

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

Scribe's Comments - The session was transcribed from the YouTube video in good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The **bold** & [bracket] disclose the scribe's commentary and links to other teachings by Willard.



[Start 08:00] - Philosophy the way I do it is centered on "life". Philosophers of the ages were concerned about wisdom lived out in life.



"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge" (Part 1) [9:00]

It is a hidden cultural calamity of growing proportions. I want to try to explain what it is and some of the reasons why it came to pass and what it means for us, for life, for our culture, for the individuals we are and the ones we know and love.

I don't mean to say there is no such thing as moral knowledge. There is. I am not going to say 'no one has it'. Many people do. Many of you do. It is very likely you don't know what to do with it, especially in conversations. Circumstances have changed. We are often intimidated when it comes to moral issues.

Description of "Disappearance of Moral Knowledge" [12:05]

Definition:

"It is a social reality that the knowledge institutions, primarily the universities and churches, do not offer knowledge of good & evil, right & wrong, virtue & vice to the public as knowledge. It is not a part of testable cognitive content of any recognized area of scholarship or practice."

* If you were teaching and you were to ask, *"What is good or evil, right or wrong, obligatory to do or not do?"*, you would not be able to grade the student on the answer. If you did grade the student and the student did not like your grade, they could appeal that up the line. Eventually, If they were persistent, it would wind up in the courts. Perhaps your Dean or Administrator would say, *"Now Professor, we, of course, know it's wrong to run over children in the street with your automobile by choice or to kick a baby through a goal post just to hear it flop. But we mustn't impose our views on our students with reference to moral issues."*

"If we are not perfect, we can not be good."

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

What does the disappearance of moral knowledge mean? [14:30]

The institutions of knowledge can not present moral truth or ethical truth as something of which there is knowledge. (*You can help me by contesting what I say. I am not interested in winning. I want to know what is the case.*)

The world is full of moral judgements, feelings, fights. The news is full of bad stuff that people have done.

* Sexually Abusive Clergy.

* Tiger Woods.

On and on the list goes. We're loaded with emotions, feelings, moral fights. The moral fight does not stop. It can't stop.

The MORAL LIFE is so central to human life, you can't call it off. The moral life has to do with choices we make. Those choices have to do with the kind of people we become. And the kind of people we become is not a matter that is indifferent to us or to others.

You're in the realm of fact already when you get into morality because morality has to do with life. We can't dispense with it. I can't quit engaging in moral feeling, moral judgment, moral belief. No one can. We have to think about the significance if all that true, moral knowledge is set aside.

~ KNOWLEDGE

[17:30]

Knowledge is what a University is about but very few people are willing to talk about it.

* I like to ask my new students, "*Why are we doing this? Why are you paying money to study?*" You might be surprised how long it takes to get around to knowledge.

Knowledge is scary. People are frightened of knowledge because they think it will pin them down. That is because... [2 Elements of Knowledge]

#1 - Knowledge Involves Truth

The truth will not only set you free, it will make you flee. It is scary because of its reality in life. We depend upon people knowing what they are doing. In any area of professional work, you want people who have knowledge, not just sentiment, not just belief.

* Dentist, "*Maybe that tooth is the one.*" You'll get out of the chair.

Truth is vital to life.

* Truth is like the sighting mechanism on a gun - if it is right, you can hit the target. Truth is what you need to hit the target.

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

Truth is bitter. It does not make any allowance for what you think or feel, or what you wish or hope. If you wrong, you're in trouble.

#2 - Knowledge Involves Public Method

[20:15]

Where you have knowledge, you have access to truth by method. Those two things [Truth & Public Method] about knowledge are missing if you can't have moral knowledge. You might begin to get alarmed right at that point. You might say to yourself, *"Moral beliefs and thoughts are among the most important ones in our lives. If you can't have knowledge, if you can't have truth, if you can't have method with those, we are in real trouble."*

You might have gathered that by looking around you.

How do people wind up in such incredible messes?

How do they wind up in situations where their mental health is gone?

There are a lot of reasons. I am not saying what I'm talking about is the solution to all the problems, but it is a very major part of the solutions to many problems that individuals face.

