

This World

SPRING/SUMMER 1983, NUMBER FIVE, FOUR DOLLARS

Foreign Policy and "The American Way"

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE POST-WORLD WAR II CONSENSUS

ALLAN C. CARLSON

The Market, Planning, Capitalism
and Democracy

Giovanni Sartori

Cosmos, Cosmologies, and the Public Schools

Richard A. Baer, Jr.

Who Put the Wrong in "Wrongful Births"?

Terry Eastland

REDISCOVERIES:

I. The Clergymen-Scholars of Economic Development

Salim Rashid

II. Ascona: "The Mountain of Truth"

Martin Green

Economics and the Canadian Bishops

A Symposium with James Finn, Hendrik S. Houhakker, Richard John Neuhaus, Paul Heyne, Margaret Laws, and Thomas Langan

THE BOOKSHELF

Review essays by Mark Lilla, Christopher Wolfe,
Mackubin T. Owens, Jr., John P. Hittinger, and
James Finn.

5

"Cosmos," Cosmologies, and the Public Schools

RICHARD A. BAER, JR.

GEORGE GALLUP has made a rather astonishing discovery, one with considerable significance for educational policy making in this country: Almost half of all Americans believe that God created man in his present form sometime within the past 10,000 years.

According to a *New York Times* report of August 29, 1982, 44 percent of the Americans polled—nearly a quarter of them college graduates—hold to the Genesis account of creation. Of the rest, 38 percent believe that although man has evolved from lower life forms, God directed that process. Only 9 percent believe in an evolution in which God had no part, and another 9 percent say they don't know.

The reaction to the Gallup results among some theologians has been one of genuine surprise: the newspaper quoted Bishop John S. Spong, the Episcopal bishop of Newark, as saying that no reputable biblical scholar takes the biblical account of creation literally. Surprising or not, however, Gallup's findings shed considerable light on why many public school parents are speaking out against the current way that evolution is taught in the public schools. If 82 percent of Americans believe that God has guided the origin and development of humankind—and if more than half of that 82 percent reject any kind of evolutionary process whatsoever—small wonder that many object to the teaching of evolution, especially when evolution is taught as the cornerstone of a religious-philosophical world view rather than as scientific theory and the conceptual basis of modern biology.

The concern of parents not only about evolution but, more widely, about the overall religious-philosophical underpinnings of elements in the public school curriculum has been scoffed at by many who deny that any particular perspective is a force in the public schools, much less a threat to the moral and religious values of America's schoolchildren. Yet one need not look far

for some quite convincing evidence of the legitimacy of these vocal parents' concerns.

Religious Dimensions of Carl Sagan's Cosmos

A case in point, one worth exploring in considerable detail, is Carl Sagan's public television series *Cosmos*. First aired in the fall of 1980—the year in which the bestselling book by the same title was published—the thirteen hour-long TV presentations of *Cosmos* were well received by the public. The shows became required viewing for many high school biology courses across the nation, both in 1980 and during a replay of the series in 1981.

Sagan presents much more than science to his television audience. He also shares his religious testimony, his witness to a strange and beautiful cosmos that for him is the ultimate reality. "The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be," he proclaims. "It is the universe that made us," he declares, and "we are creatures of the cosmos." Somehow, we are even morally indebted to the cosmos: "Our obligation to survive and flourish is owed, not just to ourselves, but also to that cosmos, ancient and vast, from which we spring."

If such declarations sound vaguely familiar, it is because Sagan presents to his viewers virtually all the key terms of the Judeo-Christian drama of creation and salvation. All that is missing is the element of worship and the services of the priest. But in a sense even these are present, for throughout the series we repeatedly see Sagan at the controls of his cathedral-like spaceship of the imagination, his face reflecting awe, wonder, and mystery. His voice is reverent, the background music worshipful.

The 17th century Westminster divines asserted that "the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." Sagan's claim is similar: "We are born to delight in the world," and our obligation to this world is to understand it and to survive. Throughout *Cosmos* Sagan goes far beyond the traditional descriptive and interpretive role of science. His presentation involves a host of metaphysical and value statements that are *not* a part of science as ordinarily understood and practiced. Sagan commits what philosopher Alfred North Whitehead termed "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness." He transforms a very fruitful method for understanding the world into an all-embracing metaphysic or world view. He takes science to be the only really significant mode for understanding reality.

