

Elizabeth Ortel. M.A. *The Morality of Student Futures at the North Carolina State Normal and Industrial College, 1890s-1910s.* (2023)
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This study utilizes Abend's (2014) conceptual framework for the sociological study of morality to investigate historical patterns of vocational reasoning—ways of thinking and making decisions about work and career—at the North Carolina State Normal and Industrial College at the turn of the twentieth century. An analysis of public-facing discourses directed at students uncovers two patterns: the “spirit of service” and the “labor market decider.” In terms of surface-level (or in Abend's terms, “first-order”) normative prescriptions and morally sanctioned behaviors, both patterns make similar recommendations: that each student has a duty to engage in forms of work and activity (paid or unpaid) that would aspire to improving some aspect of social life. Analysis of the “moral background,” however, reveals important differences in the underlying understandings, arguments, concepts and cultural logics that enable expressions of first-order morality. Where the spirit of service grounds its vocational recommendations in the Christian-derived metaphysics of the “calling,” the labor market decider emphasizes an incipient concept of labor market fairness and the need for students to become informed decision-makers in the face of contemporary socioeconomic change. At the same time, both moral backgrounds share certain similarities, and actors in the case demonstrate instances of borrowing background components across vocational reasoning patterns. These findings contribute to the study of the role of morality in career decision-making and in constituting working subjects in capitalist society, applications of Abend's moral background framework and manifestations of the Protestant ethic and its secular variations.

THE MORALITY OF STUDENT FUTURES AT THE NORTH CAROLINA STATE
NORMAL AND INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE, 1890s-1910s

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my fiancé Alexander Saunders, who encouraged and cared for me throughout this process, my parents Bruce and Rebecca, who checked in on me every week to listen in on how everything was going, and my wonderful friends and family near and far, who gifted me their time, humor and love.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the early 1900s, Charles D. McIver, founder and first president of the North Carolina State Normal and Industrial College for Women in Greensboro, North Carolina, drafted text for an upcoming address on Hotel Guilford letterhead:

Be real teachers. Teach children right habits of thought, expression, feeling, and so far as your influence as a citizen may permit, teach the men and women of this state a true educational policy. Teach them that we are not too poor to educate our children, but that we are too poor not to educate them; that ideas are worth more even in dollars and cents than acres of lands and that education precedes and creates rather than follows wealth.¹

That McIver would envision a future of public-school teaching for graduates of his institution was not surprising. This was the vision that drove him and his collaborators in education reform as they initiated a statewide campaign for teacher training and universal public education in the 1880s. It was an intentionally transformative project to develop and “uplift” North Carolina, making it a pinnacle of New South prosperity.

In part, it followed a pattern established more than half a century before by Horace Mann’s common school movement, which was initiated in New England and radiated across the country over the decades to come, reaching North Carolina through the figure of state superintendent Calvin H. Wiley on the eve of the Civil War. But where Wiley’s vision for common schools emphasized moral instruction for citizenship in a slavery-based plantation economy, the postbellum “graded school enthusiasts,” who advocated for the professionalization of teaching and the centralization and bureaucratization of schools, spoke “more often through a language of markets and competitive individualism than through one of civic virtue and self-

¹ Charles McIver, speech draft, undated, image 1 of 172, President Charles Duncan McIver Records, Box 9: Diaries, Autobiographical material, etc., 1884-1906, Folder 7: Speeches 1890s, n.d., University Archives, University of North Carolina Greensboro, <https://gateway.uncg.edu/islandora/object/ua%3A278440>. The date of the draft is inferred from letterhead, which was pre-printed with the template “19—” to be filled in with the current year.

sacrifice” (Leloudis 1996, 21). Through standardized state-funded education, they sought to bring North Carolina and the rest of the South into more level economic competition and political power with the industrialized North and West. This required altering the rhythms of community lives based in agriculture, modifying commonsense notions about the value of land and natural resources and shaping a new ““culture of self” that defined exertion, striving, enterprise, and achievement as the keys to happiness and a rewarding life” (Leloudis 1996, 21).

The state’s young white women—many of whom faced limited life prospects in a tumultuous postbellum economy—were as if in a providential position to be enrolled as the project’s servant-heroines (Leloudis 1996; Dean 1995). In McIver’s vision, through a Normal education they would be transformed into independent, striving individuals capable of going forth into the state as teachers and political agitators for the cause, spreading the new modes of thinking, being and acting that it espoused.² Their Normal training would also prepare them for educated motherhood, enabling them to raise their children from infancy according to new ideals. Once made ubiquitous after a few generations, this would supercharge the state’s development even further. All McIver and his fellow reformers had to do was convince the public, and the women themselves, that universal education was worth supporting and that public school teaching was a worthy calling—something that these women could and *should* do.

But McIver’s vision for Normal students’ futures was not the only one on offer, even within the walls of his own institution. The school, which became a “college” by 1896 and a

² Here again, training women for teaching service and conferring upon them the responsibility to reform and organize communities through education followed a pattern established by Horace Mann and fellow New England education reformer Catherine Beecher, who both argued that women were best suited for the work, and that school districts could save money and increase capacity by hiring women in place of men. Mann’s proposals portrayed teaching candidates “...as angelic public servants motivated by Christian faith; wholly unselfish, self-abnegating, and morally pure” (Goldstein 2014, 26).

fully four-year degree granting institution by 1908, rapidly developed into a hub connecting Greensboro's rising middle class of educated professionals with regional, national and international networks of Progressive Era educational, religious and social reform. The institution's enmeshment in these networks fostered a range of interactions between students, alumnae, educators, political figures, ministers, missionaries, philanthropists, businesspeople and social reformers. Through these interactions, multiple actors from diverse social positions presented their visions of Normal students' futures, which included ideas about the forms of subjectivity they should cultivate in facing available prospects for employment.

Facing the Future

The future of a student's life was a topic of interest and concern at the Normal in part because the future was uncertain—at least, more uncertain than it had been in previous generations. In the decades after the Civil War, North Carolina experienced economic crises, which pushed more women into the labor force to supplement family earnings and to become breadwinners themselves (Robbins 2010; Leloudis 1996). Families began to send their children to school for longer periods of time in the hope that they would have increased options for employment (Clifford 2014; Leloudis 1996). Socioeconomic change was occurring rapidly as "...trends that had taken most of the century in the rest of the country were compressed into a few short years in the South" (Dean 1995, v). The growing need for waged work and the concomitant desire for vocational guidance—already established in urban areas across the United States—accompanied the region's incorporation into national networks of industrial capitalism.

The Normal, while established with the foremost purpose of expanding and professionalizing the state's teaching force, was also charged with helping women prepare for economic self-support in these conditions. Its legislative charter combined the mission to train

teachers with the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the King’s Daughters’ petition to “...establish a vocational school for poor white women” (Leloudis 1996, 89). Among the first students admitted to the Normal in the 1890s, more than half came from rural households and “between 1892 and 1900, roughly 25 percent of each entering class...were orphans or the daughters of widows” (Leloudis 1996, 95). For many students, then, attending the institution provided an essential gateway to a livelihood as well as a dramatic shift in life outlook in comparison with their mothers and grandmothers.

As Dean (1995) describes it, to become a student at the Normal was to become part of an all-encompassing campus culture whose practices, routines and norms combined to fashion new subjectivities to face life after graduation. Limited dormitory space and prohibitions on off-campus travel created a tight-knit social experience, full of prescribed activities and behaviors. Faculty, and particularly female faculty who lived in student dorms, served as mentors and models, demonstrating what it meant to become educated, independent and self-motivated. Students were extensively involved in extracurricular activities, which tightened social bonds, promoted leadership skills and facilitated the spread of ideas. The goal was to cultivate graduates who were “...prepared to meet the vicissitudes of life with courage and with dignity, and at all times ready to battle for the cause of Right and Truth with all the strength of her grand young womanhood” (Keathley 1901, 180).³

³ At the same time, differences in class position, geographic origin and general outlooks on life—often filtered through the Normal-Industrial curricular divide—fostered difference and at times tensions. The school had a Normal department, which provided training in pedagogy, a Commercial department for stenography, typing and bookkeeping, and a Domestic Science department, for instruction in subjects like cooking, sewing, home nursing and basic home economy, as well as special instruction in vocal culture, physical culture, and industrial arts like architectural and artistic drawing, wood carving, working with clay, and decorative arts. While teaching was viewed as a professional path, Commercial department offerings were described in an early course catalogue as “intended especially for those women who are thrown upon their own resources, but who do not care to teach” (The State Normal and Industrial College 1897, 22). These types of differences in tone characterized writing and addresses about the various fields of study.