1. What do you lose when you lose Knowledge?

[21:45]

You lose 4 main things when you lose knowledge:

- 1.) The Right & Responsibility to Act
- 2.) The Right to Direct Actions
- 3.) The Right to Formulate & Supervise Policy
- 4.) The Right to Teach

The Right & Responsibility to Act - Knowledge authorizes and perhaps requires certain actions.

* When people see us going wrong, they say things like,

"What do you think you are doing?"

"Who do you think you are?"

If it appears we do not have knowledge about we are doing, we don't have the right, much less the responsibility, to do it.

* Golf - If it is something trivial like golf, it doesn't matter. There you don't have to know anything, though it may help.

For real life, it matters a lot. **Knowledge gives us the right and responsibility to act, to direct action, to formulate and supervise policy, and to teach.** If you are going to do those, you need to have knowledge. You can begin to see what an incredible difference it makes whether or not there is moral knowledge. Reflect on whether or not that is

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

actually the case. In moral matters, people have only very questionable rights to act, direct actions, to formulate policy and to teach.

What I am saying most pointedly is - not to TEACH. The institutions of knowledge, the ones that are set to convey knowledge in the culture, do not have the right & responsibility to teach knowledge of right & wrong, good & evil today.

Some of you remember a time when it was not the case. Do you remember..

* "All Hail, Rock n Roll" song by Chuck Berry

"Up in the morning and off to school.

The teacher is teaching the golden rule."

That was characteristic of the time that Chuck Berry wrote that song. That is what has disappeared. You don't teach the Golden Rule. You can say it. You might scold them about it, but you don't **teach** it as a **piece of knowledge**.

Loss of Moral Knowledge in Business

[26:00]

* John Maxwell, *There is No Such Thing as Business Ethics*

- If you adopt and implement the golden rule,
you will not need any other ethical provisions.

* "Care" commonly used in Business - *"We care."*

* Rotary slogan - *"Service Above Self"*

Professional ethics generally does not touch the issue of being a good person and doing the right thing. Professional ethics generally deals with how to stay out of trouble with clients, fellow professionals and the law. We need professional ethics but we need them to be ethics. But that's the area you can't really go because when you go to ethics, you're going to be judging about character, virtues, vices, good and evil. That is what professional codes today will almost never touch on.

Read the codes from in 1900 and you'll see them come up over and over. That's the difference. What could be dealt with is character, vices and rules. They had plenty of rules and a lot of them had to do with not infringing the interests of your fellow professionals. There are other kinds of issues like legalities but it is a step further up if you are going to deal with ethics or morality.

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

2. Change of Ideas

[29:45]

This [Disappearance of Moral Knowledge] did not come about by some kind of discovery or invention. Two ways changes of ideas come about:

- ONE Way of Change - Discovery or Invention
 - * Harvey - Blood circulation in animals after using pumps in Holland
 - * Copernicus - "Heliocentric" - Earth goes around the sun.

- SECOND Way of Change

* Witches killed in 14th-17th centuries. There was a pervasive belief in witches. By end of 17th century no longer a consensus in society to continue to burn them. How did that come about? Progressively. No one discovered it. It became ridiculous.

What you call a change in the "zeitgeist" - the spirit of the age.

[[The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge, 6-7, 18, 25](#)]

That's what we're talking about here. No one discovered you couldn't or shouldn't have knowledge of moral distinctions. Not something as a result of a process of investigation. It is something that just grew up.

[[Constitutional government is driven by consensus](#)]

—> [6 Causes of the "Zeitgeist" change to Moral Knowledge]

[[The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge, 8-17](#)]

How it came about that our institutions of knowledge no longer presented an understanding of moral knowledge distinctions as a body of knowledge

[34:25]

1.) Removal of Theology and RELIGION from the area of knowledge

[[Jesus was expelled from the University](#)]

Today it's hard to believe that theology & religion were once viewed as a source of knowledge. Nearly every university in the country had departments of Theology (not Religious Studies.) Many times departments of Theology & Philosophy. The ethical truths were standards from a biblical view like the *Ten Commandments*. People thought you knew it was wrong to steal. They thought you knew that deceitful people were not good people. They thought you knew because it was assumed there was theological knowledge backing them up.

In the last third of the 1800's, that changed. Theology ceased to be regarded as an area of knowledge, especially an area of cognitive research.

