

**Educating the children of the Enlightenment:
Didactic methods of morality in the work of Dugald Stewart**

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- During the eighteenth century, there was a distinct shift away from the traditional aim of moral philosophy to train young men for the ministry, towards preparing them for civil life. This shift involved a re-orientation in the teaching methods considered adequate to the task.
- This paper will excavate the pressures this introduced by investigating a crucial contradiction built into the moral philosopher's new role - how to teach a child to become a rational, independent and critical adult.
- This will be accomplished through examining the teaching practice of Dugald Stewart, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh from 1785 to 1809. It will delineate the didactic aims inside Stewart's published guidelines - the *Outlines of moral philosophy* - and within the lecture notes taken by his students.

Rhetorical tactics of authority

- Both the *Outlines* and the dictation of lectures supplied Stewart with a source of authority in the classroom. It also gave a sense of permanence to the otherwise ephemeral occasion of the lecture.
- This use of a set text in the lecture hall was typical of the teaching practice of eighteenth-century Scotland.
- The act of dictation engaged Stewart in a relationship of benevolent intellectual dominance over his students.

- The question arises however, as to whether what Stewart was inculcating was anything more than a full system of morality, as internally coherent and as domineering as the traditional scholastic system that historians suggest the enlightenment was trying to overthrow? Was Stewart, however self-consciously enlightened, not just as given to priestcraft as the priests themselves?

Rhetorical tactics of uncertainty

- Even a cursory examination of the notes Bridges took in the lectures of 1802 provides a lengthy list of authorities that Stewart used to evidence his arguments.
- What this does is to shift Stewart's course away from the intensive model of study favoured by Carmichael and towards an extensive process of learning. In this, the move from Carmichael to Stewart replicates in miniature the reading revolution of the early modern period delineated by Elizabeth Eisenstien.
- Stewart used the *Outlines* not as a scriptural authority but rather as a travel guide to the world of reading
- The provision of a survey to the world of learning served three purposes. First, it opened the mind of the students to the capacity to make their own decisions.
- Secondly, it mimicked the inductive method that Stewart was trying to inculcate.
- Finally, Stewart's status changed from that of doctrinal priest to pastoral minister.
- He was successful in his aim of directing and maturing men of enlightenment.

Conclusion

- Stewart's work as a teacher appears at first to be in line with a traditional understanding of the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student.

- However, closer examination of the lecture notes taken by James Bridges suggests that Stewart's didactic methods were more complex. Stewart was trying to be an example to his students of a moral philosopher in action.
- In this, Stewart fits into the shift in emphasis historians have noted in the purpose of moral philosophy courses over the course of the eighteenth century.