Learning to project a future for the self was an important part of this process. Commencement sermons and speeches encouraged students to imagine their future “lifework”—the range of waged and unwaged work and activity they might undertake across their lifespan.⁴ Class prophecies written by a student from the graduating class conjured images—varyingly realistic, humorous, and aspirational—of future selves to contemplate. “Women at Work” columns and student fiction in the *State Normal Magazine* imagined a field of possibilities for careers, further education and the hoped-for balance between work and romance. Regular reports from students who had graduated—their employment, marriages, travel and other activities—provided further fodder for students' imaginations.⁵

Protestant Christianity was a particularly important influence. While the Normal was founded and funded by the state of North Carolina, broke the monopoly of church-affiliated women's institutions, and accepted students from any religious background, the early social world of the college was hardly secular (Leloudis 1996; Dean 1995). It was, more accurately, non-sectarian, and increasingly networked into a cosmopolitan Protestant milieu, engaged in projects of cultivating the universal and secular out of a liberal Protestant sensibility (Bender 2019, 786).⁶ Because of this, common ideas about students' lifework shared many of the same

⁴ The term “lifework” was used to make general reference what students might do in the future. The flexibility of the term was useful for encompassing a range of activities, because it was assumed most women would not dedicate themselves to a single form of work for most of their lives. For example, they might engage in paid employment for some period, marry and become homemakers, seek out volunteer work to fill their time when their children get older, and possibly need or want to return to waged work again later in life.

⁵ At the same time, rural farm life was increasingly portrayed as backward and alienating—the kind of life where, as she grew older, a woman would come to feel trapped, left behind and forgotten by the rest of the world. Student fiction periodically incorporated the theme of older uneducated women living in rural areas who expressed sadness and regret about their inability to access education when they were younger.

⁶ The *State Normal Magazine* documents regular on-campus religious services, extensive Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) program offerings and regular speaking engagements for ministers. McIver was typically present at campus-wide meetings inflected with religious themes, and his favorite Biblical passages were known by students (Dean 1995).

features that Weber ([1930] 1996) described among historical Protestant sects, including the duty to labor in a “calling” and anxiety about success and failure as signs bearing existential significance.

The Morality of Student Futures

What students decided to do in their future lives was imagined to have moral force in society.⁷ Many of these moral concerns were grounded in gender norms. Because women were responsible for maintaining homes, raising children and other forms of formal and informal social activity, their attitudes and everyday activities were perceived as bellwethers for and drivers of general societal health and progress.⁸ More women entering paid employment presented moral opportunities and threats. At the same time, by becoming highly educated people in a state undergoing projects of economic and political modernization, students had special responsibilities to contribute to state and societal development by adopting an ethic of personal and social improvement and molding others in their sphere of influence to do the same.

In effect, discourse about student futures provided both explicit and implicit “moral causation accounts” (Abend 2014, 4), in which the lifework decisions of individual women were projected to have broad consequences at all levels of social life. It was generally agreed that in the face of contemporary conditions, students had both the material need and the ethical duty to

⁷ As an example of this sentiment, a *State Normal Magazine* segment reported the 1898 visit of J.L.M. Curry, former Alabama legislator and Confederate soldier, who was serving as agent of the Peabody and Slater funds to support education reform in the South. The segment recounted Curry’s words to a student audience and offered editorial commentary: “‘What are you here for, and what are you going to make of yourselves?’ These were the questions he asked of the large assembly of Normal students. On the answer to these questions depends much of the present and future usefulness of this institution and of its students” (“Dr. Curry’s Recent Visit” 1898, 206).

⁸ Some examples of the association between women and morality expressed in this case: In his address to the class of 1897, Walter H. Page contended that “Society depends more upon the culture and influence of gracious womanhood than on any power of man” (1897, 90). In an address to the Southern Educational Conference in 1901, McIver argued that “The ideals of our civilization come from our homes. Need it be asked who make our homes, who develop the ideals, who determine their intellectual and moral atmosphere? The wife and mother is the priestess in humanity’s temple and presides at the fountain head of civilization” (1902, 21).

engage in public-facing forms of work and activity, and that each individual was responsible for discovering and following their own path. But assumptions, understandings and cultural logics underlying these broad agreements—including interpretations of socioeconomic reality, ideas about how to find the right form of work and notions of “choice”—varied.

To develop an understanding of the moral evaluations of student futures and the forms of “vocational reasoning”—ways of thinking and making decisions about work and career—circulating at the Normal at the turn of the twentieth century, I will utilize Abend’s (2014) two-level conceptual framework for the empirical investigation of morality. Empirically, I seek to document variations in moral evaluations of students’ lifework in public-facing discourse—what Abend calls “first-order” normativity—as well as the shared assumptions, understandings, concepts and forms of reasoning that enabled them, which he refers to as the “moral background.” Theoretically, I intend to demonstrate the application of Abend’s framework in a more limited geographical scope and timeframe, characterized by rapid socioeconomic change. Overall, I find that Abend’s framework is valuable for understanding the workings of morality in generating worker subjectivities through patterns of vocational reasoning. I conclude with some reflections about conceptualization of the moral background, and suggestions for future research into historical and contemporary manifestations of the work ethic.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Morality of Vocational Reasoning

Vocational reasoning—a term that I employ to describe how individuals and groups think and make decisions about work and career—is an important process through which people become workers in a capitalist society. Contemporarily, it involves visible actions like planning and carrying out employment searches, engaging in forms of work-based self-assessment and seeking career advice, as well as less visible activities like thinking, imagining and theorizing about the world of work individually or with others. Morality is an important aspect of this process, with moral beliefs and judgments and normative institutions and practices playing a role in how work is organized socially, and how individuals and groups evaluate and decide amongst available employment options and shape their occupational paths over time.

The dominant moral principle shaping vocational reasoning in the Anglophone Global North is the “work ethic,” or the “complex of shifting claims, ideals, and values” that uphold the social value of work and the promise of self-realization through employment (Weeks 2009, 38). According to Weber ([1930] 1996), the individualized compulsion to engage in rationalized labor characteristic of life in many modern capitalist societies originated in the religious beliefs and practices of Protestant sects in Europe and North America. Sustained activity in a “calling,” ordained by God and mediated through man, was a method for assuaging spiritual anxiety about the fate of the one’s eternal salvation. Disenchanted through its imbrication with the economic logic of capitalism (Weber [1930] 1996), a secularized morality of work remained.⁹ It continued

⁹ At the same time, Goldman (1988) emphasizes that Weber’s “vocation” concept indicated the possibility of the re-enchantment of work by resuscitating the Protestant ethic through an individual’s dedication to an ideal or “god” associated with a value sphere. Uneven processes of disenchantment and re-enchantment, then, are involved

to shape labor market norms and cultural beliefs and practices, manifesting variably across transitions in global capitalism (i.e. industrial, post-industrial, Fordist, post-Fordist) and according to an individual's location in the division of labor and hierarchies of class, gender and race (Farrugia 2021, 2019; Weeks 2009; Rodgers 1979). Individuals and groups may exercise a level of control in shaping their own engagement with work by imbuing it with vocational meaning (Weber [1946] 1958a, [1946] 1958b) and/or placing expectations and demands upon employers and industries (Boltanski and Chiapello [1999] 2005; Rodgers 1979), but for most people, the need to work for a wage is assumed. For this reason, studies of vocational reasoning tend to take the work ethic and the normativity of the "work society" (Weeks 2009) as given, implicitly or explicitly. Within these conditions, they focus on how people navigate career paths by prioritizing "work values" or work-based cultural schemas, which serve as individualized moral guideposts in making employment decisions.

Studies in vocational psychology, organizational behavior studies and management and administration examine individuals' attachment to discrete and measurable "work values," defined as "...intrinsic, enduring perspectives of what is fundamentally right or wrong" in the context of work (Judge and Bretz 1992, 261). All individuals adhere to a range of these values which they variably prioritize in making employment decisions. Some values may be more prevalent among people in particular occupational fields (Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins 2006; Karl and Sutton 1998) and they may manifest distinctly across demographics (DeHart-Davis, Marlow and Pandey 2006). Sociological studies have also examined work values, but with more emphasis on variation over time (Kalleberg and Marsden 2013); variations across race, gender

in the work ethic, vocation and affiliated concepts, all of which grapple with how to conceive of the relationship between individuals, work and society.

and class identities (Benditt 2015; Kalleberg and Marsden 2013; Hitlin and Piliavin 2004); and the effects of family origin and youth socialization on their development (Benditt 2015; Johnson and Mortimer 2011; Johnson 2002).