As Universities turned more to research, it became more clear that theology as practiced was not an area of knowledge that could be

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

sponsored by the Universities. Possibly still one at Notre Dame. You will find it hard to locate a school that has a department of Theology.

If ethics were based on theology, and theology is not an area of knowledge, what follows for ethics? It's not an area of knowledge.

* Julie Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*

The university no longer sponsors as knowledge a body of ethical truth.

Now, there is a very rigorous moral code enforced at the University, but it is not expressed as knowledge. It is expressed as **POLITICS**. In politics, you don't have to know anything. It is a matter of winning and getting your way.

2.) The Disappearance of the Human SELF as a domain of respectable knowledge.

[39:00]

In ethics from Plato on (not to mention the Biblical side of it), ethics was focused on the soul until the modern period with Thomas Hobbes (d. 1679) and others and the soul begins to disappear. When the soul disappears, the problem is about the self.

* David Hume (d. 1776), Jean Paul Sartre (d. 1980) and others.

The idea of "*the human being as spiritual substance that undertakes its own direction by intentionality, plans, choices, education to become a good person who does the right thing without having to think about*" is lost to any kind of knowledge.

* *Modern Man and Search of the Soul* by Carl Young

The problem from the 1800's on is - "*What to make of the human being?*"

The disappearance of the human self from the _____ (?) and knowledge of the self from respectable knowledge is another part of what leads up to the disappearance we are talking about tonight.

Social Constructionist theories of the self dismisses the responsible person with knowledge guiding their lives.

* Freud, Marx, Nietzsche all hammering on the idea of the disappearance of the self for the conscious mind and the direction of life.

3.) All cultures come to be regarded as equal

[Multi-cultural pluralism]

Up until the early 1900's it was assumed there were differences but we are right and they are wrong. But other cultures become a topic of scholarly investigation. Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict and others bring the idea that,

"No, we're not right and they're not wrong, we're just different."

* *Folk Ways* by William Graham Sumner

- One culture is not better than another.

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

If that's true, none are morally inferior, all just different. Then "difference" itself becomes a value. There is no moral truth about different cultures.

["In the world of the moral equivalent thinker, everything is of equal value. We give no deference to context."]

Victor Davis Hanson, 8/3/08, The Heritage Foundation]

4.) Moral distinctions & standards viewed as power plays [44:00]

* Marx, Nietzsche are primary in that area. Freud in a different way.

The idea is that TRUTH is not a matter of consideration but just a matter of who has the power. [Nietzsche - "The Will to Power"]

5.) Fear or Resentment of Knowledge itself [44:35]

Knowledge is viewed as oppressive in human and cultural matters.

"Colonialism" becomes a big issue and the suppression of people who have been colonized in terms of claims to superior knowledge on the part of the people who are oppressing them. One way out is to disclaim knowledge. The oppressors (usually Europeans) have knowledge of what was right, good and suppress the natives, saying their practices are not right, not good for human beings. If there is no knowledge, they don't know that. They might try to criticize [the natives] but they can't criticize [the natives] if culture is what determines right and wrong, good and bad. The point is there is no knowledge. It is just a matter of the relativity of the cultures.

6.) Growth of the idea is that it is always wrong to make a moral judgment. [46:20]

That has become almost a piece of law in many context, especially on the campuses. Of course, if there is no knowledge of moral matters, perhaps that is right. If there is knowledge of moral matters, even though it is unpleasant, you might even have a responsibility to make a judgment.

In this area, people have confused discernment and condemnation. They think that condemnation is morally wrong and it is the same as judgment, so you should never make a judgment. (It helps worlds to be confused about things.)

* Dentist - "That tooth has a cavity and we're going to have to repair it".

That's a judgment. Thank goodness for a dentist who will say it.

Now if he slaps you and says, "*Who do you think you are to treat your teeth this way?*" That's condemnation.

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

Those are different things. But if you are confused about that, then you will want not to say that anything is wrong because that would be condemnation and condemnation is bad and we let morality back under the door at that point.

There is great reticence about making a moral judgment.

The idea is that "you could not make a moral judgment in love", so it becomes hate speech.

But hate speech is often speech someone hates. [48:40]

There is such a thing as hate speech and it should not be done. (That's a moral judgment by the way.) **To say that something is wrong is not hate.** You can murder people without hating them.

