When Ethics Become More Valuable Than Academic Degrees

An analytical essay on education, upbringing and values, and on a labour market that rewards the credential but needs the person

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Abstract

This article asks a question that recurs in homes, schools and hiring rooms: why does a certificate so often seem worth more than the character of the person who holds it? It begins by separating three concepts that are routinely confused: education, upbringing and human values. It then draws on economics and sociology to explain why labour markets and public opinion favour a written qualification over behaviour that is hard to measure. Next it reviews empirical studies on the link between professional conduct and outcomes, stating the limits of each. It then takes a clear position: restoring the standing of upbringing and values does not belittle science, but it does mean that ethics must not be left outside the scale on which decisions are made. It closes by setting out what falls on the individual and what falls on institutions and society. The article is an analytical work based on published sources. It is not a field study.

Keywords: education, upbringing, values, certificates, labour market, trust, professional ethics, moral education.

1. A scene from the interview room

Imagine a hiring committee choosing between two candidates for a senior post in a public body. The first holds a higher degree from a respected university and an outstanding academic record. The second has a degree one level lower, but his two referees describe him as someone who admits his mistakes, keeps his promises and does not flatter his superior. The committee closes the second file and chooses the first. Its members do not take honesty lightly; asked, they

would all agree it matters. The reason is that a certificate can be read in seconds and is backed by a stamp, while honesty needs time, witnesses and context, and today's decision cannot wait.

This is a hypothetical scene, but it condenses what happens in many forms every day. The article accuses no one of bad faith. Its point is that the order of priorities in modern societies leans towards what can be counted, stamped and filed, and that what cannot be counted loses ground in decisions even when everyone acknowledges its value.

The author's position can be put in three sentences. First, a certificate is useful evidence of knowledge acquired, and knowledge is indispensable. Second, a certificate says nothing about how that knowledge will be used when it collides with self-interest. Third, a society that rewards the first kind of evidence and neglects the second pays later, in eroded trust, swollen oversight and talent used in the wrong place.

This thesis does not claim that ethics alone is enough, nor that holders of certificates are less ethical than others. The comparison proposed here is not between the educated and the ignorant. It is between a system that measures what is easy to measure and forgets what matters more at the real moments of testing.

2. Three concepts, not one

The first source of the problem is that we use similar words for different things. We say "learned" and mean "well brought up"; we say "cultured" and mean "of good character"; then we are surprised when the two do not go together. It helps to separate three concepts before asking which should rank higher.

Education is the transfer of knowledge and skills: reading, arithmetic, medicine, engineering, law. It is usually measured by tests and grades and documented by certificates. It can be learned at any age and lends itself to direct teaching. Educational philosophers have long held that education has functions beyond attainment. Gert Biesta (2009) distinguishes, in good education, between qualification (equipping learners with knowledge and skills), socialisation (introducing them into the traditions and values of a society) and subjectification (helping them become independent, responsible agents). He warns that the dominance of measurement in education policy pushes systems to settle for the first function because it is the easiest to measure, so the others are forgotten.

Upbringing is the building of character and the shaping of behaviour through habit, example and practice. The oldest account that has reached us is Aristotle's in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: the moral virtues are acquired by habituation before they are grasped by reason, so we become

just by doing just acts and brave by doing brave ones. The Islamic tradition says the same. Al-Ghazali, in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, treats the discipline of the soul and the refinement of character as a craft requiring effort and repetition. Miskawayh, in *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*, sees character as a state of the soul that moves a person to his acts without deliberation, which means that successful upbringing produces behaviour that comes from the person spontaneously. Ibn Sahnun, in *Adab al-Mu'allimin*, wrote that the teacher must attend to children's conduct and manners, not their memorisation alone, which shows that the separation of knowledge from conduct was present in the minds of Muslim educators from the early centuries.

Human values are principles that govern conscience and our relations with others: truthfulness, justice, mercy, trustworthiness and respect for dignity. They are not only a skill to be mastered or a habit to be acquired. They are the reference by which we judge skills and habits. A skill can be used for good or for harm; a value determines the direction. Sources far apart in outlook agree on this. Kant, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), holds that a human being is an end in himself and never merely a means. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states in Article 1 that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, are endowed with reason and conscience, and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Article 26 says that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to strengthening respect for human rights. The international text itself does not accept a definition of education as the transfer of information alone.