Others have examined vocational reasoning through cultural schemas like “passion,” “calling,” “vocation,” and “achievement,” which individuals draw upon to project career futures, make employment decisions and narrate career paths (Cech 2021; Farrugia 2021, 2019; James 2017; Bunderson and Thompson 2009; Bellah et al. [1985] 2008).¹⁰ These schemas, like work values, contain moral judgments about what is good, desirable and just in employment and what people should aspire to or seek in their work, both for the benefit of themselves and for society.

¹¹ Investment in these schemas is interpreted with relation to large-scale socioeconomic and cultural patterns like neoliberalism and individualism, as well as expectations and behaviors shaped by class identity.¹²

¹⁰ Most studies of cultural schemas describe secular ideals and concepts, but religious belief still shapes vocational reasoning patterns among some (Riley 2022; High 2019). Some studies in vocational psychology and counseling also examine calling and vocation as “constructs,” particularly as they can be positively applied to career development to enhance individuals’ experience of meaning and enjoyment in work (Dik and Duffy 2009; Duffy and Sedlacek 2007; Hall and Chandler 2005).

¹¹ Farrugia (2021, 2019) and James (2017) interpret the cultural schemas they identify as descendants of and variations on the work ethic, and James further highlights descent from the Protestant ethic described by Weber. Farrugia argues that contemporary passion and achievement schemas are respective variations of the post-Fordist/post-industrial and Fordist/industrial work ethics described by Weeks (2009), while James argues that contemporary “passion” is a descendant of more traditional ideals of “vocation” infused with desires for the expression of “authenticity.” Cech (2021), on the other hand, argues that neoliberal-era “passion” is distinctive for its emphasis on individualized self-expression. While acknowledging that these schemas can be distinguished from each other and that their prevalence varies across individuals and groups, I would agree with the assessment that they are all encompassed by the broad moral prescriptions and underlying cultural logics of the work ethic.

¹² Individualizing frames of analysis contextualized within macro socioeconomic trends reflect modernization theories, which posit that as traditional lifeways have fragmented and receded in the past two centuries, “reflexive projects of the self” have become a central organizing principle in modern life, grounded in expanded lifestyle options and opportunities/demands for individual “choice” (Schwarz 2018; Giddens 1991:5), which are shaped by class-, gender- and race-based hierarchies of access and exposure (Schwarz 2018; Bourdieu [1979] 1984).

In the cultural schemas approach, there has been interest in addressing the kinds of underlying assumptions, understandings and shared concepts about the nature of the world and society that inform investments in work-based ideals and shape individuals' self-concepts as actual or potential workers. Discussing the grounds for his interviewees' investment in ideals of "passion" and "achievement," for example, Farrugia (2021, 91) observes that "projects of self-realization" are encouraged by the "intertwining [of] personal worth and the capacity for economic productivity" characteristic of post-Fordist capitalism. Cech (2021) notes that many college students explain their investment in "passion" in terms of the desire to avoid self-alienation, which they expect to occur in the modern workplace. Individuals' moral evaluations about career, then, are inseparable from their broader basic understandings and concepts of social, economic and cultural life—understandings and concepts which are not necessarily "moral" in and of themselves.

As Abend (2014, 66) argues, analyzing the grounding arguments and shared assumptions, concepts and cultural logics involved in moral evaluations are important for understanding how morality works, because they shape the kinds of moral concepts that are available and the types of claims and judgments that can reasonably be made and accepted by others. In other words, they constitute enabling conditions for moral beliefs, opinions, judgments and behaviors. However, generally they are not systematically examined in studies of vocational reasoning. Incorporating Abend's "moral background" into the analysis of how people think about work and make career decisions, both as individuals and as participants in groups or networks, would address an underexamined component of how morality operates in this key process for generating, maintaining and transforming worker subjectivities.

Abend's Moral Background Framework

In response to a renewed interest in the study of morality across scientific, social scientific and humanistic fields of scholarship, Abend (2014) introduced a conceptual framework for the empirical investigation of morality in social life.¹³ Through the study of a range of archival materials produced by nineteenth and twentieth century business ethicists, he develops and demonstrates its application. He differentiates between two “levels” of morality. First-order morality encompasses publicly expressed beliefs and prescriptions “about what is right, good, permissible, obligatory, admirable, etc.,” as well as what moral behaviors are understood to exist and how they are distributed across a population (2014, 30).

He distinguishes first-order morality from second-order morality, or “the moral background.” The moral background encompasses those “para-moral” (2014, 17) cultural concepts and everyday theories and logics that underlie and support first-order morality. Examining the moral background is important for understanding how morality works because it shapes the kinds of moral concepts that people recognize to exist, the types of moral arguments that can be made and accepted, and the entities—people, institutions, concepts, phenomena—that can be considered moral agents or actors. Like first-order morality, the moral background can be investigated empirically to identify patterns of similarity and variation across individuals and groups. It includes, at minimum, a) the groundings or reasons used to explain why something is moral and why a person, institution or practice should be moral, b) the conceptual repertoire drawn upon in moral arguments, c) what objects can be subjected to moral evaluation, d) methods of argumentation and forms of evidence employed, e) whether or not morality is

¹³ See Hitlin and Vaisey (2013) for additional context.

considered to be an objective fact, and f) the metaphysics underlying moral and immoral things, people and actions (2014, 33).

Abend argues that a large portion of research in social science restricts its investigations to the level of first-order morality. While this is important for providing accounts of what social actors think, believe, value and do, “if we limit our empirical analyses to the level of first-order morality, we are missing not only this level’s conditions of possibility, but also one important kind of variation” (2014, 65). In the case of historical business ethicists, for example, the “Christian Merchant” and the “Standards of Practice” types shared similar first-order normative prescriptions—that businesspeople and business should be ethical and act ethically—but the moral backgrounds characteristic of each type differed dramatically. This approach can be applied to the study of vocational reasoning to clarify how it works as a multifaceted moral phenomenon that relies upon a range of background elements to generate first-order normative accounts and shape worker subjectivities.

The Present Study

As Abend’s study of business ethicists demonstrates, historical cases focused on social groups are especially valuable venues for studying the moral background, because it is “...the product of social and historical processes” experienced and shared among groups of people (2014, 66). In this case, I examine moralized patterns of vocational reasoning at a foundational historical moment in which many individuals in the United States, and particularly the agricultural rural South, were seeking regular forms of waged employment for the first time. This was also a period in which contemporary styles of vocational psychology and counseling were in formation and becoming standardized through the efforts of philanthropic, civic and educational institutions across the nation (Lent and Brown 2020; Brewer 1942).

The North Carolina State Normal and Industrial College was an important site for the development of vocational reasoning patterns among a wide swathe of the white female population. Like many similar institutions founded in this period, it introduced a generation of women of rural and middle- and lower-class backgrounds to new ways of thinking about futures of work and career (Ogren 2005). Alumnae of the institution also brought these modes of thought and practice with them to their efforts teaching in public schools, raising children, volunteering and working in business. In analyzing this case, I identify and examine patterns of similarity and variation in Abend's two levels of morality, with special focus on the moral background.

In terms of first-order morality, I document normative beliefs about students' lifework options circulating in speeches and print. What was the proper way for a student to determine their future lifework? What types of work were promoted as good and valuable? Which were viewed with suspicion? Which social actors tended to hold which kinds of opinions? Furthermore, what did students tend to do after graduation? Regarding the moral background, I examine concepts and understandings that enabled first-order judgments and prescriptions with special focus on Abend's background components of metaphysics, grounding, methods of argument and forms of evidence, along with some consideration of conceptual repertoires. I also consider the ways in which Normal students were and were not constituted as decision-makers in relation to their futures. Was a lifework something that was imposed, given, chosen or something in-between? This discussion draws upon Schwarz (2018) and Abend's (2018) prescriptions for investigating the ascription of choice and use of choice practices. Overall, this analysis demonstrates how students were encouraged to articulate plans for future lifework in tandem with larger moral forces like God, the state and the labor market.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

This study was conducted through a critical content analysis of archival data held at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro University Archives. My analysis incorporated published and manuscript documents from three sources: the President Charles Duncan McIver Records, the *State Normal Magazine* and *Alumnae News*. I accessed these sources digitally through the University Archives website. The materials I examined covered the years from approximately 1890 to 1920.