We have to think carefully about this whole issue of moral judgment because this is one reason why people have backed away from the idea that there is moral knowledge.

The idea is that **if you thought there was moral knowledge, then you might make judgments. In order to be nice, not to say "moral" or "virtuous", I won't make moral judgments. Why don't I? Their really isn't any moral knowledge.** [The loss of "Ought"]

[49:50] Since the University is the arbiter of what counts as knowledge. The philosophers - almost all of the highest degrees are called the PhD, "Doctor of Philosophy". The reason is because philosophy attempts to deal with the ultimate issues in every field in terms of the corresponding reality and the modes of knowledge of that reality. It falls to philosophers to try to deal with the situation of the lack of moral knowledge. They are not jumping up and down with joy about the disappearance moral knowledge.

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

[19th & 20th C. Philosophers trying to Recapture Moral Knowledge]

~ John RAWLS [liberal] (d. 2002) [[The Dis. of Moral Knowledge, Ch. 6](#)]

~ Alasdair MACINTYRE (b. 1929) [[The Dis. of Moral Knowledge, Ch. 7](#)]

~ G.E. MOORE (d. 1958) [[The Dis. of Moral Knowledge, Ch. 3](#)]

[Moore was founder of modern "analytical philosophy" vs. "Idealism" & "Skepticism".
Met Bertrand Russell & Ludwig Wittgenstein at Cambridge]

Moore was so morally serious, those who thought they knew him best regarded him as naive. They could not tell the difference between naive and earnest. Moore was earnest about moral knowledge, properties, distinctions. Because of this, he was victimized by people around him, people like John Maynard KEYNES (1883-1946, "*Macroeconomics*") [[The Divine Conspiracy, p.5](#)] who used [Moore] to polish up their particular version of amorality. Moore was very serious. Most were extremely serious about re-founding, rediscovering moral knowledge. But they have not succeeded.

It is very similar to what happened in the late 1800's like...

~ T.H. GREEN [[The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge, 64-92, 98-102](#)]

~ Herbert SPENCER [[ibid, 51-62](#)]

~ F.H. BRADLEY [[ibid, 58-59, 105, 368](#)]

~ John S. MILL [["Justice...more obligation than others"](#) [[ibid, 102, 131, 349](#)]

They realized that the theological basis of ethics was disappearing as far as society was concerned and tried to provide a secular interpretation of the foundation of ethics. They all failed. That's what actually led up to the debacle of "Logical Positivism" or "Emotivism" in Ethical Theory where an ethical judgment is just an express of emotion. Saying "It is wrong to steal" is saying, "Boo!" and the right to be honest is "Hurray!"

~ C.D BROAD (d. 1971) *The "Boo-Hurray Theory" of the moral judgment.*

[[The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge, 125-125](#)]

~ ~ ~ End of Part 1 [52:27] ~ ~ ~

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge" (Part 2) [50:10]

[see *The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge*, pages 377-380]

What does the "Disappearance of Moral Knowledge" mean for our lives?

It means the loss of moral guidance concerning good & evil, praiseworthy and blame worthy actions & characters, honorable & dishonorable lives and institutions, both for the individual trying to find his or her way and for groups trying to learn to live together in the way that is best. Without moral knowledge, individual and group life is left to drift at the behest of DESIRE, force and chance.

David Hume (d. 1776)

"The end of all moral speculation is to teach us our duty and by proper representation of the deformity of vice and the beauty of virtue beget corresponding habits and engage us to avoid the one and embrace the other. What is honorable, fair, becoming, noble, generous takes possession of the heart and animates us to embrace it and maintain it."

That's exactly how moral knowledge had been regarded.

Henry Sidgwick (d. 1900 - 3 days after Nietzsche)

[One of the most influential ethical philosophers of the Victorian era, his work continues to exert a powerful influence on Anglo-American ethical and political theory. His masterpiece, *The Methods of Ethics* (1907), was first published in 1874 and in many ways marked the culmination of the classical utilitarian tradition—the tradition of Jeremy Bentham and James and John Stuart Mill—with its emphasis on "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" as the fundamental normative demand. plato.stanford.edu/entries/sidgwick]

"The moralist has a practical aim. We desire knowledge of right conduct in order to act it."

