, as that is what matters. But with the rapid changing society, individuals graduate from universities without learning the virtues of how to 'fit in'; that is, how to adapt, survive and succeed. One cannot readily fit into a world that trains him in a theory that is quite irrelevant, obsolete, falsified by experiences in the real world, and does not conform to the practical world that he is thrust in.

It can be argued that, no one has the right to educate for values in a democratic society as each person is free to choose the values to live by. The aim here is not to undermine individual freedom or to indoctrinate the populace, but simply to guide persons on how to make wise and rational decisions when faced with moral choices.

Let us take a case that happened on a University campus in Jamaica. There was an incident in March 2003, where a man who was allegedly caught breaking into a car on the Campus of the University of Technology [UTech] was chased and cornered in a waste water pit. According to the *Sunday Gleaner* [March 16, 2003, p.A3]:

During this time in the cesspool the students rained several stones on the thief forcing him to remain under the murky waters for long periods. They also lit bush fires around the pool to prevent him from escaping. The students reported that the thief remained below overgrown lilies in the cesspool for about an hour then he popped up for air but some stones were rained down on him. They said at one point during the ordeal the thief offered to give himself up and attempted to come out of the pool but the angry mob rained down more stones at him. He eventually went below the water again and popped up a few times for air until he disappeared from the surface.

⁶ Niblett, W.R., 25.

The significant points are: “first, a man pays for attempted theft with his life.”⁷ The second point is that, “the thief’s offer to give himself up was refused.” The final point is that the mob was composed ostensibly of university students.

These points raise some issues which beg for consideration. Students, at this level, are supposed to be among the most educated members of their society, and from among them, one would expect, would come our next generation of leaders of their societies. They, because of the refinement of intellect and sensibilities that are provided by the institutions that educate our elite, should be above such acts of vigilantism. But if they, in whom the society pins its future hope can sentence a man to die in such a terrible way, then what is to become of our civilization?⁸ It seems to show a serious level of decadence in the values that the society could be said to defend.

It is often expected that University graduates should be equipped with not only the factual knowledge learnt from the various disciplines, but also that they should be able to display and impart a vibrant sense of human values or moral judgement derived from the cherished ideals of their society, which will enhance the overall development of their societies within the international competitive environment moderated only by greed and profit. There needs to be an overall evaluation of the values which determine the various curricular choices that are made in all societies, to ensure not only the validity of content but also the morally uplifting relevance of product.

It seems currently that what passes as “education” in the university lecture rooms offer by tradition less scope than it should, for a frank and open discussion of values and morals groundings of social existence. The majority of subjects are taught, pretty safely as matters of fact or non-fact in which there is no room for critical thought, as the so-called facts or non-facts are regarded as scientifically proven and beyond dispute, or simply as the best available opinion which is to be accepted, at least till there arises further scientific evidence to dispute such claims.⁹

It is the view urged in this essay that students should be given more practice in making choices, debating the choices, and evaluating the choices that must necessarily arise in the process of living with others and within the international global village, especially including critical moral choices, which may impact the lives of selves and others near and remote. In a changing and highly unpredictable society, such as the one we live in, values should not only be expressed but lived, values are critical to survival of human civilization as we know it, and they may not necessarily be uniform across the world but they must interface to engender harmonious co-existence of discordant and contradictory values that make us human.

The evaluation being urged as necessary within tertiary curricular should take into consideration the wide level of Western views that students are introduced to, by ensuring that students recognize the fact that such Western orientation constitute just

⁷ Chevannes, Barry. *Betwixt and Between Explorations in an African-Caribbean Mindscape*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers. 2006, 149.

⁸ Barry Chevannes, 150.

⁹ Niblett, W.R. *Moral Education in a Changing Society*. London: Faber and Faber Limited. 1963, 27.

one in the many ways humanity have defined values, thereby understanding that humans have real choices about whether or not to embrace these Western values instead of those indigenous to their own cultures or whether to reject them because they pose dangers to the overall development of their own identities and humanity. In very serious ways, the teaching of Western values with no such advisory as suggested above has impacted on the minds of the young in societies of the third world in such a way that at times they are often unable to draw from examples within their own cultures to underwrite their own humanity as such examples are sadly foreign to them.