Case Selection

The North Carolina State Normal and Industrial School, later College, for Women was founded in 1892 to offer low-cost courses of vocational study to the state's young white women. It offered teacher training for public school service, as well as courses in stenography and industrial and domestic arts to prepare students for employment in a limited number of occupations and for skilled homemaking. The women who attended the institution in the first decades of its existence (approximately 1892-1920) comprised a first generation of white female North Carolinians receiving higher education, with many coming from rural farming households. Similar institutions were established throughout the United States beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, extending higher education to young women from rural families and non-elite class backgrounds and preparing them to enter employment (Ogren 2005).

Attending the Normal precipitated a major shift in life plans and expectations from those typical of prior generations, and for this reason, the school presented a valuable location for examining the ways that young women were socialized to envision and anticipate their futures, what kinds of activity they were encouraged to undertake and how they were imagined and portrayed as potential workers. The Normal also quickly became a nexus for educational and

social reformers. They shared ideas with students about what they could and should do in life which were both reflective of contemporary cultural norms and which influenced students' perceptions of themselves and their possibilities.

Articles, essays and speeches printed in institutional publications documented this range of communications. These operated as forms of “public moral normativity,” which Abend describes as “public facts” that “can best be observed in socially prominent and prestigious loci, which is where normative standards are set” (2014, 21). Speeches by Normal founder Charles McIver also served as a valuable reference point for contextualizing messages directed at students. These materials presented the opportunity to examine vocational reasoning and the moralized generation of worker subjectivities in terms of a “formation story,” which Hirschman and Reed (2014, 268) describe as an “explanatory [account] of how social kinds are shaped, reshaped, or brought into being,” focusing on “the nonfixedness of social entities, the eventfulness of social life, the emergence of social entities from processes of assemblage, and the dependence of such assemblage and nonfixedness on representation.” They documented the ways in which students were constituted as future career-seekers and workers as they anticipated entering waged employment with the knowledge that their future lifework may need to be malleable and responsive to a range of personal and socioeconomic conditions.

The characteristics of this case also presented a productive contrast with Abend’s study of historical business ethicists. Where Abend analyzed multiple types of archival materials across a broad range of time—the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—and across a relatively wide geographic span centered in New England but inclusive of other locations, this study applied his approach to materials directed at the same general audience, in a single location, within a narrow time frame of approximately twenty-five years characterized by major

socioeconomic change. This facilitated a close examination of moral messages exchanged in a narrow sphere of action.

Data Collection

To gather vocational discourse directed at students, I examined the *State Normal Magazine*, select issues of *Alumnae News* and a selection of Charles McIver's speech drafts. My primary source was the *State Normal Magazine*. This publication was produced by a board of student editors, elected by members of the two literary societies on campus, and faculty advisors. It contained essays, fiction and poetry by students, alumnae, faculty and guest writers; speech reprints from visitors, faculty and students; and campus news columns and editorials. Speeches were printed in full form, fragments and summaries from text submitted directly by speakers as well as text recorded by Normal students studying stenography.

I examined 54 issues of the *State Normal Magazine* in their entirety. These magazines were issued on a quarterly basis beginning in June 1897, and I reviewed all issues to March 1910. At this point the direction of the magazine shifted its focus to literary contributions.¹⁴ For each magazine issue, I uploaded a copy of the digital file to ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software, where I read the text, took notes, and assigned descriptive codes to the digital file, so that I would be able to easily locate keywords later. When I began the project, I inductively generated many codes, which gradually became more focused as I progressed through magazine issues. I continued to review issues released after March 1910, but I adopted a strategy of targeted skimming based on what I knew about the magazine's format.

¹⁴ This shift would result in a split between the *Magazine* and *Alumnae News* in 1912, followed by another division in 1919 between the *Magazine*, which became *Coraddi*, a literary and arts publication, and *The Carolinian*, which became the student newspaper.

I followed a similar procedure for reviewing three collections of Charles McIver's speech notes and drafts. I read through the digital files of handwritten and typed documents, taking notes and uploading items of special interest to ATLAS.ti. As with the *Magazine*, I initially uploaded all documents for more extensive coding, but as I reached a saturation point of repeated topics and themes, I introduced codes more selectively.¹⁵ Additionally, I selectively reviewed issues of *Alumnae News* which were short newspaper-style publications of 6 to 8 pages released between three and five times per year beginning in 1912 by the Normal's Alumnae Association. I gained a sense of common topics being discussed by alumnae, and I also utilized it to search for more information about events referenced in the *State Normal Magazine*. To check for additional materials of interest, like commencement speeches not published in the magazine, I consulted with university archivists.

Studying these materials enabled me to inductively build an understanding of social and cultural life on campus, and to connect the Normal to other groups and institutions across the state, country and globe. I was also able to observe shifts in formats and trends in themes, all of which were valuable for contextualizing and interpreting moral discourse about student futures. For example, one major shift was from a high volume of external contributors in earlier issues to a predominance of student contributions by the late 1900s, which reflected the increasing education levels of incoming students and accumulated publishing experience. I framed and supplemented my interpretations with prior analyses by historians, particularly James L. Leloudis' *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920*, which recounted the trajectory of McIver's education reform project, and Pamela Dean's

¹⁵ Research by both Leloudis (1996) and Dean (1995) confirm that McIver was prone to repeating the same messages in speeches and essays—his focus never strayed far from the reforms for which he was advocating.

dissertation “Covert Curriculum: Class, Gender, and Student Culture at a New South Woman’s College, 1892-1910,” which examined campus life and socialization in the early years of the Normal.

Thematic Categorization

Between these sources, I identified an ongoing phenomenon of interest; namely, instances where people spoke to the student body about their futures, discussing topics like employment options, the important contributions they could make in society, and the social responsibilities they had as educated women. These kinds of discourses primarily appeared in speeches or essays, but they also appeared in poems, fiction and editorials. I identified two broad categories of these materials which were sufficiently distinct in their thematic orientations and normative recommendations to form two groups of texts: 1) addresses by Protestant ministers and appeals by a variety of actors to take up some form of service-based work (teaching, educated mothering, community work, missionary work, etc.), and 2) and addresses that discussed important considerations and best practices for selecting a career.

With these two categories established, I proceeded to re-read these texts, carrying out thematic analysis. I analyzed seven commencement sermons and two shorter speeches by Protestant ministers to identify patterns of similarity in the moral arguments of Christian vocational reasoning. This included ministers’ descriptions of finding a calling. Along with these, I selected texts which presented the range of typical recommendations oriented toward “service.” This included speeches discussing the teaching profession, women’s duties as citizens, the responsibilities of the “college woman” and the lives of moral exemplars like social reformer and philanthropist Dorothea Dix and Red Cross founder Clara Barton. It also incorporated some materials from McIver’s speech notes. Messages advocating the calling of service hewed closely

to ministers' in terms of metaphysical assumptions, conceptual repertoires and forms of argument and evidence. This was not unusual considering the high level of religious activity at the institution and Protestant affiliation among actors in its network. I denoted this the "spirit of service" pattern of vocational reasoning.

Materials representative of the second category were much less common. I analyzed three texts that adopted this perspective in a more extensive, developed form—an article by a U.S. Labor Bureau representative, a speech by a female medical college professor and an essay by an alumna about careers in stenography. These constituted students as career decision-makers facing a wider range of employment options and modeled for them a series of practices that would facilitate making a good decision. I called this the "labor market decider" pattern. While less common in a full speech or essay form, components of this pattern did appear across other institutional materials, including the "Women at Work" column in the *State Normal Magazine*. While the spirit of service and labor market decider patterns shared some overlap, their characteristic objects of moral evaluation, modes of argumentation and preferred forms of evidence warranted a distinction.

Beyond in-category analysis, I compared their respective first-order and moral background elements to better identify variations between them. This enabled me to put them into dialogue and to theorize about potential changes in outlook and practice in the morality of vocational reasoning emerging at this time. This also presented an opportunity to observe interactions within and between Abend's two levels of morality, to generate comparisons with his outcomes that would facilitate further exploration of the conceptual framework.