The table below summarises the distinctions used in the rest of the article.

Point of comparison	Education	Upbringing	Values
What is transmitted	Knowledge and skills	Habits and behaviour	Principles and standards of judgement
Main means	Teaching and training	Example, repetition, shared life	Conviction, reflection, self-accounting
How it is verified	Exam and certificate	Long observation in varied situations	Tests where interest conflicts with principle
First responsible body	School and university	Family, then school and society	Family, religion, culture and individual conscience

Point of comparison	Education	Upbringing	Values
Ease of measurement	High	Medium to low	Low

When these domains are mixed up, three recurring faults appear. The first is that the home assumes the school takes care of upbringing while the school assumes the home has done it, so the child falls between two assumptions. The second is that society judges schools and universities by test results alone, because they are the visible outputs, so the institution follows what it is held accountable for. The third is that the individual may think that obtaining the certificate has finished the task of building himself, so he stops at education and believes he is complete.

An important qualification is needed here: the distinction among the three concepts is analytical, not a separation in reality. A teacher who explains a mathematical problem and treats pupils with respect practises education and upbringing at the same time; an institution that announces its values and rewards those who violate them is bringing up its members in the opposite direction to what it says. What matters is knowing, in each situation, which door we are closing and which we are opening.

Roots of the idea in our heritage and in educational thought

The separation of knowledge from manners is not an imported idea. In classical usage the word *adab* combined good conduct and refinement of temperament with breadth of learning. In al-Ghazali's *Ihya'*, within the Book of Knowledge, there are chapters on the manners of the learner and the teacher and their responsibilities, and an explicit warning against seeking knowledge for boasting, rivalry and prestige. For al-Ghazali, knowledge that does not refine its owner may become evidence against him. This is an old observation of what sociologists now say about the certificate turning into status.

In modern educational thought, John Dewey (1916), in *Democracy and Education*, sees the school as preparing the child for shared life, and holds that social values are not taught apart from the school's daily life but lived within it, so that the school becomes a small community in which generations practise cooperation and responsibility. This is close to the hidden curriculum discussed below. The UNESCO report chaired by Jacques Delors (1996), *Learning:*

The Treasure Within, built education on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. The last two bear directly on upbringing and values. That nearly three decades have passed without these two pillars becoming an actual yardstick for assessing education systems expresses the very problem discussed here.

Robert Sternberg (1998), in his balance theory of wisdom, adds a useful element. Wisdom for him is not higher intelligence; it is the use of knowledge, especially tacit knowledge gained through experience, to achieve the common good by balancing one's own interests, those of others and those of society. Wisdom in this sense is a bridge between education and values, and it is what we miss when we meet a person of wide knowledge who cannot see the consequences of his action for others.

3. Why does the certificate win?

The certificate is not an arbitrary phenomenon; it has a logic that explains its strength. Understanding that logic is a precondition for any serious reform proposal, because whoever ignores it becomes a preacher who changes nothing.

The certificate is an indicator that is easy to verify

In his model of signalling in the labour market, the economist Michael Spence (1973) offers a simple explanation: the employer does not know an applicant's productivity before hiring, so he looks for an observable signal that costs the less able more than the more able. The certificate plays this role because it indicates, at least in part, ability and perseverance. This explains why a certificate may be demanded even when it adds nothing directly to job skills. Gary Becker (1964) looks at education as human capital in which the individual invests and so raises his income, a framework that explains why families and states spend on education. But it measures return by skills that can be priced, and that leaves character outside the calculation.

The certificate between knowledge value and social standing

The sociologist Randall Collins (1979), in *The Credential Society*, argues that certificates inflate because they have become a means of distributing status among groups, and that demand for academic qualifications expands through competition for jobs, not necessarily because work has become more complex. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) adds that the academic qualification is a form of

"cultural capital" that converts into social standing and economic opportunity. If these readings are right, the certificate performs two functions at once: it is evidence of knowledge and it is also an entry ticket to status, and the second may outweigh the first.

