

The theme of social responsibility is one of the foundations of the Jewish heritage which informs the ethos of Yeshiva University as an American University under Jewish auspices.

In this millennial tradition, each human being is regarded as unique, infinitely precious, and irreplaceable. This assertion of human worth places on all people the obligation to respect the autonomy of other persons and to seek effectively to enhance their lives both as individuals and as members of society. Moreover, it obligates society as a whole and its various institutions to inculcate these and related values in succeeding generations.

Yeshiva University accepts the challenge of this magisterial function. It aspires to impart to its students not only technical knowledge, the facts of culture, and the spirit of critical inquiry, but also to educate them in the underlying moral structure of Western civilization and, especially, its Judaic component, in which such knowledge and such inquiry best flourish in a manner most meaningful to their lives and destinies.

Such an approach, which was once unexceptional in American higher education, is not at all popular today. But we are convinced that the asseveration of the academy's responsibility to offer its students moral guidance marks us not only as a relic of a more naive and less complex past, but also as the harbinger of an even more complicated, more dangerous, but perhaps wiser future --one in which sensitivity to moral values, openness to

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spiritual dignity, and emphasis on conscience will be seen as abetting rather than as detracting from the intellectual enterprise which is the major function of the university. If indeed the academy is a "market place of ideas," it is good to remember that even the most convinced of capitalists considers some regulation as necessary for the market place itself to survive.

In its comparatively brief history, Yeshiva has exemplified this ethos in a number of ways. Thus, in founding the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, the university insisted that entry as a student or as a faculty member be conditioned on merit and motivation, and not on race or religion or gender. No photograph was required on an application, and no questions were asked about ethnic origin or denominational affiliation. And its doors were flung open to scientists of all religions--or none--who were fleeing from Nazi persecution.

Another example of Yeshiva University's long-standing moral and social concerns maybe seen in the history of its Wurzweiler School of Social Work. There the University practiced cultural pluralism before it became a popular preachment. It was determined from the very beginning that respect for the moral, ethnic, and religious autonomy of the client is as important as any of his/her other needs or perceptions. The business of the social worker is not to be the agent of the socialization of the client in the "melting pot," unless that is the will of the client; rather, respect, or his/her autonomy, both as an individual and as a member of any ethnic or other group, must be

paramount.

These and similar educational orientations, and the values they embody, have become an integral part of undergraduate education at Yeshiva University. The typical undergraduate student at Yeshiva is already a member of a minority group -- in the ethnic, religious, and cognitive sense, even if it is not legally recognized as such. Hence, the University's aim is not primarily to teach such students that minorities are to be respected, but that people must learn to balance the interests of individual sub-groups, including their own, with the interests of society as a whole; and, of course, to relate constructively and creatively to other human beings as individuals in the spirit of volunteerism that has roots in both American history and Jewish culture.

The University therefore encourages projects, which flourish on its campuses, such as reaching out to elderly and infirm shut-ins, tutoring the educationally underprivileged (especially of other, neighboring minority groups), and welcoming foreigners fleeing oppression in their native countries. And Yeshiva University, by the very nature of its institutional mission, continues to search for new avenues to express this theme of moral guidance and social responsibility.

But morality presupposes integrity, and integrity requires more than self-gratulation. It demands an awareness of difficulties and even failures. It must be acknowledged, therefore, that along with the rest of American academia we are perplexed by challenges that defy easy solutions. Two such questions continue to vex us and will increasingly demand



concentrated attention. One is the issue of educational ethics per se, and the other is the problem of how to teach the moral dimensions of the various disciplines in which our students specialize.

The first is endemic to all of the American academic community, and includes such items as: false or misleading reporting of research results; copying on examinations; plagiarism, etc. We do not have any ready solutions to these troubling phenomena, but we do not regard ourselves as exempt from the duty to pursue new ways; despair is certainly no answer.

The second problem is one that very much occupies the attention of contemporary educators and ethicists: does one teach ethics as a separate course or are ethical issues best raised as part of the rest of the curriculum? Each side has strengths and corresponding weaknesses, and no consensus has so far emerged. At Yeshiva (in addition to the courses in professional ethics on the graduate level), we are currently experimenting with a two-pronged approach at our Sy Syms School of Business, and it is still too early to predict definitive conclusions, although we are guardedly optimistic.

Moral values and rules are taught in our undergraduate schools neither as dogma nor as issues which reduce to taste a personal bias. We consider them integral to our entire academic enterprise. It is in this sense that Yeshiva University aspires to a student body that cherishes its social responsibilities in both theory and practice and seeks, in this manner, to make a uniquely Jewish contribution to all of American society.