



Moral decline

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Nowadays, there is widespread belief that contemporary civilization is in decline. First, there is environmental decline, destroying the environment, threatening future generations, and extinguishing biodiversity and all forms of life. Second, intellectual decline has transformed science and technology into a major threat to humanity itself. Political and economic decline is a third challenge. The new capitalism since the 1970s, though extremely productive, has destructive political, psychological and environmental impacts (Bennett 2001). Most important, however, is moral decline. It is shown in narratives and actions that would not have been acceptable some time ago. What about a presidential candidate openly making fun of a disabled journalist? What about politicians arguing that fake stories are not reprehensible, and that lying is not wrong? Practices as torture or separating children from parents have been regarded as barbaric since a long time, and how can people seriously justify them today? The sense that present culture is no longer motivated or even interested in ethics is perhaps most evident in regard to human rights. The United States once regarded itself as the champion of human rights. It criticized many countries for their deplorable human rights record. Now it has withdrawn from the Human Rights Council. Human rights have become a dirty word and a fake endeavor. It is only important if it guarantees a reliable and peaceful climate for doing business or going on holiday and ensures safety to travel. This narcissistic attitude shows precisely that human rights discourse is not a discourse for the powerful; they don't need it, they denigrate and reject it. But today, protest is low. Many believe that the rights of some citizens are stronger than those of others.

What is the impact of moral decline (and not everyone shares this cultural pessimism) on ethics education? In this issue, Howard Harris examines the challenges of ethics teaching in connection to three phenomena: pluralism, secularism, and anti-business sentiment (Harris 2018). He argues that these phenomena have created uncertainty and have fractured traditional patterns and methods. However, in teaching ethics they are still approached with traditional ideas and theories. He advocated for new approaches. Ethics teaching should be transformative by taking fractures seriously. Marion Ben-Jacob and colleagues (Ben-Jacob et al. 2018) suggest another approach in

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their contribution. They correctly observe that many educational efforts, especially in research ethics, may take a negative perspective. They emphasize the potential risks and harms of research and suggest that education first of all is necessary to prevent potential damage. This is usually done by learning from horror stories, negative examples and cases. The authors argue that this gives a distorted view of research ethics. Teaching ethics should have a more positive focus. Ethical behavior of research is not the result of trying to avoid scandals. Virtues like integrity are the consequence of collaboration and collegiality.

References

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