Ethics is hard to prove

Moral character does not appear in a document and is not tested in an hour-long exam. It is revealed in situations where interest conflicts with principle, and such situations are rare and cannot be summoned in an interview. Add time pressure and the cost of a hiring error, and it is natural that committees turn to what they can defend before their superiors: a documented file and an accredited certificate. Someone who chooses a candidate of evident good character but without the required qualification may be questioned; someone who chooses a qualified candidate who later fails usually is not, because he followed the procedure.

The certificate protects against favouritism

Here is a point that sermons overlook: the certificate has a fair function. If we abolish the written criterion and leave judgement to impressions of "character", we open the door to patronage, since any manager can describe his relative as trustworthy and his rival as ill-mannered. The certificate, for all its flaws, sets a minimum that someone without connections can reach through effort. So reform should not mean reducing the weight of certificates. It should mean adding reliable measures of conduct alongside them, and rules that stop moral judgement becoming a weapon in the hands of whoever holds the decision.

The hidden curriculum: what systems teach in silence

Philip Jackson (1968), in *Life in Classrooms*, described what he called the "hidden curriculum", that is, what pupils learn from the classroom system itself: waiting, pleasing the teacher, reading what is rewarded, before they learn what is written on the board. If the system rewards the result and does not ask about the path, the student learns that the path does not matter. Then we expect him, at graduation, to be trustworthy.

When the grade becomes the goal

Self-determination theory, by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2000), offers a psychological frame for this slide. They distinguish between intrinsic motivation, arising from a person's interest in the activity and conviction about it, and motivation driven by external rewards and pressures, and they hold that the source of motivation affects the quality of engagement,

persistence and well-being. Applied to our subject with caution, a student who learns because a grade is demanded relates to knowledge differently from one who learns because he wants to understand, and an employee who obeys rules out of fear of penalty differs from one who obeys because he believes in them. The difference shows where no one is watching. This is an applied inference from a theoretical framework, not the result of a direct study of ethics and certificates.

There is also a social clue that the paper may be sought for its own sake: the existence of a market for forged certificates and fake universities in many countries. If the goal were knowledge, buying the paper would be meaningless; only someone who sees its value in the social recognition it brings would buy it. We have no documented figures for this phenomenon in our own countries, so we cite none, but its mere existence is enough to show that some people separate the certificate from its content.

So we arrive at what may be called the paradox of the scale: we say ethics matters most, and we distribute rewards to other things. A society that wants character needs to change what it rewards, not what it says.

4. What does the evidence say?

Before going further we need to ask whether there is evidence that ethical and professional conduct affects outcomes enough to be weighed beside the certificate. Below are the main published studies we found, with, for each, what it shows and what it does not.

Medicine: conduct at university foreshadows what follows graduation

Maxine Papadakis and colleagues (2005) published a case-control study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. They compared 235 graduates of three medical schools who were disciplined by a US state medical board between 1990 and 2003 with 469 controls. Disciplinary action was strongly associated with documented unprofessional behaviour during training: the odds ratio was 3.0 (95% confidence interval 1.9 to 4.8), and the authors estimated that about 26 per cent of disciplinary cases in the population could be attributed to such warning signs. The kinds of behaviour most strongly linked to discipline were severe irresponsibility and a diminished capacity for self-improvement.

In fairness it must be said that the study also found an association between disciplinary action and lower scores on the medical admissions test and poorer grades in the first two years, so it cannot be read as belittling attainment. It is a retrospective study comparing existing cases with controls, and the rate of disciplinary action among US physicians is low to begin with, so one cannot conclude that every student with an unprofessional record will be disciplined later. The lead author stressed this caution herself. The conclusion the study allows is that professional behaviour during training is a risk indicator that deserves to be taken seriously, and that it is added to grades, not substituted for them.

Communication with patients: a skill close to character

In a Canadian study in *JAMA*, Robyn Tamblyn and colleagues (2007) followed 3,424 physicians who took the national clinical skills examination between 1993 and 1996, and tracked complaints filed against them with regulatory authorities until 2005. Patients filed 1,116 complaints, of which 696 were retained after investigation. Lower scores in patient-physician communication were associated with a higher rate of retained complaints, especially complaints concerning communication and quality of care.