Matthew Arnold, (d. 1888, contemporary of Henry Sidgwick)

[Classical attacks on the contemporary tastes and manners of the "Barbarians" (the aristocracy), the "Philistines" (the commercial middle class), and the "Populace." He became the apostle of "culture" in such works as *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869).]

Perhaps one of the most exemplary of enlightened people of his day,
"The object of systems of morality is to take possession of human life, to save it from being abandoned to passion or allow it to drift at hazard, to give it happiness by establishing it in the practice of virtue. This object those systems seek to do by presenting to human life fixed principles of action and fixed rules of conduct. In it's inspired as well as it's uninspired moments, it's days of languor and gloom, it's days of sunshine and energy, human life always has a clue to follow and may always be making it's way toward its goal."

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

That's what you lose when you lose moral knowledge. Public discourse ceases to support morality. Proverbial wisdom becomes "corny". (Corny is worse than false.)

* Electricity - Compare it to knowledge of electricity. We have a lot of knowledge of electricity and it's amazing what we can do with it. How we can cooperate with one another, know if someone else knows electricity and how to wire a house and use it in other kinds of instruments.

What would happen if knowledge of electricity disappeared? Perhaps things would work for a while, sort of. Then the certain loss of huge amounts of what is good would come. Think of medicine, household chores, travel, communication without knowledge of electricity. It does not just depend upon electricity. Electricity is still there. What is gone is knowledge.

[* "Keeper of the Spring"]

Now can you transfer that to the moral life?

It has been said for century or more that we have been living off the moral capital of past ages. It won't last forever. There are deep issues about our lives that can not be handled without moral knowledge which allows us to:

—> **Act, Direct Action, Formulate & Supervise Policy & Teach.**

[see Video #1 @ 21:45]

Moral life is not just a matter of some rules that we might think will prevent us from having a good time. Often what are presented as moral rules do not make any sense. They have to be corrected by moral knowledge not just thrown away.

[6:15] **MORALITY is a matter of what we are living for, the kinds of persons we are becoming. Moral knowledge is knowledge of this. Morality is not just conformity to what is proper but is about building a life.** (This is the part I think we need to pay most attention to.)

Life has a NATURE. That is one of the points that is most commonly denied by recent thinkers, scholarship, even standard academic behavior. You might think a human being is a Brussel sprout or squirrel from what you hear. Human life has a nature. All life does, it has a structure. Moral distinctions are part of the reality which is human existence.

[Willard, "Human Nature"]

[7:20] **Vice is a bitter reality usually having to do with the capitulation of will and character to DESIRE.** This is the ancient moral

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

battle that thinkers, East and West, from the beginning have understood.
The problem is with DESIRE and action from DESIRE - how do you deal with it. **DESIRE is not something that considers what is best.** It considers what it wants. It does what it wants without regards to what is best.

[Willard, "[Battle Between Flesh & Spirit](#)" — DESIRE used 31 x's]

[* Levels of "Moral Knowledge" as road signs:
Speed Limit; Yield; Stop Sign; Stop Light; Do Not Enter - One way]

* Bill Clinton with Monica, "*I just could do it.*"
He lied. He uttered a falsehood. He did it because of desire.

DESIRE poses the problem for choice. Unless you have knowledge of right and wrong, to counteract desire to say, "I know you want that but there is this other." The function of **WILL** is to present alternatives.

One of the lessons you learn when you study ethics and morality seriously is that your feelings and DESIRES are not your will. Many people in our culture today because the disappearance of moral knowledge do not know that. They think their **DESIRES** are their will. That is the source of many of the deplorable situations we face in our life.

Traditional Moral Knowledge [9:45]

Virtues - temperance, courage, justice, wisdom, faith, hope, love - are reliable sources of direction, strength, joy and peace. This is the content of traditional moral knowledge. That was the content of teaching in this country. Go back and look at old readers of grammar schools. Now people say, "That's corny".

The 7 Deadly Sins are "deadly". [10:45]

Pride, envy, lust, sloth, greed, gluttony, wrath...they will kill you. They will ruin your mental health unless you have a way to deal with them.