Limitations

Due to limitations of time and access, this study examined digitized public-facing discourse, and primarily material which was deemed acceptable for printing and dissemination in institutional publications. While, following Abend's reasoning, these do serve as "publicly valid accounts or representations," examining solely these kinds of materials introduced bias in the representation of existing forms of vocational reasoning and moral evaluations of them (2014, 4). In early years, for example, magazine editors were conscious of seeking to placate the Normal's detractors, who had opposed the use of public funds to establish the institution. There was also evidence that the *State Normal Magazine* had ambitions to reach beyond student and alumnae audiences to become a statewide journal of prominence. Both conditions impacted the kinds of items that were published. For these reasons, certain perspectives were likely overrepresented in these materials, while others were underrepresented or absent.¹⁶

Additionally, this study only addressed the case of the State Normal and Industrial College, and the body of students that it served—white women of principally rural and semi-urban middle class origin. It did not engage in an investigation of other higher education students in North Carolina, nor in study of the various kinds of actors who shared these messages and how they communicated about this topic with various audiences. Where possible, attempts have been

¹⁶ There were a small number of pieces that offered perspectives and arguments that differed dramatically from what was typically published. A particularly notable example was an article by industrial arts professor Mrs. A.R. Phillips (1904, 180), which criticized the most popular forms of professional work that students trained for at the Normal—teaching and stenography—arguing that both paid poorly in comparison with cost of living in any location, and that they took students away from their families and from the more healthful working conditions on farms. She advised students that raising poultry was a more amenable option for Normal students, many of whom were still connected to life on rural farm homesteads. She also ridiculed the concept of the "calling" as it was typically deployed: "As all men are not 'called' to teach, to preach, to plead at the bar, to heal the sick; so all women are not called to teach, to write Short-hand, to measure ribbons and laces, to make gowns and millinery, or even to take boarders. They can not all become experts in the few callings allotted to women in that great book of the 'Unwritten Law'." Unlike the majority of recommendations for future employment which pulled students toward professional work in urban and semi-urban locales, Phillips advocated for the value of maintaining rural farm life.

made to identify key characteristics about actors involved in the case and the way these might relate to their expressed opinions and understandings. I have also sought to maintain awareness of the broader relations in which the Normal and affiliated actors were embedded and from which they articulated their visions, though an extended analysis of these with relation to the case was not feasible. These included a growing division between rural and urban life, a national spread of Progressive Era ideas and practices, and the alignment of education reformers with business interests and white supremacist and imperialist political currents in this time.¹⁷

¹⁷ For example, a condition of the Normal's continued support by the North Carolina legislature was the alignment of its founder and supporters with Democratic politicians (including state governor Charles Brantley Aycock) pursuing the oppression and disenfranchisement of African-Americans (Leloudis 1996).

CHAPTER IV: THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE

Finding the Calling: First-Order Morality

In his baccalaureate sermon to the class of 1899, Rev. Dr. J.O. Rust, a Baptist minister from Nashville, Tennessee, implored graduating students: “Oh, woman, if you would find your mission and fulfill it learn your calling of God. He made you, and He alone knows what you were made for” (1899, 497). Rust’s prescription to find a calling was echoed in both religious and secular forms by a range of actors at the Normal, including other ministers, political figures, education reformers, faculty, students and alumnae. Various descriptions of a “calling,” “mission,” “purpose,” “organizing principle,” “aim,” “passion,” “ideal” or “life plan,” it was the form of lifework that students were encouraged to find—something worth dedicating their mind, body and energies to.¹⁸

Finding a calling was portrayed as a profoundly individualized experience, something that could not be predicted or prescribed by anyone else. It involved a “coming to self,” which signaled both self-awareness as well as recognition of one’s place in the world (Hathaway 1919, 170). It could extend into an ongoing process over the lifetime. According to one anonymous *State Normal Magazine* editorial, “Each individual has a God given plan, which he must work out in his life. Not with some other individual as his model, but only the perfect plan of his personality. Life is education, hence it is ‘the working out of the design of a human being into character’” (“Individuality” 1898, 202). For ministers, finding a calling required “getting right with God” and having faith in God’s presence in each one of life’s activities (White 1908, 159). It was about achieving

¹⁸ For clarity and consistency and its connection to Weber’s concept, I will use the term “calling,” but “purpose” was possibly used with more frequency.

...the fullest and the freest, the most intense, the most earnest and the most sustained application of every gift of mind and body and the utilization of every opportunity in life for His glory and for the advancement of that purpose which appeals to us in our best states as being that for which we ought to devote our energies. (Sigmund 1909, 164)

In this vision, only the individual could truly determine what this “purpose” could be.

Finding a calling was also imagined as responding to a “call” coming from somewhere beyond the self that sought the skills, faculties and knowledge that the individual could uniquely offer. This might entail beginning “to show what you are and what you’ve gained in a sympathetic life lived in the nearest surroundings which present themselves” (Rondthaler 1901, 258) or taking part in “the upbuilding of man...the strengthening of society, and...the sweetening of the lives of those with whom you come in contact...” (Parkhurst 1901, 239). The flexibility of complementary interpretations in the face of concrete conditions—limited employment prospects for women, women’s close association with the moral health of society—facilitated a range of prescriptions about Normal students’ future lifework, which became increasingly abstracted over time. What they shared was a general sense that the calling was not quite something that the individual “chose”—it was rather something that, in various ways, chose them.

In the 1890s and 1900s, teaching was the form of work most frequently recommended for students at the Normal as an ideal calling. This was almost guaranteed because the institution’s existence was predicated on the mission of training teachers. Its legislative charter, curriculum structure and tuition incentives for teacher trainees consciously directed students to follow this career path, as did formal and informal social pressures.¹⁹ Actors based at or visiting the Normal

¹⁹ Students were aware that McIver, for example, preferred that students become teachers rather than follow other career paths. Emily Semple Austin, a Normal stenography graduate who served as McIver’s stenographer for some years, recounted in her memorial to him after his death that, “The greatest ambition of his life was to send into the educational field well trained teachers, fully realizing the vast need for them, but when a young woman contemplated preparing herself for a stenographer’s position and he could not persuade her otherwise, he always advised her to secure a good educational foundation and then prepare for the work of Stenography” (Austin and Banner 1906, 138).

offered ongoing encouragement about the value and importance of becoming a teacher—statements which sought to bolster the institution’s aims and spread enthusiasm about the work students were being prepared to do. Visiting the Normal on the way to the Conference for Education in the South, Hampton Institute president Dr. Hollis Burke Frissell told students, “I think there is no school so important as a normal school, and I want to congratulate the young ladies who are gathered here because of the high and holy calling that is theirs” (1901, 240). Students described their future teaching work as a “duty to the state”—something that they had an obligation to do (Donnelly 1897, 44). Unsurprisingly, teaching is what many Normal graduates did, at least for some period of their lives.

However, due to a combination of factors, including low teacher pay and marriage patterns, as well as new course offerings and the increasing education levels of the student body, prescriptions for other callings quickly appeared, among them the educated mother, the citizen, the nurse, the missionary, the women’s club volunteer and the philanthropist, all of whom were projected onto the encompassing figure of the “college woman,” whose specialized training and charismatic power conferred upon her a generalized duty to help all and any others for the sake of humanity’s progress. As alumna Mary Faison DeVane phrased it: “Wherever you are in society, or in the professions, you are to be depended upon to help all the causes that help others. It is a waste of time for me to enumerate the causes that need you now. You know them” (1909, 171).²⁰ Second Normal president Julius I. Foust spoke in similarly broad terms to the class of

²⁰ “Causes” adopted by organizations or actively discussed by students and alumnae included: education reform, schoolhouse improvement, documenting North Carolina history, animal welfare and environmentalism (Audubon Society activism against hunting birds for their feathers and for establishing wildlife reserves), child labor, consumer activism, orphanages, advocacy for women’s rights abroad, and women’s suffrage. An increasingly globalizing concept of the call to service was spurred on by the Normal’s imbrication in regional and national religious, higher education and progressive social reform networks. The YWCA, for example, counted most students and some faculty among its members (Dean 1995). While all members were not equally active, the organization had a vocal presence, publishing updates about its activities in the magazine and assisting with fundraising. Students

1909, stating that “The other thought that I wish to leave with you is that your college would have you to transform these ideals into unselfish service. Noble purposes do not accomplish much in this world unless these purposes are wrought out in life, and, hence, this institution has always striven to develop on the part of its students a spirit of service” (Foust 1909, 194). From this perspective, any form of lifework would do, as long as it was dedicated to the “spirit of service.”