A caveat applies here too: communication with the patient is not a synonym for ethics. It is a skill close to it, tied to respect, listening and honesty in explanation, but it remains a performance measured in an examination, and someone may master it without firm values. What the study says precisely is that part of "what concerns the human being" in professional practice can be measured and predicted, and that neglecting it costs patients and institutions.

Employers say what they need

Wendy Cunningham and Paula Villaseñor (2014), in a World Bank working paper, reviewed 28 survey-based studies of the skills employers demand in different countries (the peer-reviewed version published in 2016 in the *World Bank Research Observer* says 27 studies, so we treat the proportions as approximate). They found marked consistency across countries and sectors: employers gave priority to socio-emotional and higher-order cognitive skills over basic cognitive and technical skills. Of the top five skills employers named, about 51 per cent were socio-emotional, about 29 per cent higher-order cognitive, about 16 per cent technical and about 4 per cent basic cognitive. It is worth noting that technical skills remained the most pressing single gap when each skill is looked at alone.

The caveats are clear and were stated by the authors themselves: these are stated preferences, not actual hiring behaviour; the answers are qualitative; the sample is not representative of the

world; and only seventeen studies entered the ranking analysis. Moreover, "socio-emotional skills" include perseverance, cooperation and discipline and are not the ethical values as such. So the evidence is that employers themselves do not say a certificate is enough; it is not that they ask for honesty specifically.

The labour market rewards social skills

David Deming (2017), in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, showed that jobs requiring intensive social skills have grown in the US labour market since the 1980s and that the return to these skills has risen, explaining this by the fact that coordination among people and teamwork are tasks that machines find hard. James Heckman and Tim Kautz (2012), in "Hard Evidence on Soft Skills", argue that achievement tests alone miss personality traits such as perseverance and discipline that predict life outcomes, and that these traits can be shaped by educational programmes.

On the other side, "soft skills" are not "ethics". A person may have high social skill and use it to manipulate others, which exposes the difference between skill and value with which we began. So we use these studies to show that the labour market does not in fact rely on the certificate alone and that what goes beyond it has real weight. We do not use them to prove that character in itself raises income.

Integrity in personnel selection

In personnel selection psychology, Frank Schmidt and John Hunter (1998) summarised decades of meta-analytic studies and found that integrity tests, when added to a test of general mental ability, gave the highest predictive validity for job performance among the combinations they examined, with a mean validity of 0.65. However, Paul Sackett and colleagues (2022) re-examined these estimates in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and found that the range-restriction corrections used in earlier meta-analyses overstated validity, with means falling by between 0.10 and 0.20, while most of the procedures that ranked high still ranked high. We therefore cite the result as a direction, not a figure: measuring integrity added to mental ability, and the size of the addition is smaller than the original study estimated. In fairness, too, an integrity test is a written instrument that can be answered to please its administrator, so it does not replace verification of actual behaviour.

Social and emotional skills internationally

In its international Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (OECD, 2024), the OECD offers the largest comparative effort in this field, among students aged ten and fifteen. Its second round in 2023 included sites in several countries, among them Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. The skills measured include persistence, responsibility, self-control, empathy, trust, curiosity and tolerance, among others. The report found that these skills are linked to better life outcomes, including academic success, life satisfaction and healthier behaviours, and that they are unequally distributed among students by age, gender and socio-economic background. In two sites whose data were compared between 2019 and 2023, Helsinki and Bogotá, levels of most skills declined. These skills, as the report itself notes, develop across several social contexts and not in school alone, and their value and forms of expression differ among cultures. They are not necessarily ethical values: empathy and trust come close to character, but perseverance can serve good or ill. Their importance is that some education systems have begun to measure what was thought to resist measurement.

What do we conclude?

These studies meet at one point and differ in everything else. The shared point is that grades and qualifications do not exhaust what predicts a professional's conduct and results. The differences lie in the traits measured, the contexts and the methodology, so they cannot be combined into one figure, and it cannot be claimed that they prove ethics is "more expensive" than the certificate in any financial measure. What they show is that neglecting the behavioural dimension in assessment is a decision with a cost, and that this cost is documented in several fields.

5. Trust and what example does

What do we trust when we trust?