The point here is not that courses should only be offered in Caribbean studies, but that the cultural values indigenous to the Caribbean societies need to become a greater part of the educational lives of tertiary students. For example, no student should graduate from any tertiary institution in the Caribbean without being versed in critical knowledge of Caribbean history or heritage. It is only from the fact that Jews continue to instil in their young ones stories about the “promised land”, based on some strange divine grant of other peoples ancestral homeland to them for possession at any cost, and the “Holocaust” as a horror that must never be allowed to repeat itself, regardless of whether other peoples are exterminated, that Jews are able to maintain their identity in the world and make other humans hostage to their demand for a homeland.

Clearly, some of these ideals that we garner from education as it is presently structured is only a fraction of the values that are akin to our culture and way of life. Part of the function of the university or any tertiary institution must be to provide graduated practice in actually taking responsibility for our choices and actions in the real world. This is one key value area that is lacking in the workplace, and university graduates should be leaders in this regard.

With the growing erosion of essential values, there is a serious need to re-adjust and re-evaluate the tertiary curriculum in order to enforce, cultivate and re-cultivate the values that are regarded as wholesome for our society. There should then be a concerted attempt on the part of tertiary and other training institutions across the Caribbean to address directly the problem of values in education, if the goal of social cohesion and respect for others is not to be totally destroyed.

These lofty ideals can be achieved not only by upgrading existing courses, but also through additional group work, student exchanges, outreach programmes, living with peoples from different social, economic, religious and political means and beliefs and involvement in voluntary organizations, clubs and societies. In these types of arrangements, positive values such as accountability, responsibility, respect for others, perseverance, temperance, diligence, painstakingness of attention to detail and sharing will be further developed.

The key point here is that it is not so much helping students find values but helping them learn skills to continue to undertake the value clarifying approach throughout life. When they are able to do this, the task of humanisation of existence would be attained without the need for the use of force and intimidation, as moral and rational suasion become the benchmark for interaction in society.

It would follow from what we have been urging that the values that inform tertiary education programmes in society should not be chosen haphazardly but must be

determined by social, cultural, political and developmental agendas of society. And for that matter the development of curricular that inform the value orientation of society should not be left to religious bigots who use the opportunity to further their narrow but unrealistic religious agendas.

Within the cultural context, each society has a level of unique qualities that will not be evident anywhere else, that is, that will be uniquely local and non-replicable because of the experiences of members of such societies. It is from this cultural context that individuals will derive the most critical of the values that they adhere to in society, even if unconsciously.

It can be argued that we have a particular mindset or even that may be we are even programmed by our culture. But it may be legitimately asked, "How true is this"? Since the individual seeks in many cases to make value decisions that may or may not be within the realm of their cultural beliefs, it becomes a moot point as to what the role of culture is in the determination of the values that members of society embrace. Although some are of the view that individuals hold certain cultural beliefs in high regard and react within the confines of these beliefs. If this is the case, it can also be argued that since, at any given point in time, societies are not completely stable, it would follow that the values and attitudes are in constant evolution and may change from time to time, depending on the forces that pull and push cultural orientations in society, both from within and from without.

The question that may be asked at this point is whether individual values change in order to keep pace with the existing values within the larger cultural situation of the society of which she is a member. We may attempt an answer by looking at the following statement by one concerned thinker:

When the change is slow enough it is possible for its members gradually to shift their attitudes and maintain a gradual sense of value continuity and legitimacy.¹⁰

But, in recent times, social changes have been so rapid that it is impossible to keep pace with the variations and extensions of the changes. In cases like these the level of adjustment may take longer to be accomplished, and as such the effect of the external changes in values on individuals may be very profound.