While actors at the Normal championed a range of callings defined by the spirit of service, other forms of work were discouraged. Indeed, by undertaking the wrong lifework, it was possible to “miss” one’s calling entirely. Rev. Rust described the phenomenon in stark terms:

It is sad for any of us to miss his calling in life, saddest of all for woman; sad because she goes on with the unnatural work so courageously, cheerfully and successfully. All honor to our fair women who do well what they have to do in order to get along in a world that is perpetually making them do what they ought not to have to do. I do not blame the women, but the world. To-day many a dear girl is playing ‘Home, Sweet Home’ on a typewriter, when she ought to be executing that divine music in some cozy cot all her own and his. Many women with no hope of this life are hearing with wistful ears dusty looms sing of ‘A Land That Is Fairer Than This’; and many more with bleeding fingers are rubbing all the music that they hear out of the hard surface of a wash-board; and some kneel perpetually at the menial altar of a scrubbing brush and gaze at the dim pictures of distant bliss reflected on the surface of hard floors polished with their tears. I am coming to believe that, for every woman who is forced to do what she ought not to do, there is some rascal of a man who persists in being what he ought not to be. (1899, 503)

Work undertaken solely for a wage was particularly suspect, whether it was done out of material need as in the case of Rust’s mill girl, or with the aim of obtaining a stable income and personal savings like the typist. The general sentiment at the Normal was that “When money thus gains

attended regional and national YWCA conferences, and the organization facilitated the visits of missionaries and religious dignitaries from East Asia. Some graduates and former students became missionaries abroad. The Normal also hosted a Brazilian exchange student for a few years.

predominance over a man's heart and soul, it draws him away from all the ties that bind him to an ennobling career..." (Berry 1897, 48).²¹

The Moral Background of the Call to Service

To understand the morality of the spirit of service calling ideal, it is necessary to examine the background categories that operated as its conditions of possibility. In the spirit of service pattern of vocational reasoning, similar to Abend's Christian Merchant business ethicist, individual motives in pursuing a calling were primary objects of moral evaluation. Ministers, for example, emphasized the need for faith, simplicity, consistency and the purity of high ideals (Paxton 1907) and educators advised optimism, joy, "inspiration" and "clear vision" (Corson 1906; Hathaway 1919, 170). This "ethic of being" (Abend 2014, 282) as a guide for action was grounded in a metaphysical landscape derived from Protestant Christianity, in which proper attitudes were required for an individual to access their calling from a higher power.²² It also entailed certain methods of argumentation and forms of evidence, which lent themselves to the illustration of right motives necessary for solving pressing social problems—first in North Carolina, but extending to the rest of the nation and world.

²¹ In this same speech, "The Jingle of the Guinea," Berry—a graduating Normal student—equated mine workers and businessmen as equally driven in their work by greed. This implied that like a businessman or corporation head, an individual worker could also be driven by avarice.

²² Abend describes an "ethic of being" as being most concerned with "what to be" in life, and contrasts this with an "ethic of doing," which focuses on "what to do," typically in specific contexts or conditions (2014, 282). While the two overlap in practice, in the spirit of service pattern, being a certain kind of person or aspiring to righteous motives were described as a necessary condition for discovering the right things to do in the form of lifework. Of course, "doing" some form of service work was idealized, but it was possible to service without the proper internal motivations. Rev. Rust, for example, describes unmotivated wives and mothers who "...do not bring to the high calling of wife and mother a ripe intelligence and the holy purpose to build a home according to the specifications of the divine architect and to lift life up to the divine ideals" (1899, 504). Arnette Hathaway, distinguishing between uninspired and inspired teachers, observes that: "Every year a host of prospective teachers near the field of the teaching profession. Each of them has a reason or reasons for being found in the walk of life; but all of them have not come to themselves [achieved purposeful motives]" (1919, 170). Doing service work without proper ways of being decreased the value of the service.

Grounding the Calling in Religious Metaphysics

According to Abend, the metaphysical dimension of the moral background describes shared “assumptions about being, reality, space or time,” as well as “assumptions about human beings, what they are like, what they are capable of, what they are for, and what is their essence” (2014, 50-51). The concept of the calling derives from a long lineage of Christian thought and practice and establishes specific notions about the nature and purpose of individual and collective human life. In Weber’s ([1930] 1996) analysis, it assumed its modern guise by way of the beliefs and practices of Calvinism and other ascetic Protestant sects. In Calvinist theology,

The world exists to serve the glorification of God and for that purpose alone. The elected Christian is in the world only to increase this glory of God by fulfilling His commandments to the best of his ability. But God requires social achievement of the Christian because he wills that social life shall be organized according to His commandments, in accordance with that purpose. The social activity of the Christian in this world is solely activity *in majorem gloriam Dei*. This character is hence shared shared by labour in a calling which serves the mundane life of the community. ([1930] 1996, 108)

This concept of human life was both teleological and defined by “stewardship”—human beings were not owners of their own “...human powers, faculties, learning, knowledge, bodies, and material goods...,” rather they were their temporary stewards who must make proper use of them in the world (Abend 2014, 336). Because Protestant forms of religious belief and practice were still influential at the Normal, the composite form of the calling circulating at the institution shared these basic features, though typically with more emphasis on the alignment between finding the calling and self-realization. For example, ministers argued that if you had found your calling, you would “...be in league with the greatest powers” (White 1908, 159) and feel “...in harmony...ready for better things” (Paxton 1907, 267).²³

²³ These modes of description emphasizing decontextualized access to higher powers through God (not specifying their application in particular social roles like teaching, being a dutiful daughter or motherhood) may

Rev. Dr. Frederick L. Sigmund's 1909 commencement sermon offered a striking illustration of the metaphysical dynamics of the calling, and the relationship that it established between a higher power, the individual and the society in which they live. Gideon, a leader of the Israelites living for years under the intermittent assaults of enemies, had begun to doubt God as well as his own capacity to help his people:

And yet this man who thus raises the question as to even the presence of Jehovah with his people, was fully prepared for the work to which God was thus calling him. With physical strength, he was beating out the wheat; with clear intellect, he was doing so in the winepress and hiding it from the Midianites, thus adapting himself to circumstances. With ready knowledge he reviews the history of God's people and God's dealings with his people, and discusses the present condition in the light of past history. With moral courage he questions the presence of God with his people, and also the principles according to which alone God could govern or could save his nation. All that this man needed was to become aware of the presence in himself already of the necessary equipment to do the work to which God was calling him; and this illumination of his own mind, this inspiration of his will, this quickening of his imagination to see and understand was to come to him through the declaration of God himself, 'Have I not sent thee: am I not present with thee? Am I not the One, who, coming from heaven, is both revealing new strength to thyself and opening up to thee the work which God now calls thee to do?' (1909, 159)

Despite his doubt, Gideon *already* possessed the necessary capacities to fulfill God's purpose. All that was required was his recognition of this basic fact, which was enabled by adopting the proper attitudes and motivations—in this case, overcoming his doubt and recommitting to faith in God and self (which were one and the same). Once he had achieved this, he would be capable of total and inspired dedication to the task of saving his people.²⁴

have been more characteristic of ministers' speeches in the later 1900s and into the 1910s. They broadly maintain the ontology of the calling described by Weber, though again, with less overt emphasis on asceticism and self-denial. While finding the calling and accessing its associated higher power does require submission to God, the nature of this submission may carry a more joyful, positive emotional texture.

²⁴ This type of dynamic was also evident in a Calvinist practice of "conversion" in youth, which Goldstein describes as "a transcendent, nearly manic period in which God's plan for one's life would be revealed, setting an individual upon her predestined path toward heaven" (2014, 13).

Secular Adaptation of the Religious Metaphysics of the Calling

The religious metaphysical dynamic of the calling, including its teleological interpretation of human life and its logic of stewardship, was foundational for North Carolina education reformers' conception of the relationship between the state, the individual and their training in public schools, which included higher education institutions like the Normal.

According to Charles McIver's postmillenarian theory of human life, humanity was on an infinite march of generational progress "from savagery to the millennium" (1902, 18).²⁵ Education was the means by which "love" and the "law of the golden rule" would gradually be established as the universal motives for human action.²⁶ Through education the state would supply each citizen with "opportunity"—the opportunity to "...make out of himself the thing that God intended that he should make out of himself."²⁷ This opportunity consisted of the guidance of a trained teacher, who would mold individuals' motives according to civic ideals, and state-funded training for "that work for which the individual was best suited" (McIver 1902, 18-19). Expanding universal public education would deliver to the people of North Carolina "...a more certain means of grace" (Page 1897, 81). By aiding its citizens in discovering and taking up their callings, the state would inspire ambitions to higher ideals and ensure the even development of its greatest natural

²⁵ These types of metaphysical visions projecting the ongoing perfection of life on earth were widely shared by mainline North American Protestants in this period (Friedman 2021).

²⁶ Charles McIver, "Who Shall We Call to Teach?", speech draft, undated, image 85-86 of 172, President Charles Duncan McIver Records, Box 9: Diaries, Autobiographical material, etc., 1884-1906, Folder 7: Speeches 1890s, n.d., University Archives, University of North Carolina Greensboro, https://gateway.uncg.edu/islandora/object/ua%3A278440?islandora_paged_content_page=085.