The model of Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) is among the best-known writing on trust in organisations. They define trust as one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another's actions, based on the expectation that the other will perform what matters to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor. They identify three factors that raise a party's trustworthiness: ability, benevolence and integrity. What matters for us in this division is that

the certificate mostly indicates the first, ability, while the other two concern character: does this person care for my interest even if not compelled to? Does he hold to principles I accept?

This explains why a skilful but dishonest doctor seems frightening, and why a brilliant accountant who manipulates figures is more dangerous than a mediocre one. Competence amplifies the effect of intention, whether good or bad. Every power we give to a competent person magnifies the effect of his values, so values become the first guarantee of safety.

Ethical leadership

Michael Brown, Linda Treviño and David Harrison (2005) studied what they called ethical leadership, defined as demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and relationships and encouraging followers to do likewise. They tied it to the social learning theory of Albert Bandura (1977), which holds that people learn behaviour by watching models they respect and seeing the outcomes of their actions. Their study showed ethical leadership associated with a number of indicators of trust, satisfaction and employees' willingness to report problems. That means example is not rhetorical decoration; it is the mechanism by which values travel inside institutions. A manager who demands integrity and rewards the violator teaches his staff the opposite of what he says.

When facts speak

Volkswagen is a case often discussed in the literature and the press. On 18 September 2015 the US Environmental Protection Agency issued a notice of violation to the company, which then admitted that it had equipped diesel cars with devices that cheat emissions tests. The people working on such projects are qualified professionals, and this does not mean their qualifications caused the deviation. It means the qualification was not a barrier, and that published texts do not replace a culture that rewards honesty when honesty is costly.

Bandura (1999), in his work on "moral disengagement", describes how people switch off their self-regulation by familiar psychological means: giving the harmful act a softer name, shifting responsibility to superiors or the group, minimising the victim's harm. None of these needs ignorance or little education; they work as well for the educated as for others, because knowledge can be used to craft justifications for unethical behaviour. Hence the need for moral upbringing before the need arises: it is not enough for a person to know what is right; he must have practised doing it when its price is high.

The Qur'an contains a text that ties word to deed explicitly: "O you who believe, why do you say what you do not do? It is most hateful to God that you say what you do not do" (Al-Saff: 2–3). It

could serve as a title for the problem of institutions that proclaim values and reward something else. The Qur'an also holds that justice does not lapse because of enmity: "Let not the hatred of a people lead you to act unjustly; be just, that is nearer to piety" (Al-Ma'ida: 8). And in the agreed-upon hadith: "The best of you are those with the best character" (al-Bukhari and Muslim). These texts show that character, in the culture we live in, is a measure of goodness and not an optional extra.

6. Where is character made?

The home first

Diana Baumrind (1966) offered a famous classification of parental control styles and described the "authoritative" style as combining clear limits, explained to the child, with warmth and openness to dialogue. In her early studies this style was associated with better social competence and independence than the authoritarian and permissive styles. We cannot take this finding as a rule for every family in every culture, but it gives a useful signal: moral upbringing is not only command and prohibition, nor open permissiveness, but a relationship with limits, reasons and warmth.

Social learning theory confirms that a child takes more from his parents' behaviour than from their words. A father who advises his son to be truthful and then asks him to tell the caller that he is not in teaches a lesson different from what he said. Moral education research in the tradition of Lawrence Kohlberg (1984) indicates that moral judgement develops through stages tied to mental maturity and to opportunities to discuss real dilemmas. Carol Gilligan (1982), in *In a Different Voice*, criticised Kohlberg's conception for putting abstract justice first and underplaying the ethics of care and relationship, a criticism that reminds us that the models we rely on are judgements open to revision. James Rest (1986) adds that moral behaviour requires four components: moral sensitivity, that is noticing that a situation has a moral dimension; moral judgement; moral motivation, that is giving priority to the moral value over others; and perseverance in carrying it out. A person may fail in any one of them though he succeeds in the others, which explains how he may know what is right and not do it.

The school and the hidden curriculum

The school has a double role because it teaches and brings up even when it does not intend to. We saw with Jackson (1968) that what the student learns from the classroom system is no less

influential than what he learns from the book. If the student sees that cheating passes, that connections work and that honesty is neglected, this is the actual curriculum he will carry with him, whatever the values poster on the wall.