The *Cosmos* package is appealing, to be sure—and that is a problem for public school parents who object to the values implicit in it. Why would anyone object to a series that brings science to life as effectively as *Cosmos* does? In many ways, the series is indeed extremely successful: The photography is interesting, at times outstanding. Sagan's obvious delight in the sub-

ject matter is contagious. Many of the specific bits of history and stories about individual scientists are superbly narrated, and it is fair to say that *Cosmos* as a whole catches the imagination and stretches the mind. The series is also sobering, especially when Sagan imagines what nuclear holocaust would be like, the destruction of life on planet Earth.

As television, *Cosmos* is indeed a success; nevertheless, it remains objectionable for classroom use in public high schools. The reason is that Sagan does not stop at presenting science in an interesting way; rather, throughout the series, he carries on an insidious assault against traditional religion, especially Christianity.

Most frequently (apart from a few references to Hinduism) Sagan conjoins religion and superstition. Science gives us reliable knowledge, he suggests, whereas religion is connected with fanaticism, narrowness of mind, and bigotry. With a mixture of glee and contempt, he describes in detail the oppression of Kepler, Galileo, Copernicus, and others by the Catholic Church. Kepler "lived in a time when the human spirit was fettered and the mind chained." The seminary at Maulbronn, where Kepler studied as a boy, Sagan describes as "a kind of theological boot camp, training Protestants in the use of the theological weaponry against the fortress of Roman Catholicism." "Suppression of ideas may be common in religion," Sagan reminds his viewers, but not so in science.

In contrast to a direct attack, which the viewer would quickly recognize for what it was, Sagan's many almost-incidentally comments about religion create a tone, a mood, a flavor. It is deprecatory expressions such as "a vast industry of priests," "abject surrender to mysticism," and "if we capitulate to superstition" that gradually affect the listener—and it is the insidious nature of Sagan's attack that makes the assignment of *Cosmos* for high school biology classes not merely objectionable, but an infringement of the student's First Amendment right not to be indoctrinated by the state in a particular religious position.

To continue the argument further, consider Sagan's treatment of the origin of the universe: He reminds his audience that in many cultures the customary answer is that a God or gods created the universe out of nothing. "But if we wish to pursue this question courageously," he asserts, "we must, of course, ask the next question: Where did God come from?" Evidently, Sagan is suggesting that theologians have not been courageous insofar as they have not addressed this question. But that would be a curious assertion, one that would reflect a substantial lack of understanding of how the term "God" functions, say, in Western Biblical religion. Within that framework, nothing is more ultimate than God, so the question has no meaning.

What Sagan apparently does not see is that theologians *have* thought about the question of the origin of the universe and about the question of ultimate

reality. *But most theologians have rightly understood that at some point thinking comes to rest upon certain assumptions or givens that are not themselves explainable.* This is true in logic, for instance in the necessity of accepting certain basic features of rationality, such as the principle of non-contradiction. It is also true in science, as in the assumption of a meaningful correspondence between the way the human mind functions and the processes of the external world.

Theologians have long recognized that at its deepest level life involves mystery, and that human beings will never fully fathom the reality of God. Human knowledge is always partial, or, to use St. Paul's expression, "we see through a glass darkly."

Throughout *Cosmos* Sagan presents his speculations about the origin of religion and belief in the gods (or God) as facts, with no discussion of alternative possibilities. He simply assumes that the gods (or God) is a human creation, a primitive attempt to explain natural phenomena that science later helped us to understand correctly.

Viewed in light of his own strong commitment to a form of nature mysticism, Sagan's unsympathetic treatment of Western religion becomes particularly noteworthy. From beginning to end of *Cosmos*, we see Sagan the admirer, the devotee, the worshipper—one who is not simply trying to understand nature scientifically and objectively. "Our ancestors worshipped the sun," we are told, "and they were far from foolish. It makes good sense to revere the sun and the stars, because we are their children."