[11:30] Is it too much to think that our contemporary disasters such as failures of covenants in family, business and government, obesity, addictions, crime, financial chaos, failure of educational system.

If the teachers, students and administrators in our schools were pursuing a life of virtue, how much would that change in our schools?

All of these rest in some significant degree upon the failures of lives and character of some people involved. And those failures rest in some significant degree upon the disappearance of moral knowledge from our society in a sense explained. It would be a mistake to ascribe all of our

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

problems to that disappearance. Not everything can be solved in this world by sincere effort even if it is informed by moral knowledge. There are other problems.

This disappearance has had and is having a very harmful effect on much our life in present and that is the responsibility of our institutions of knowledge to make moral knowledge available in the extent to which that is possible. Not by teaching rules, not by imposing condemnation or praise, but by the dispassionate analysis and communication of the nature of virtue and vice and character.

~ ~ ~ **End of Teaching in Part 2 [13:30]** ~ ~ ~

Q & A

[14:15]

Q - Problem of re-founding moral knowledge. What went wrong with failed attempts and do you have another course?

A - Alternative basis

[15:00]

- John Rawls (d. 2002 - Harvard & Oxford Professor) has to water down knowledge to the point that it is no longer knowledge to claim a limited area of knowledge with reference to justice in social institutions. He really has nothing to say about justice in persons. You might think that if a person lived under a just institution will be just. If you think that, you need to check the facts. Just living in a just institution is not enough to make a just person. Justice is more demanding than that. He does not have a full theory about virtue and vice, about character. He's trying to dance with the devil of modern epistemologies that do not allow you to have knowledge of the self.

- Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (published 1984 includes a criticism of John Rawls) - MacIntyre believes virtue is an expression of community. People can know what is virtuous and vicious. In his view - If you know what it is by living in a community, then you will do it. The problem for MacIntyre - Where do you get the community to start with?

MacIntyre end of his book *After Virtue*,

"The barbarians are already within the gate."

(He was referring to the Universities.)

"We are now waiting, not for Gadaux, but for another and no doubt very different St. Benedict."

He was referring to that it was fundamentally the Benedictine system of monasteries that managed to eventually pull the collapse of the Roman Empire into a new era of living together in Europe.

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

The problem - Where do you get the community to produce the virtue?

* MacIntyre has become a devout Roman Catholic Christian since he wrote that book.

[Willard's Response] **I don't think you can build a community and then getting to virtue. You're going to have the virtue to build the community. That's going to have to be individuals who do that.**

[[Family & Church - Virtuous Disciples before Teachers/Parents of Virtue](#)]

Obviously there's going to have to be social and communal conditions and eventually we'll have to deal with where are we going to get that.

We have to look candidly at the University and ask, "Is that the community?" The answer unfortunately is - it is not. The conditions in which people live in University communities today have almost no moral content at all. We all trying desperately to be nice, or at least to be thought nice.

Where do you begin? Two things:

1.) Look at the wisdom that is in whatever tradition you have. There is a very strong moral tradition in Europe and America. We need to look back at that and see what it says. Take the "corny" parts [traditional virtues] and test them in life and then to begin to teach:

What is wrong with child abuse? What is wrong with lying?

All the things we say, "Yes, they're wrong!" What's wrong? That's where we need to write, teach and think.

If you have a tradition to work from, use it. If you are a Christian, in this country is most likely to be the tradition, use it. Put it to the test.

What do you think your tradition teaches about morality? Understand it. If you think for example, your tradition says, "*Love your neighbor as yourself*", that's the place to begin. If you think the content of ethical teaching is **love**, okay, let's make sense of it. Let's don't just say the word. How do you put it into practice?

Read the thinkers about what is to be done and compare them. Then ask yourself, "**What is the kind of life that is best?**" [22:35]

You face that issue and you answer it and live by the answer.

The other institution that has to deal with this are the religious institutions.

2.) Build the character that would be suggested as ideal in that tradition.

You say, "*Which one is right?*" Let life decide it, as well as thought. Meet the challenge. One of things that has happened is that religion and theology were moved out of the domain of knowledge. Now religious institutions are apt to say, "*We are just teaching tradition.*" Tradition is not knowledge. It could be in some cases if it is truthful to the life that it touches.