In the empirical field there is reassurance that school intervention is possible and worthwhile. Joseph Durlak and colleagues (2011) analysed 213 school-based universal programmes of social and emotional learning involving 270,034 students, and found improvement in social and emotional skills, attitudes and behaviour, and an improvement in academic performance of about eleven percentile points. This means attention to the emotional side does not come at the expense of attainment but is associated with it. Even so, social and emotional learning programmes are not complete moral education: they teach skills such as managing emotion, empathy and resolving conflict, and the values and their reference remain a wider responsibility.

The university: what does it really teach?

The university says in its documents that it prepares trustworthy researchers and professionals, but the deeper lesson comes from its daily practices. How does it deal with plagiarism in research? Is the weak student punished and the strong one excused? Is the principle of academic honesty explained to students or merely warned about? When a supervisor works on a student's research, he teaches method, and he also teaches, by his integrity in crediting others, his candour in giving comments and his refusal to exploit the student's effort, how academic honesty is practised. This relationship resembles an apprenticeship more than a lecture, and in this sense academic supervision is one of the best places for moral education at the postgraduate stage if done well, and one of the worst if done badly. Universities should make this relationship a matter of care, training and accountability, and not leave it to the student's luck in choosing his supervisor.

The UAE experience in moral education

In 2016 the United Arab Emirates launched the Moral Education Programme at the direction of Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and its implementation began in government and private schools in the 2017–2018 academic year. The curriculum rests on four pillars: character and morality, the individual and the community, civic studies, and cultural studies. It relies on interactive discussion and practical activities, and has materials and teachers' guides. In its early phase it was described as not based on traditional exams; a unified national measure to assess it, known as MESA, was then introduced and piloted in a number of schools in 2019, which means that measuring the effect of moral education has actually begun to enter the field.

This is a step that officially recognises that the school is responsible for character alongside knowledge. Implementation is not without challenges: in 2019 *The National* reported, from a government report covering 617 schools, that about a quarter of schools had not reached the required standards in moral education and that teachers found it hard to engage pupils and plan lessons, after which the Ministry of Education launched a programme to train 1,500 teachers. This frank admission of shortfall is a healthy sign of seriousness, and it confirms that a written curriculum is not enough unless teachers are prepared to be role models before they are instructors.

The majlis and the extended family

Discussion of upbringing in our setting is incomplete without the majlis and the extended family, where the young learn from the old by watching: how a guest is received, how an elder is respected, how enemies are reconciled, how a secret is kept. This is teaching in which no one is examined, but it lasts. If the presence of elders in children's lives weakens because of long school days and solitary screens, we may transmit information more efficiently and lose an old channel for transmitting character. This is an analytical observation not supported here by figures, so we record it only as a trend that deserves field research.

7. When capability expands: artificial intelligence and the digital space

The more a person's capability grows, the more he needs an internal restraint. We have entered a stage in which artificial intelligence tools produce texts, code and analyses at a level resembling specialists' work, at much lower cost and time. This article is no place to assess those tools, but they have three implications for our subject.

The first is that the traditional signals of competence may weaken. If a polished report becomes easy to produce, the report itself says less about its writer's ability than it did, and decision-makers may turn to what the machine does not produce easily: sound judgement, responsibility and trust. This is an analytical inference we offer as a hypothesis for discussion, not an established fact; we do not yet have enough evidence on the effect of these tools on hiring criteria.

The second is that ethical error spreads more widely. Whoever has a tool that multiplies his capacity to produce multiplies with it the effect of his intentions. The UNESCO

Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021), adopted by member states in November 2021, affirms that the development and use of these technologies should rest on human rights, dignity, human oversight and accountability. These are principles that regulations alone do not realise; the engineer, the manager and the user must carry them in conscience.

The third is that the digital space loosens the social restraints we are used to. John Suler (2004) described what he called the "online disinhibition effect": people behave differently online from face to face, for reasons including anonymity, invisibility and a reduced sense of social authority. This may appear as useful candour and it may appear as cruelty and abuse. Moral upbringing in this environment means that a young person acts with the same integrity when no one knows his identity, a test earlier generations did not face at this scale.

In sum, education in the age of the machine will teach our children how to use powerful tools, while upbringing is what decides for what end. Whoever neglects the second on the pretext of the pressure of the first has handed a very powerful tool to someone not trained to use it well.