In fact, Sagan's stance in *Cosmos* is thoroughly religious. It is simply that it is a *different* religion from that of Christianity or Judaism. It is fair to say that Sagan's attitude toward religion and mysticism throughout *Cosmos* is not that of the unbeliever. It is rather that of one committed to an alternative religion, indeed committed in such a way that he has little time sympathetically to understand rivals to his own position.

The Cosmos and Nature

In his last presentation, after recounting his dream about the destruction of the planet through thermonuclear war, Sagan suggests that science could have saved us, but we did not give it a fair chance. "We accepted the products of science," he tells us, "but we rejected its methods." But *how* science possibly could have saved us, Sagan does not indicate. Treating the world as value-free is a part of modern scientific method—a necessary and fruitful part. But how then does one move from this value-free world of science to the wider world of moral commitments and responsibilities? Here Sagan is silent.

Cosmos reflects the dilemma of much of modern culture. Sagan espouses a

kind of scientism and a radical split between facts and values (we can know facts, but values are a matter of subjective preference), but then proceeds to exhort us about values. He glorifies skepticism and doubt but fails to realize that in the practical world of everyday affairs human beings cannot survive (nor can science carry on as a discipline) without commitments to "values"—such as, for example, truth-telling.

Sagan appears to support cultural relativism when he tells us approvingly that "Einstein believed that every culture had its own validity," but then proceeds with scorn to belittle the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. He states that we inhabit "an insignificant planet on a humdrum star," but fails to point out that, if it is to have any meaning, this statement must presuppose the prior value claim that there is a direct positive correlation between significance (for humans) and bigness—a not altogether obvious truth.

Sagan's personal witness for philosophical materialism (cast within the framework of modern science) appears credible in part because of a fundamental ambiguity in his use of the term "cosmos." In actuality, the cosmos is not an empirically perceivable reality at all. No one has ever observed the cosmos, and in principle it is not possible to do so. This is because the meaning of the term "cosmos" closely parallels that of the term "world," which the theologian Gordon Kaufman noted, following Kant, is "a construct created by the human imagination as a heuristic device to make possible the ordering and relating of all our other concepts of objects and events."¹ It is directly analogous to similar terms (whether theistic or materialistic) that we find in virtually every known culture in their fundamental mythology, their view of "the nature of things." Rather than constituting one among many empirically observable objects, cosmos is the "backdrop" or "framework" within which particular empirical observations become fully meaningful.

In contrast to the terms "world" and "cosmos," however, the term "nature," which sometimes is used as a synonym for cosmos or world, can also refer to the observable phenomena of experience such as mountains, trees, or galaxies. In other words, as Kaufman points out, "nature is experienceable as well as conceivable; world is only a concept." It would sound strange to say that a tree or the process of evolution was "worldly." But to speak of them as "natural" seems quite appropriate. This is, Kaufman suggests, because nature is concrete in a way that world (or cosmos) is not.

In his opening statement, then, when Sagan proclaims that "the cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be" he apparently wants to affirm that *nature* "is all that is," and so forth. Otherwise, his actual statement is either

¹ See Gordon D. Kaufman, "A Problem for Theology: The Concept of Nature," *Harvard Theological Review*, Volume 65 (1972).

a definition or a tautology. ("All that is," and so forth, is all there is.) This semantic slippage between two fundamentally different meanings of the term "cosmos" (cosmos as world and cosmos as observable nature) is critical not just in a technical philosophical sense but also because *Cosmos* presents a strong statement of nature mysticism. As Kaufman maintains, nature as observable phenomenon(a) is often presented as the polar counterpart of culture. We contrast what is natural with what is unnatural or artificial. But precisely this Nature, either in its totality or in any number of its various manifestations and vitalities, can function as an object of worship, and thus as a direct competitor with God.