It could be understood, however, that although culture may be one source of values, individuals do not necessarily have to fashion their beliefs and values around or within the confines of their own culture. There are various other media that value change can be channelled through or derived from by individual members of society. This is one of the reasons why retraining of members of society is important, so that when all these changes occur, individuals will be in too much of a quandary that could lead them to deviating too far from the required norms considered crucial for the survival of society.

¹⁰ McShea, Robert J. *Morality and Human Values: A New Route to Ethical Theory*. Philadelphia, USA: Temple University Press, 1990, 6.

Although culture shapes beliefs and values to a great extent, the ‘self’, which takes into account the dual nature of the individual consisting of a body and a mind, has a strong influence on the kind of beliefs and values that it adheres to. This is because human beings are capable of, and are constantly fashioning and refashioning their own choices of values in their lives. For value judgements to become ‘real’ or to become non-existent (unreal), the individual has to make this happen, in the sense that it is by choice and action that values are activated. Otherwise, the values are dormant and ineffective, making no difference to anything in the real lives of people and in the real world.

From all indications, it could be suggested that the mind can assimilate whatever it wants to and at the same time reject other things (McCalla 2007) this is mostly the case when we are able to make conscious decisions regarding what we may want to achieve with regard to our goals and what we want to reject. But this is only supposed to be the case for adults, as infants and young people, because they are impressionable in the early parts of their lives, embrace the experiences they are exposed to and the teachings that they received directly or otherwise from those who are older than them, as well as from their peers (peer pressure).

It may be argued from what we have indicated so far that, in essence, although there may be cultural and social values which relative to each society and philosophical and universal values which make us human, these are useless without a valuer. This is where John Locke’s “blank slate” [*tabula rasa*] theory regarding the human mind at birth, could hold some merit, as individuals learn everything that are good or bad from the environment and reality to which they are exposed to.

It has been indicated earlier that each individual is unique in his/her own way and, apart from possible internal inferences, has a level of control over what he/she believes or values, despite the culture that he/she may be brought up in. And, although culture can be seen as one source of human values, it falls short on how to control individual gravitations to these values as the ‘self’ plays a domineering role.

This line of argument does not, in any way, seek to imply that the ‘self’ can attain these values in isolation, or apart from human community. We have attempted to show that each individual needs to be taught the rudiments of existence even in society before the individual can become fully humanized. In this regard, it is expected that tertiary institutions will work with the positive values already inculcated in students by these other agents that key values are derived from, given the expected level of reflectivity that such young adults must necessarily engage. But this will have to be done with proper guidance to give balance and coherence to the thoughts and ideas that are generated in order that society may be the net beneficiary of the values embraced.

In the social arena, individuals are exposed to values that can either uplift or debilitate and destroy. Some individuals do not readily know how to make a distinction between both the positive, self and other affirming values and the negative, self and other destroying values. One could then see that the job of helping individuals to become humane rests on societies and institutions within societies to assist in this process.

The social and political spheres, already mentioned, are guided by political ideals, with the addition of some carefully selected educational ideals, as well as educational policies and practices, which, though being political, conduce to the overall interest of society.¹¹ Individuals, tertiary institutions and universities should be introduced to the values and practices of their own society as the objective realities that they would have to consciously interrogate and justify or reject, based on the reasons that they can elicit. It is with these shared values that the basis can be found to establish social, cultural, political, religious, spiritual and economic institutions with a common bond.

However, one might argue that the minimum framework for determining common values remain a very thin one, and that certainly this is not sufficient to support a common system of education as extensive as we have today [White, 1987, 16].¹² If common values are to be retained within universities around the Caribbean, for example, some way must be found of making the democratic framework of values more substantial. But, it may be asked, how is this to be done?

One possible starting point in preparing students to meet this changing world, especially at the onset of globalization, is to begin by treating each country differently; that is, by first addressing those values that are relevant for survival within that particular country. Thus, while it may be true, as suggested by Nettleford, that the Caribbean is one melting pot of shared ideas and ideals, one cannot help but to identify the major differences as well.