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

Knowledge is not something that happens to you externally. You have to rise up and seize it. That's why "seeking" is such an important part of the religious life.

Too many times we think of religion, "We've got it all right and settled and we're just waiting for something to happen."

The life of a Christian is one of "seeking". One of the primary teachings is "*Seek first the Kingdom of God and it's kind of righteousness.*"

Secular humanism has a proposal. Put the proposals by one another, use your mind and learn the practice and put it to the test of life. That's how virtues are developed.

* Greek Idea - Set up government properly and everyone would be virtuous. It didn't work for them.

*"*We are all looking for a system so perfect that we won't have to be good.*" T.S. Elliot [26:00]

~ ~ ~

Q - What if you took existing Christian communities and injected MacIntyre's thinking?

A - [26:40] MacIntyre seems to not have known St. Benedict did not create communities. He brought one and inducted people into it. The community that he presupposed is what is called the Kingdom of God.

~ ~ ~

Q - How would that community contribute to the moral knowledge of the broader community?

A - [27:25] There is a lot talk about the Public Square. We are all in the public square all the time. If you are forming a religious community, you are in the public square. The people who are there [in religious community] live in the world. You teach and think at the very best level for the people that are there and they are members with the larger community and they share that as we might share any body of knowledge that we have. It has to be approached in that way. Not just "I don't have knowledge, I just have beliefs. I'm trying to get you to have those beliefs, too." That's a different approach and that's the one unfortunately that most people are tied to.

[Epistemology - "the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope. Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion."]

That's not sharing knowledge. People share knowledge in a totally different way. If you think you have knowledge of the virtuous life and of the vicious life, you will share it in a very different way than trying to get people to do things.

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"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

Q - Freud, "Moral knowledge can be understood in super ego."
Can exclusivity lead to intolerance?

A - [30:25] This is very important. All truth is exclusive.

* If it's true that your shirt is red, that excludes your shirt being blue, logically.

Now, an **attitude** of exclusiveness is another thing. That's where you can draw an important distinction. Does the fact that I **know** that truthfulness and honesty are among the essential properties of a good and healthy life, (I claim to **know** that by the way), does that mean that I don't have anything to do with people who disagree with me or even with people who are dishonest? Not necessarily. That's a choice.

Exclusiveness in the sense in which one truth excludes other truths is a logical matter. There is nothing you can do about that. You do have people today that suggest, if you would, you can believe all religions are equal, all moralities are equal and all cultures are equal. You can say that but you can't do that. To be nice you might say it but you can't believe things that contradict one another.

Exclusiveness as logic principal is one thing, exclusiveness as a human attitude is another thing. I don't encourage the second. **You're going to have to have a basis in virtue [kingdom] to do that.**

~ ~ ~

Q - Moral Knowledge or Ethical Principles? How do you differentiate with claims of knowledge and safeguard against absolutizing of knowledge of the truth and the ease to slide into imperialism, arrogance?

A - [33:50] By teaching the virtue of love and respect, not by saying we drop knowledge because of disagreement. Disagreement is compatible with knowledge. People of good will can disagree over things.

Agreement does not secure knowledge and knowledge is compatible with disagreement. The question how you are going to handle attitudes of intolerance, arrogance and so on is a moral question that depends upon moral truth.

In our culture, **the census of morality and ethics have changed so that you can have ethical principles and disagree, as long as you don't act on them it doesn't make any difference.** When you act on them, that's when morality comes into play. Once again, it is so important to understand that this particular problem, which is an incredible social and personal problem, can not be dealt with by simply saying we don't have moral knowledge. I believe you can only deal with it if you say we do have moral knowledge. The people who decide that those who become absolutized and arrogant about their claims, they don't hold these up as morally

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

admirable people. They think there is something wrong with that. And they are right.

If you're going to be tolerant, you have to have a really strong basis in your character to do that. So often today we talk about tolerance. What does it mean?

Can you tolerate someone without loving them? If so, how much is gained?

We have built in our culture in recent decades around very important issues the idea of giving people rights without loving them. Sometimes the situation is so bad, we need to do that. But in fact, our country is sick with anger between groups of people where there have been conceded rights and tolerance at that level but they don't care about them. What good have we done? Limited, yes. **But justice never does justice to justice.** You have to have more. That line of question which is very important, we need to ask it and pursue it, precisely points us toward moral knowledge not way from it.