The problem becomes acute when we recall that nature as understood by modern science is radically different from the nature of the classical world. For instance, the Stoic philosophers could speak intelligibly of living *kata phusin*—that is, according to nature—because they viewed nature as possessing quality, meaning, and purpose. It was a teleological order that provided an appropriate context for man not just as a physical-chemical organism but also as a personal, purposive being. But nature as viewed by modern science is devoid of all quality, value, and purpose. A large part of the incredible success of modern science stems precisely from the paradoxical conclusion that the specific value of achieving understanding and power over nature (based on predictability) could best be achieved by treating the world as value-free. By eliminating value terms from the framework of discourse, by viewing nature simply as object, and as such manipulable at will for the achievement of specific human purposes, modern science was able to move steadily forward in its quest for understanding, predictability, and control.

But if this non-teleological, value-free nature of modern science is what we mean by nature, then it is very difficult to understand how human reality can adequately be comprehended in terms of it alone. How mind, purpose, freedom, and moral responsibility could arise from such a mechanistic, value-free nature is at least as difficult to imagine as how the human self or the God of theism relates to observable nature. Or, if man is fully a part of nature, what possible justification could exist for referring to specific human actions as unnatural or to human creations as artificial (as opposed to natural)? Or, again, how do we explain that peculiarity in man (noted by Hegel) which makes it possible for him to become self-reflexive, capable of experiencing himself as subject and object simultaneously? As Kaufman notes, "the complexities of the concept of the self simply cannot be subsumed under 'nature' without giving nature at least as much (self-reflexive) complexity as a self."

In pointing this out, I am not suggesting that theism does not also encounter problems in describing how the world of nature and the self are re-

lated. The language we use to speak about God, which is primarily personal within the Judeo-Christian tradition, facilitates discussion of how the self can be free, act intentionally, and exercise moral responsibility. But Jewish and Christian theologians must struggle to give convincing explanations of how God and the self are related to nature. My point is rather that these are complex and difficult issues. They may never be intellectually resolved in a fully satisfactory way, just as we may never be able to understand fully certain micro and macro aspects of nature.

Thus I do not fault Sagan for not dealing with these issues in a systematic fashion. But to reflect virtually no awareness that such problems even exist is a serious shortcoming of *Cosmos*, one that leads to specific misleading and confusing statements, such as the opening sentence of the series. As I have already suggested, this initial declaration is far closer to proclaiming a new dogma than to providing a scientific explanation.

Implications for Public School Policy

Many parents of school children react with less than enthusiasm when material such as Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* is assigned in high school science courses. What arguments can they muster in defense of their views? More importantly, how should public school policy—even governmental policy—treat this sensitive area? I would suggest five specific conclusions relevant to the ongoing debate over how science and religion should be dealt with in the public schools.

1. *Any science films, texts, or curricula that attack traditional religion and/or support new "religious" positions of their own, should not be used for science education in public, tax-supported schools.* Indeed, to do so is to violate the doctrine of separation of church and state, and seriously to jeopardize First Amendment rights of students and, indirectly, their families.

This point is particularly critical insofar as children in public school in important respects constitute a captive audience. The rich have the option of private schools. But except for those parents who are willing to make heroic sacrifices for their children's education, at the same time paying both tuition fees for private schools and taxes to support public schools, most parents have little realistic choice but to accept the fact of the state's monopoly in education. The public schools constitute the only reasonable option open to them. This makes it all the more critical that school authorities (including teachers) not exploit the state's monopoly position to engage in sectarian religious or anti-religious indoctrination.

Though in quantitative terms *Cosmos* easily qualifies as a science series, in its fundamental assumptions and overall tone it is religious throughout. As a straightforward, not-at-all subtle apology for secular materialism, it presents a

position that stands in direct competition with and contradiction to the basic Judeo-Christian commitments of a large part of our society. To offer *Cosmos* and similar material immunity from ordinary church-state separation doctrine is to act arbitrarily and in a socially divisive manner. The public schools are not the proper place for evangelism, even when it is as attractively packaged as is Sagan's *Cosmos*.