Globalization, for example, impacts on Jamaica in a different way than it would affect Barbados or Trinidad. In addressing the value needs of each country then, to face this demand for effective workers, each territorial tertiary institution and University will have to devise strategies that will be relevant to meet the peculiar needs of each territory, as the demand for additional survival values may be lesser or greater for each region.

One of the key components of globalization is that it should have a social dimension. That is, it should sustain human values and enhance the well-being of individuals, while striving to provide work for everyone in a particular society and satisfy all their basic needs. But this has not always happened; hence it could be argued that it is a new version of earlier forms of domination and exploitation. Values derived from the trend of globalization are not always positive, as in the age of globalization, countries and citizens alike have to adapt or seek to find survival values in order to remain in existence.

Survival values then are just often-times forced on individuals and the individuals should be psychologically equipped to choose the course of their actions rationally. In Jamaica, for example, there are so many students graduating from tertiary level institutions who are not able to get a job, whether within or outside their specialized field. This is due to the daunting fact that new jobs are not being created to meet the

¹¹ Hare, William & John Portelli. *Philosophy of Education Introductory Readings*. Canada: Detselig Enterprises Ltd. 1988, 117.

¹² Halstead, Mark J & Monica J. Taylor. *Values in Education and Education in Values*. London: Falmer Press, 1996, 7.

demands of graduates. There is vast unemployment and underemployment. This brings about frustration and a level of resentment to the system that has failed them.

The fact is that when humans are faced with the reality of surviving or dying, they are not going to think twice about using whatever means of survival is readily available to them at the time. It is not the opinion here that in making these decisions these individuals would or should overlook the values that they were taught during the stages of their lives. The suggestion here is that humans, by nature, tend to choose survival over death, even if certain moral values are sacrificed in the process.

One may ask: What value can we give in tertiary institutions and universities in an age like this, which is so complex and constantly in transition and in which there are many groups so uncertain of their own principles? The response is that society should devise and give a type of education that will first help students clarify these uncertainties and realize that the tertiary institutions and Universities are not seeking to change their core values, but are seeking to show how to adjust them to face these transitions.

Secondly, it is important that tertiary institutions are not regarded as just ones that will show them how these will not simply add to, but compliment the majors that they are pursuing. Tertiary institutions need to change their focus from being merely centres of teaching purely survival to ones that help people to appreciate reality better in the complex environment in which humans have to live today. Finally, tertiary education should strive to provide a type of value education that will help to develop the quality of life for all. This level of social development can only help with nation building and national development.

In this regard, it is probably indisputable that university students have been central to every progressive, social, economic and political movement in the Caribbean region. These students were historically harbingers of consciousness as they were, among other things, nation builders, decision makers and leaders, such that if they fail the nation fails as well.

Competing in this global arena is not and will not be an easy task. Tertiary level students need to have the 'know how', attitudinal dispositions and intellectual understanding necessary to compete successfully in the new global arena in which all of humanity are thrown by capitalist forces of the world. Tertiary institutions and their students alike are now faced with the challenges of developing the main resource [human resource] to meet these growing demands. The values that we live by should reflect us as a nation and as a people, and because of that, the values we embrace in education will enable individuals to meet these challenges.

In the final analysis, teachers, students, parents and the community at large can help students find themselves and function as valued and effective citizens, by affording them the kind of value clarification needed to achieve the goal of self realization, social integration and universal appreciation of the worth of our humanity. Thus, while it may be true that the students of today are confronted with more problems than students of the past, and although it might prove challenging to teach values in a fluid world interconnected by technologies which members of many societies hardly understand, tertiary education may be equipped and prepared to directly or indirectly

assist students in clarifying personal, social and political issues in a rational manner that benefit all human stakeholders in what is a joint venture of social interaction.

The conclusion that is very pressing is that tertiary educational institutions must take the leadership role in the development and propagation of the values that would assist societies in the upliftment of humanity in the contemporary world. The fact humanity has embraced tertiary education as the apex of instructional mechanisms and processes leave us no choice but to accept that 'it can be done, and it has to be done.'

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