8. In defence of science

Some may read what precedes as an attack on certificates. That is a misreading and must be corrected plainly. A surgeon with a kind heart and trembling hands does not help his patients, and an honest engineer who miscalculates brings a building down on its occupants. Honesty without competence is not a professional virtue in any field that touches people's lives and money, because whoever accepts a post he cannot perform well betrays those who trusted him, however good his intention. Islam itself made excellence in work a required quality, and whoever undertakes work that needs knowledge must learn it.

So the argument is not that we choose between the certificate and character; that is a false choice. The argument is that each has its place in the decision. The certificate answers the question "can he?" and character answers the question "can he be trusted with what he can do?" Whoever settles for the first hires a competent danger; whoever settles for the second hires a helpless kindness. The sound standard is to require the minimum necessary competence and then distinguish between qualified candidates by what remains, and the most important of what remains is character.

In this sense the title can be understood: "more valuable" does not mean the certificate is worthless, but that the price we pay when we lose ethics is higher than the price we pay when a qualification is lacking, because some aspects of a qualification can be completed through

education and training, whereas rebuilding character in an adult is hard and costly, and rebuilding trust in an institution that has lost it is harder still.

9. Objections that deserve an answer

"Who decides what is character?"

The strongest objection to any call for ethics is that it is relative: what I see as virtue you may see as vice. The reply is that real disagreements over details do not cancel a wide consensus on fundamentals. Truthfulness, trustworthiness, keeping promises and not wronging the weak recur in the Islamic heritage, in Kantian philosophy and in international charters alike, as we saw in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Shalom Schwartz (1992), in a study across many cultures, found a recurring structure of major human values despite differences in how societies order their priorities. There is no need to settle every philosophical dispute before agreeing that bribery, falsifying reports and abusing subordinates are unacceptable.

"Will it turn into hypocrisy and surveillance?"

Yes, if we are not careful. When promotion or hiring is tied to character, people may learn to display virtue instead of practising it. Erving Goffman (1959), in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, described how individuals manage others' impressions of them by presenting a calculated front. If character becomes a criterion people are held to, some will master the front. To limit this risk we rely not on impression but on a documented record of conduct over time, assessment from several sources, clear procedures for objection, and we prefer what is observed in situations to what is declared in an interview.

"Do we want ethics because it pays?"

This is a lofty philosophical objection. We cited studies tying conduct to outcomes, which may suggest ethics is a means of improving performance. If that were the foundation, ethics would collapse whenever it did not pay. Kant (1785) holds that the worth of a moral act lies in its being a duty, not in its consequences. So we need to say clearly: empirical evidence helps persuade sceptics that neglecting ethics is costly, but our basic argument is that a human being is an end and not a means, and that dealing with others with truth and justice is a duty in itself, whether or not it raises productivity. If duty and benefit coincide, that is good; if they part, duty

remains. And in the verse "O you who believe, be steadfast for God, witnesses in justice" (Al-Ma'ida: 8) there is a tie of justice to the highest reference before any return.

"Isn't values the individual's responsibility alone?"

This objection places responsibility for deviation on individuals alone, and hides the other half of the picture. An individual raised on honesty may be pushed to lie in an institution that punishes those who tell the truth. We have seen from the trust model and the leadership studies that institutions affect behaviour. Responsibility is therefore shared, and we detail that in the conclusion.

10. From words to action

An article that stops at diagnosis is of little use. What follows are practical suggestions addressed to each party. They are analytical proposals open to discussion and testing, not prescriptions proven by figures.

For the family. Parents should be the first to practise what they ask. Time should be set aside to talk about everyday situations between right and wrong instead of giving abstract advice. Children should be asked about the kind of person they want to be, not only the career they want, and involved in work that serves others. Moral conduct should be praised before them as much as grades are. If parents rejoice in excellence and do not rejoice in their son's honesty when he admits a mistake, the wrong message has arrived.