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Q - Where my judgments become wrong in other's eyes?

A - [38:45] There's a difference between politics and morals. In the latter case, you're dealing with political issues where many persons have been hurt. When you say that, then a different attitude comes at you. It's not particularly moral. It's based on political considerations that have evolved into moral attitudes. **You cross the line to the moral when you are now referring to a person in a way that indicates they are not acceptable as a person.** You're not to be accepted, to be emulated. **You don't say to your child, "Be like that person." That's where the "Moral" comes in when you begin to make judgments related to the acceptability or unacceptability of a person.**

We are loaded with that now in this country. Part of the difficulty there is because there is no moral knowledge to have recourse to.

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Q - Does the evolutionary paradigm contribute to the disappearance of moral knowledge?

A - [40:40] Darwin did not think that moral knowledge disappeared. He treated the moral sense as part of the biological character of the human species. So it does not disappear. Some would say if here were consistent it would have disappeared. But who is consistent? His own attitudes toward

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

morality and religion were probably at considerable odds with a strict interpretation of his biological theory.

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Q - Is morality tied to personal accountability?

A - It certainly is tied to that, yes.

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Q - If we remove Creator/Creature relationship you remove all accountability?

A - I don't agree with that. We are accountable to each other as well. You may need to add something more, especially if you are concerned about how to become the kind of person that actually lives according to moral principles.

* Often quoted from Dostoevsky's *Ivan*,
"If there is no god, everything is permitted."

No, if everything remains as it is, then moral distinctions and other distinctions will be the same. If human life remained exactly as it is but there would be no god, there would still be accountability. Tiger Woods would still be accountable to his wife.

Q - What is a moral truth other than what we represent it to be?

A - [43:05] In the case of moral truth, because of what truth is, that is a representation of something as it is.

* For example, if dishonesty is not a morally admirable character, anyone who thought it was would be mistaken. The problem is to get moral truth or any kind of truth, if you have truth, you have a representation of something as it is. You can have truth still and not know it.

* Bet on a winning horse, your bet was true even if you didn't know it. Truth brings the object with it. But, you can have moral falsehood as well as moral truth. In that case what is represented is not as it is represented.

Tricky stuff. **You have to write out what you think truth is and what you think knowledge is and then you can begin to work on it.** I am not trying to jam what I said down your throats. I am trying to articulate something and hopefully you can work on it.

"The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge"

Dallas Willard @ UCI Veritas Forum, 2011

Q - How do you envision Moral Knowledge in practice in public schools?

A - [45:20] Do a sociology of virtue and vice. Honestly teach about the role of virtue and vice - lying, stealing, not keeping promises, covetousness, envy. That's the thing that social scientists will not touch. Stick to the facts and help your students understand that. Because your students have been given the impression, especially if they are religious, that *"wrong doing is actually a good thing, it's just God has a thing about it."*

That's because they have never looked at it. **This is what I encourage as many people as I can and try to practice myself - helping people look at virtue and vice and then look at character and understand that they are forming their character and it is going to have incredible consequences for their life.** You can do that. You don't have to preach, exhort, start complaining to people, grinding them down.

* Bob Coles, Student at Harvard who left the school after bad treatment from a fellow classmate who was in her "Moral Thought" class who kept propositioning her for sex. (See *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 3-4)

He never discussed with the young man what is wrong with propositioning a young woman who has to work her way through college.

We don't talk about that kind of thing we just say, *"Don't do it"*, if we say that. **We are failing in our intellectual responsibility in this area.** We don't have to do that. You won't have to do that.

You will meet some people who say "if you talk about that, that is religious." It is very interesting how this is developing in our language. Any kind of morality is being gradually associated with religion so that it can be dismissed as not appropriate to discuss in a school situation. Some people will tell you it violates church and state so morality violates church & state.

Some programs on "Sexual Harassment" actually present it in such a way that an atheist can not have ethics because ethics is religion.

When you depart from real, serious quest for knowledge, things go crazy. Then the language starts to show up. It will be regarded as so important that you will regard the absurdity that is being plainly said because there is a good reason.

~ ~ ~ End of Part 2 Q & A @ 50:07 ~ ~ ~