The use of *Cosmos* in public school science education would present problems similar to those that arose in the middle 1960's with the development of the social science curriculum "Man: A Course of Study" (MACOS). This material was developed by nationally known scholars through grants from the National Science Foundation, which in turn is funded with federal tax dollars. MACOS was reported to have cost in excess of \$7 million for development and marketing. In its attempt to answer the question "What is human about human beings?," the curriculum, designed for fifth and sixth graders, focuses on the study of salmon, herring gulls, baboons, and the Netsilik, a group of Eskimos known for infanticide, adultery, and turning old people out to die. These practices are portrayed as understandable and natural responses to the total physical and social environment.

Critics rightly pointed out that this material was thoroughly tendentious in its attempt to push on young school children a form of cultural relativism and environmental determinism. Project director Peter B. Dow stated as the curriculum's second major objective: "We hope that through this course children will come to understand that what we regard as acceptable behavior is a product of our culture." Describing the effects of the curriculum, he commented: "For one thing, it questions the notion that there are 'eternal truths' about humanity that must be passed down from one generation to the next."

Such views, of course, are offensive to many Christians and others, and it is hard to see how such obviously biased material could justifiably be used in public school education. It is indeed significant that, although nearly 2,000 schools in 47 states at one time used the curriculum, only one state, California, appears to have put MACOS on its approved textbook list.

2. *My analysis of Cosmos suggests that public schools should pay more attention to how evolution is taught. In short, it should be taught as science, not as religion.* Creationism has no legitimate place in the public school science curriculum, for it does not qualify as bona fide science. But equally clear, when evolution is presented in ways similar to the way it is handled in *Cosmos*, it too, strictly speaking, does not qualify as legitimate science. It rather must be seen as a curious blend of science, philosophy, and religion.

When one looks at the world as a scientist, the theory of evolution appears far and away the best explanation of the data at our disposal. I believe it is a convincing theory, at least in its broad outlines. From a scientific perspec-

tive I also recognize the importance, indeed the necessity, of emphasizing the random and nonteleological quality of mutations in their impact on the evolutionary process: The refusal of scientists to deal with questions of ultimate purpose and value has contributed strongly to the technical success of modern science.

And yet, as the Gallup findings indicate, millions of thoughtful people see evolution as the natural mechanism of the Genesis story. And from a religious perspective they accept the Genesis creation narratives as a profoundly true account of human beings in relationship to God, the world, and other human beings. Scientifically, they would agree with Sagan about the key place of evolutionary theory in modern biology. But religiously, they would also affirm that in some more basic sense the process of evolution itself is enfolded within the more ultimate context of a creator God of love and mercy, purpose and meaning.

Does this latter conviction make such believing Christians and Jews less "scientific" than Sagan? Hardly. It only means that they are not philosophical materialists but rather theists—as have been many great scientists, both past and present.

Listening to Parents

(3) *School authorities should listen more carefully to the objections of those who claim that public schools often undermine the religious and moral teachings of the home.*

Besides the examples of *Cosmos* and MACOS, another case in point, one taken from a nonscience area of the curriculum, is the use of the method known as values clarification. Developed in the middle 1960's by social scientists Louis E. Rath, Merrill Harmin, and Sidney B. Simon, it was advertised as a way of dealing with values in the public schools without advocating particular ethical positions. At first, values clarification drew little attention from parents. But when children began reporting over dinner that class discussion that day had centered on whether lying was permissible in some instance or whether children should always obey their parents, parents began to take note. And when values clarification began to be used in sex education curricula to deal with the pros and cons of premarital sex, abortion, and homosexuality, many parents began to object. Groups of concerned parents pointed out that the method in actuality was indoctrinating their children in subjectivism and radical ethical relativism, particularly because it held that all values were "personal" and tended to equate values with individual tastes and preferences. These parents also argued that values clarification invaded their children's (and their own) right to privacy and that, insofar as it fostered a particular set of moral/ethical perspectives of man,

society, and the good life, it was indoctrinating their children in a particular world view that directly contradicted and competed with their own religious beliefs.

What has been most embarrassing for the proponents of values clarification is that over the past seven to ten years a body of scholarly literature has been published in first-rate professional journals that largely substantiates the soundness of the concerned parents' original objections.²

The shift in public schools away from a basically theistic framework (mainly Protestant-Unitarian) to humanism has been well documented. Traditionally, both public and private schools in America were thoroughly religious in orientation. "Christian" values and beliefs pervaded elementary and secondary education. As recently as the immediate post-World War II period, Bible readings and prayers were common in public schools.