For the school and university. Moral education should be treated as a serious subject for which teachers are trained, not a marginal slot. Documented behavioural elements should be built into assessment of the student, such as academic integrity, teamwork and conduct towards colleagues, and integrity policies should be applied fairly to everyone so that the student does not learn that rules are for the weak. In sensitive professional faculties such as medicine, law and engineering, the study of Papadakis and colleagues (2005) points to the value of recording unprofessional behaviour and addressing it early rather than ignoring it. Universities should review their systems: do they reward attainment alone? What does the student learn from the way grants and grades are distributed?

For employers. Interviews should be structured, with behavioural questions about real situations the candidate has faced, hypothetical situations to gauge how he thinks through dilemmas, legitimate checking of job references, and assessment of performance during the probation period with criteria that include conduct. Values should be announced and tied to

reward and accountability, so that no one is promoted who achieves results by means that contradict them. Safe channels for reporting should be provided, with protection for whoever reports, since we saw that ethical leadership is associated with employees' willingness to report problems. And employers should resist relying on the certificate alone in selection, making the minimum competence a condition and not a ceiling.

For the media and society. They should celebrate those who put integrity before appearance, and not reduce success to a title and a post. Public discussion should be able to tell the educated from the well-mannered, so that we stop praising a man for "holding such-and-such a degree" and also ask "and how does he treat people?"

For the individual. He should review himself periodically with a simple question: if no one saw me and there were no certificate to be awarded, what would I do? He should keep small habits that build character, from keeping an appointment to admitting a mistake, because character is not built in the great moments; it is tested in them after it has been built in the small ones. And this review should not turn into a claim of superiority over others, but into a means of discovering shortcomings and correcting them.

Sample behavioural interview questions

So that talk of "verifying character" does not stay general, here are examples of questions that can be asked in a structured interview, asking for real examples and details that the referee can verify: "Tell us about a time you were assigned a task and found that the result your superior expected was inaccurate. What did you do?" "Tell us about a mistake you made at work and how others learned of it." "Have you been in a situation where you were offered a way to bypass a procedure to speed up work? What led you to the decision you took?" Answers are scored against criteria written in advance, such as clarity in taking responsibility, not blaming others, the detail of the account and its consistency with what the referee says. These questions do not reveal character conclusively, since some people are good at telling stories, but they give the committee more objective material than the general impression. They are best combined with the performance record during the probation period, because behaviour repeated over time is more truthful than an answer given in an hour.

11. Limits of this article

Honesty requires stating what this article does not say. It is an analytical work that relies on published sources and builds a position from them. It is not a field study or a comprehensive

systematic review. The studies cited are mostly Western, and this paper does not claim that they apply to Arab societies to the same degree without local research. The correlations reported do not indicate causal relationships. Social skills and behavioural tests are not synonyms for ethics, though they come close. And the article's Arab and local examples need field research to measure the effect of moral education programmes and of hiring criteria in the local setting; we believe this is among the most useful things Arab universities and research centres could do.

Conclusion: responsibility between the individual and society

We began with a committee closing one file and opening another, and we return to it with a simple question: who bears responsibility for its decision?

Individual responsibility stands and does not lapse. A person is responsible for asking himself how he uses the knowledge and authority he holds, for bringing up his children by example before preaching, and for saying the truth in its place even if it costs him. No one may plead that the system is corrupt to excuse himself, for every system is made of individuals who accept or refuse.

But individual responsibility without fair institutions becomes blame. We cannot ask an employee to be honest and punish him for his honesty, or a student to be upright and reward the one who cheated, or a young man to believe that ethics pays while showing him that connections are what pay. Institutions that reward results and ignore means undermine the values they call for. Here lies society's responsibility: to design systems that make integrity easier than deviation, to protect whoever tells the truth, and to redefine success so that it has room for trustworthiness.

Science does not conflict with all this; it is a partner in it. Science opens doors of opportunity to a person, upbringing helps him mature, and values give him the ability to keep his humanity when his powers widen. If it is natural to ask our children what they want to become, it is necessary also to ask them what kind of person they want to be. A son may want to become a doctor; does he want to be a merciful and trustworthy one? He may want to become a manager; does he want to be a just one?

Certificates may hang on office walls and titles may be kept in records and résumés, but a person's real mark remains in the lives of those who dealt with him. Teach your children how

to succeed, and teach them also how to keep their humanity after they succeed. The certificate is an achievement worth being proud of; character is a responsibility worth living for.

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