²⁷ [Charles Brantley Aycock?], speech draft, undated, image 11 of 166, President Charles Duncan McIver Records, Box 9: Diaries, Autobiographical material, etc., 1884-1906, Folder 6: Speeches 1890s, 1901, 1904, n.d., University Archives, University of North Carolina Greensboro, https://gateway.uncg.edu/islandora/object/ua%3A278273?islandora_paged_content_page=011. The term "opportunity" (as well as "chance") was also used by ministers to refer to signs of God's grace, in the form of serendipitous invitations to action that were associated with growth and success.

resource—its people—because “The right training of men is a better thing than the bounty of Nature itself. Nature alone never made prosperous States” (Page 1902, 205).

This metaphysical exchange of gifts, debts and duties had concrete implications for Normal students. First, it gave educated people like them the obligation to take a leading role in the political and economic development of the state by molding the motives of others—students and fellow citizens. The early imperative to become teachers, for example, was articulated through the understanding that the state and its people, through their taxes, had provided for Normal students’ higher education, and so students had a duty to use this education for the benefit of the state:

Remember always that for your training here you must forever be a debtor to all the people of this good old state, who have provided for your instruction here. Let them see that what they have done for you is a dividend paying investment. Teach them to love this college. It has tried to teach you to love them.²⁸

Many students and graduates shared this understanding. Graduating student Bertha M. Donnelly argued that, “Within the walls of this college the class of ‘97 has received the training which will fit its members for serviceable work in life, and it is the duty of each one to go forth into the State and endeavor to improve the condition of the people and uplift the lower classes by creating in them a desire for higher education, and, by aiding them to obtain it” (1897, 45).²⁹ This

²⁸ Charles McIver, speech draft, undated, image 2 of 172, President Charles Duncan McIver Records, Box 9: Diaries, Autobiographical material, etc., 1884-1906, Folder 7: Speeches 1890s, n.d., University Archives, University of North Carolina Greensboro, https://gateway.uncg.edu/islandora/object/ua%3A278440?islandora_paged_content_page=002.

²⁹ Class of 1897 alumnae Mary Faison DeVane made a similar pronouncement at an alumnae gathering during commencement exercises in 1909: “The times had changed and we, the women of North Carolina, were helpless in the face of changed conditions. This beautiful college, so dear to us, is the gift of our state. Not one person, but many have contributed to its greatness. However, let us never forget that its founder was North Carolina’s noble champion of womanhood—Dr. Charles D. McIver. ... Graduates of the Normal College, if there is anything in being in contact with a noble character to elevate, we ought to be great women. Day after day he pointed out to us the suffering and limitations of our own people, and should we fail in our duty to our state, ours shall be the punishment of her who knew her duty and did it not” (1909, 167).

metaphysical background also supported the state's use of students' presumed natural capacities for nurturing. Extant gender concepts took for granted women's responsibility for raising and molding children and for upholding society's moral character. Taking up these gendered responsibilities was bound up with the educated woman's duty to serve. In effect, then, Normal students' education had generated their calling—an imagined connection between their capacities and the needs of the state. But again, this sense of a “call” coming from beyond the self was not limited to the state and its people. It could come from the family, a local community, a particular group or even global humanity. The key was that by becoming “college women,” Normal students had acquired a generalized obligation to serve.³⁰

Beyond establishing a web of moral relationships to guide students' lifework and shape their subjectivities as workers, the metaphysics of the calling also entailed a particular way of measuring the value of human activity and effort, which buttressed the higher value of certain motives for action over others. It was grounded in a Christian distinction between heavenly and earthly realms. Presbyterian minister Rev. Dr. James D. Paxton of Lynchburg, Virginia illustrated this distinction, asking the class of 1907:

Who shall be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? That is a kind of pre-eminence that people do not always think about, and the thought that I want to start in your minds today is simply this—are Heaven's ideas of greatness anything like ours? Do they measure things in the same way? Are we in our large strivings seeking the best things that are to be had—or is it possible that we in common with all others with whom we live are busy making mistakes? Who shall be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? (1907, 257)

³⁰ Notably, the obligations individuals acquired through education also carried a coercive edge rooted in eugenicist reasoning. For example, Donnelly told fellow graduating students that “The twentieth century will find its choicest heritage, the minds of the young people now making thorough preparation for service. In a few years untrained workers are going to be driven from the field and their places supplied by men and women of better equipment” (1897, 45). The logic of this discourse appears to align with the Calvinist concept of “election” as well as the modern concept of “meritocracy.”

Effort in a legitimate calling would be motivated by a heavenly measure of value. The ultimate reward for this effort was non-material. From a Christian perspective, it was salvation in the afterlife, but it could have earthly manifestations as well. Rewards for following the spirit of service in a legitimate calling included the knowledge that an individual's work would raise up the coming generations, the appreciation they would receive from the people they served, and the feelings of love, joy and personal satisfaction they would experience (Corson 1906; Brumbaugh 1907; Hathaway 1919).³¹ The rationale for adhering to this metaphysical logic was demonstrated through other components of the moral background of the spirit of service, including its characteristic methods of argumentation and forms of evidence.

Methods of Argumentation and Forms of Evidence

The most common forms of argument and evidence marshaled to assert the moral value of spirit of service callings were vivid narratives of heroism, as well as stories from the lives of moral exemplars. These were driven by a form of analogical reasoning, that suggested parallels between students' lives and the lives of Biblical figures and real and fictional individuals who had dedicated their lives to the spirit of service in some form. Heroic narrativizations of contemporary social conditions encouraged students to envision themselves as akin to soldiers or

³¹ Hathaway argued that "The prospective teacher with inspiration then sees a position of investment and income (not material) a reciprocal worthwhileness. And she does more than see it—she feels it with such profundity that zeal is furnished necessary for her task" (1919, 171). Male educators also argued that legitimate work in a calling like teaching entailed commitment to non-material forms of value and reward, though they were more likely to be offered better paying positions and opportunities than women. Overall, discussions about compensation among educators across genders were characterized by ambivalence, and conclusions about the importance of compensation differed depending on the topic at hand (i.e. talking about teaching in general vs. issuing complaints against working conditions). Ohio educator O.T. Corson exemplified the contradictory nature of this discourse in his 1906 commencement address, telling the audience, "Now this does not mean, young women, that you should teach school for love pure and simple. I have heard that doctrine taught and I have noticed that the man who teaches it always accepts an increase in salary every time it comes along. I know of nothing that is more inspiring to a greater love for one's work than a substantial increase in the pay for doing it, and it is my honest judgment today that public schools in America have grown just about as far as they ever will grow until the public sentiment in America sees to it that these better trained teachers receive better pay for the work they do" (1906, 190).

saints, waging a battle against ignorance and evil in the name of good and progress: “It is the cultured men and women that this country looks for her advancement, those who by all the training possible, have made their intellects clear, logical and ready for every kind of action, and their sentiments refined to embrace good and hate evil” (Donnelly 1897, 44). Public school teachers were portrayed as “civilization’s most powerful agents” (McIver 1902, 19), occupying the same status as other “heroes” and “benefactors” to the state “...who are destined to do the vital things for the nation” (Brumbaugh 1907, 274-275).

This kind of “narrative inflation” (Smith 2005) characterized the arguments that many actors employed to interpret contemporary social problems and the duty of Normal students to respond. As education reformers described it, postbellum North Carolina was waging an existential battle against underdevelopment, poverty and ignorance. McIver friend and *Atlantic Monthly* editor Walter H. Page described the rural destitution of “the forgotten women” of North Carolina in stark terms, comparing it to scenes of poverty described by foreign missionaries and echoing Biblical tropes of wandering in the wilderness:

Let any man whose soul is not hardened by some worn out theory of politics or of ecclesiasticism go to the country in almost any part of the State and make a study of the life there—especially of the life of the women. He will see women thin and wrinkled in youth from ill prepared food, clad without warmth or grace, living in untidy houses, working from daylight till bed time at the dull round of weary duties, the slaves of men of equal slovenliness, the mothers of joyless children—all uneducated if not illiterate. (1897, 81)

Page positioned Normal students as the would-be heroines who would join the state in rescuing and redeeming its rural white population from succumbing to this fate:

I speak the gladdest speech of my life when I say that you have done it. This institution and your presence is proof that the State has remembered the forgotten woman. You in turn will remember the forgotten child; and in this remembrance is laid the foundation of a new social order. The neglected people will rise and with them will rise all the people. Open wide to them the doors of opportunity. (1897, 88)

Students' commitment to this work was suggested to have causal force in transforming society for the better. This form of discourse would reappear time and time again with thematically compatible contents.³²

Moral exemplars, which Abend describes as “tools or devices whose point is to affect moral convictions, behaviors and institutions,” were also held up as mirrors with which students might compare their own motives for action and their imaginings about the future (2014, 308). A portrait of Dorothea Dix, national mental asylum reformer and philanthropist, was gifted to the university in 1897. At the dedication ceremony, North Carolina business magnate and former Confederate soldier Col. Julian S. Carr described her as being “...beyond all fair question a woman of many virtues, excellencies and noble qualities, and by her long and untiring devotion to that one great cause that shaped her life, drew so heavily upon her mental, emotional and physical resources...” (1897, 92). Students Mary Gaston and Ida Gordner wrote a biography of Red Cross founder Clara Barton in which they concluded that “Unquestionably her life was dominated by a passion such as only a sense of the highest, purest humanity can give” (1918, 251). For another student, Arnette Hathaway, President Woodrow Wilson demonstrated for the prospective teacher what it was like to see in her work “...great opportunity from the standpoint of service to individuals and to society,” which would propel her “zeal necessary for action” (1919, 170-171).