Textbooks, however, have changed drastically, not just since the time of McGuffey's readers, but even over the past few decades. References to God and traditional religious values have become less and less common, and those that remain often are pejorative in nature. Many educators believe that all of these changes have brought the schools closer to a position of religious neutrality, thus more in line with what they see as the intent of the First Amendment. Yet a glance at the writings of the most prominent proponents of this mode of education raises serious doubts.

John Dewey, to take one of the most prominent and influential humanists of modern times, concluded *A Common Faith* with the following statement:

Here are all the elements for a religious faith that shall not be confined to sect, class, or race. Such a faith has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind. It remains to make it explicit and militant.

Likewise, Corliss Lamont, who signed both the 1933 and 1973 Humanist Manifestos, argued that humanism has many similarities with religion, among which is the fact that it is "an integrated and inclusive way of life" and "a

² See especially William J. Bennett and Edwin J. Delattre, "Moral Education in the Schools," *The Public Interest* 50 (Winter 1978) 81-98; Bennett and Delattre, "Where the Values Movement Goes Wrong," *Change* 11 (1979) no. 1, 38-43; Alan L. Lockwood, "A Critical View of Values Clarification," *Teachers College Record* 77 (1975) no. 1, 35-53; Lockwood, "Values Education and the Right to Privacy," *Journal of Moral Education* 7 (October 1977) no. 1, 9-26; Lockwood, "The Effects of Values Clarification and Moral Development Curricula on School-Age Subjects: A Critical Review of Recent Research," *Review of Educational Research* 48 (1978) no. 3, 325-364; Kenneth A. Strike, *Education Policy and the Just Society*, chap. 6, "Moral and Value Education," Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1982, pp. 109-127; and my own "Values Clarification as Indoctrination," *The Educational Forum*, XLI (January 1977) no. 2, 155-165, and, "Teaching Values in the Schools: Clarification or Indoctrination?," *Principal* 61 (January 1982) no. 3, 17-21, 36.

supreme commitment." Apparently thinking along the same line as Dewey and Lamont, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Torcaso v. Watkins* in 1961 referred to "those religions based on a belief in the existence of God as against those religions founded on different beliefs" and, in a clarifying footnote, includes "Secular Humanism" in the latter category.

The point is this: *Education never takes place in a moral and philosophical vacuum*. If the larger questions about human beings and their destiny are not being asked and answered within a predominantly Judeo-Christian framework, they will be addressed within another philosophical or religious framework—but hardly one that is "neutral." The arrogance and philosophical implausibility of secular humanism are demonstrated by the insistence of many humanists that their position possesses such neutrality, lack of dogma, and essential rationality. It is an arrogance that also quickly becomes coercive and imperialistic, as is clearly seen in the widespread opposition among such educators towards genuine choice in education, for instance, the kind of choice that would be possible through a system of education tuition vouchers.

4. *School administrators and other professional educators should realize that conflict regarding the place of science, religion, and values in public school education today has complex roots, and thus should not simply be blamed on conservative Catholics and Protestant fundamentalists and their demands for change.* Opposition to religion in America's public schools was originally mainly opposition, not to religion as such, but to the "wrong" kind of religion. Between 1800 and 1810, Baptist schools in New York City lost public tax support not because they were religious but because they were Baptist. The Free School Society, which later changed its name to the Public School Society, convinced the New York State legislature that the religion of the Baptists was "sectarian," whereas its own mainly Protestant-Unitarian religious instruction was "non-sectarian." Likewise, in the 1830's and 1840's Catholic schools in New York City were excluded from sharing in public funds on very much the same basis, but by this time the sectarian/nonsectarian argument was gradually being replaced by the religious/secular distinction that has dominated the discussion since that time. As Roman Catholic Bishop John Hughes pointed out in 1840, the New York Public School Society in 1827 had stated as one of its goals the "early religious instruction" of children. Of course, Hughes recognized the obvious anti-Catholic bias in such instruction and argued that different groups of Christians would inevitably differ about what were the "essentials of religion." But he also believed that even if it were possible to rid education of religion altogether, this would only leave students "to the advantage of infidelity."

In 1841, New York Secretary of State John C. Spencer, in his role as ex-officio superintendent of public schools, clearly recognized the injustice

that had been perpetrated against Roman Catholics and insisted that

even the moderate degree of religious instruction which the Public School Society imparts, must therefore be sectarian; that is, it must favor one set of opinions in opposition to another, or others; and it is believed that this always will be the result, in any course of education that the wit of man can devise.

But Spencer also understood back in 1841 something that many professional educators do not yet understand today, namely that abolishing all religious instruction would not get rid of sectarianism: "On the contrary, it would itself be sectarian; because it would be consonant to the views of a peculiar class and opposed to the opinions of other classes."

Two things changed significantly in the period following World War II. On the one hand, the values of Dewey and his descendants became increasingly prominent in public school curricula. Many educators seemed quite unaware of the "religious" nature of these values and of how deeply they affected what and how they taught. Values clarification is a good case in point. To assume that the views of human nature and society presupposed by this method are not religious because they do not mention God or prayer or worship is to limit the meaning of the word "religious" too severely. To say, as values clarification does, for instance, that the individual self is the arbiter of all values and that the goal of life is self-fulfillment or self-actualization, is to take a stand on what are essentially *religious* matters, at the very least in the views of many public school children and their parents.

On the other hand, the post-World War II period witnessed the increasing intervention in the public schools of individuals such as atheist Madelyn Murray O'Hair and groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union. One "side" in the uneasy compromise that had prevailed for decades began to press for total victory. With a crusading fervor that most closely resembled that of some of their more extreme fundamentalist opponents, these defenders of the public interest wanted to purify the schools of *all* religious practices. To borrow an expression social historian Victor Ferkiss originally used in a quite different context, the A.C.L.U. demonstrated an "overarching impatience with the messiness of ordinary human life." Although they maintained some openness to the "objective" study of religion in the schools, they at the same time pressed for the complete exclusion of all religious expression, often taking their animus to quite preposterous lengths. But they failed to see what Hughes and Spencer had so clearly understood: Ridding the schools of all expressions of religious commitment would leave the students "to the advantage of infidelity." On religious or moral questions, one cannot teach "nothing," for to do so is rather to teach the lesson that nothing matters.

The Need for Reform

5. *Americans concerned about genuine freedom in teaching and learning should explore alternatives to our current state-monopoly public education system, a system in which only the rich can afford to exercise genuine educational choice.* As public servants supported by tax dollars, faculty in state schools of education have a special responsibility to encourage open and fair discussion of alternatives to the current state monopoly pattern in education.

Unfortunately, responses to date by the public school establishment to proposals for tax credits and tuition vouchers seem to reflect far more a concern for maintaining power, jobs, and ideological control of the public schools than a genuine commitment to the welfare of students and respect for parents' legitimate interests in their children's educations.

Those educators and others genuinely concerned about religious neutrality in public schools should note that nations such as Holland and Canada—in which state funds are available for religious as well as public schools—demonstrate far more neutrality regarding religion and education than does the United States. Those seriously interested in religious pluralism should consider that in societies where religious expression is suspect, as in the Soviet Union, religious groups such as Baptists and Jews consider the survival of their traditions to be highly uncertain *unless they can take a major role in educating their own children.* They know that traditions do not survive without institutional support.

Similarly, American pluralism will either survive as *structural* pluralism or it likely will not survive at all. And, as is true of every society, one of our key structures is the schoolhouse. To deny citizens the right (including the financial capability to exercise the right) to educate their children in schools of their own choosing is to erode seriously what is perhaps the most important single support of genuine American pluralism.

Commonplace Book

Where complexities do not exist, modern literary criticism will manufacture them, as the body makes its own cholesterol.

John Wain, "Dear George Orwell"
The American Scholar, Winter 1982/83