After his unexpected death in 1906, McIver also became memorialized as a “Man of Destiny” who could not “...be swerved from his purpose” (Brooks 1906, 100). A recurrent theme

³² In 1919, for example, graduating Normal student Lucy Crisp described “The Call of Humanity” in similar terms as Page’s forgotten woman of North Carolina: “As we look around us in the world, and turn back thru the ages, we see in an ever-moving, gigantic panorama the nations and peoples of the world, who stood with outstretched hands, calling and pleading for the happiness that is their right—the happiness that has been denied them because the forces that make for happiness in the world have not listened, and have not heard” (1919, 199).

in the many eulogies published in the *State Normal Magazine* was that—unlike many other male educators—he could not be tempted by offers of higher pay that would have guaranteed much needed support for himself and his family as he grew older. These were people who had successfully found and followed their callings in service to others, and their stories and images provided important fodder for vocational reasoning about students’ futures.

Chapter Summary

Moral background elements derived from Protestant Christianity facilitated and enabled the first-order judgments and recommendations about student futures that characterized the “spirit of service” pattern of vocational reasoning; namely, that students should find and follow a calling in their lifework, and that forms of work and activity motivated by the ideal of service were preferred over others. This pattern was shared among ministers, students, faculty, political figures, educators and others focused on the project of uplifting North Carolina and the South (and other groups perceived to be facing poverty and destitution) through education and economic development. The components of the spirit of service moral background aligned closely with that of Abend’s Christian Merchant business ethicist, for whom comprehensive Christian-derived metaphysical understandings about the relationship between individuals, God and society facilitated strong normative pressures over first-order beliefs and behaviors.

The calling concept was grounded in a background metaphysical dynamic of gifts, debts and duties embodied in the concept of “stewardship.” By receiving gifts in the forms of skills, knowledge, faculties and energies from a higher power like God or the state (or both), each individual was bound or “called” to steward these gifts socially. This metaphysical dynamic, along with the close cultural association between women and social morality shaped a form of feminized work ethic or vocational ideal, in which life’s activities should be oriented toward “service” and motivated by non-material forms of compensation.

Contemporary social reality, interpreted through this Christian metaphysical lens, implicated students in a larger moral order in which their individual decisions and actions were imagined to bear transformative force. Indeed, the primary moral actor in these accounts was the individual woman, harnessed to a higher power. This does not mean that factors beyond finding a true calling or the service ideal were unimportant or that a student could not make various decisions about employment depending on their preferences and life contexts. Simply, they were not normatively valued in much of these public discourses. This imposed a sense of moral ambiguity on the notion of “choice.” To some extent, a student could make a choice, but it *should* be the right one—it should align with the spirit of service.

CHAPTER V: LABOR MARKET DECIDERS

“Give Women Work!”³³: First-Order Morality

The February 1899 issue of the *State Normal Magazine* featured an article by T.M. Robinson of the U.S. Bureau of Labor titled “What Can a Woman Do to Earn a Living?” He concluded his article asking:

Does any one suppose that the state would suffer if at least a portion of the 20,000 white women who are toiling in the fields should step into the counting room and send a like number of men to take their places at the hoe and the plow? Would humanity lose anything if an occasional poor pill driver were put to driving cattle, and some bright, patient, sympathetic woman take his place in the sick room? Would the cause of education suffer if more good women were engaged in training our children? There is but one answer to these questions, and that answer suggests to the girls in our schools and colleges that not only the path of opportunity but the path of duty leads them direct to these comparatively new fields. Women are naturally fitted for this kind of work, and the world will soon kill the fossilized prejudice that keeps them from it. (1899, 394)

Like spirit of service promoters, Robinson spoke of the “opportunity” and “duty” to engage in public forms of work for the benefit of society. Dr. Claribel Cone, the President and Professor of Pathology at the Women’s Medical College of Baltimore who was invited by McIver to speak on the subject of “Careers for Women,” mirrored the spirit of service’s dedication to the calling ideal, arguing that “...the woman who works for work’s sake will do the thing for which she finds herself best suited. And having once discovered her true vocation she will bend all her energies to meet it” (1900, 109).

Most of their opinions about good forms of work were also the same. They recommended types of employment that would lend themselves to calling-style commitments to service, including teaching, nursing, and library work. The only truly atypical suggestion in this regard

³³ This quote comes from Cone’s (1900, 98) text, described in this section.

was Robinson's promotion of bookkeeping, a career more associated with earning a good salary than with service to society.³⁴

Despite many similarities, Robinson and Cone issued several statements that were less typical of the spirit of service pattern of vocational reasoning. They passed a series of moral judgments on contemporary employment norms and practices—particularly those shaped by gender prejudice—and the negative effects they had on individual women and on the quality and efficacy of the world's work. They argued that employment practices should be fairer, and that more forms of work—professional work, specifically—should be open and accessible to women. Furthermore, jobs should offer women sufficient wages to support a respectable livelihood and provide a worthy “outlet for the faculties” (Mill 1885 quoted in Cone 1900, 99). In this way, much of their moral energies were directed at evaluating a labor market concept rather than individual motives. These types of judgments did occur in the spirit of service pattern, but they occurred much less frequently, and usually only in reference to gender prejudice blocking women from teaching.

Beyond this added emphasis on fairness in employment practices, Robinson and Cone's discourses spoke to Normal students in a distinctive way, more overtly positioning them as career decision-makers. They offered a more rationalized and scientific model for vocational reasoning and opened the door to mundane motives like earning a good income. They suggested that considering current socioeconomic conditions, students had a choice to make about their

³⁴ While this analysis will emphasize the similarities that distinguished them from the spirit of service pattern, there were also differences between Robinson and Cone's first-order recommendations. Robinson was direct in arguing that compensation should be a foremost consideration in seeking employment. Cone did argue that compensation should be a consideration, but overall, she veered away from the topic of earnings, emphasizing more strongly self-realization through committing to the right vocation. This difference likely reflected contemporary gender norms, as well as their respective origins and professional experiences.

futures, and that systematic methods of reasoning would empower them to read current conditions and achieve the best possible outcome—that students could become labor market deciders.

In part, this distinct perspective may be explained by Robinson and Cone’s social positions, which differed from others at the Normal, many of whom were most immediately occupied with the project of state education reform. Robinson represented the perspective of his employer, the U.S. Bureau of Labor, which had been founded relatively recently in 1884 as “the culmination of almost two decades of advocacy by labor organizations that wanted government help in publicizing and improving the status of the growing industrial labor force” (Goldberg and Moye 1985, 1). Adopting an impartial, scientific stance upon its founding under the leadership of Carroll D. Wright, the Bureau sought to gather and disseminate useful data about labor, education and living conditions for the public and policymakers that would support better decision-making about the management of social life in the transformative conditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Goldberg and Moye 1985).

Cone, of the same family who would become Greensboro-based denim magnates, was the child of German Jewish immigrants who initially established themselves in Baltimore. She eschewed her parents’ desire that she marry and studied to be a physician at the Women’s Medical College of Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Pennsylvania and the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania. She became a professor of pathology and conducted medical research in Germany (Malino 1999). She was one of a limited number of female medical professors and scientists pursuing a professional career in this time, and her career advice to students reflected her personal and professional experiences.

Both Cone and Robinson lived and worked in industrialized mid-Atlantic cities which had already experienced levels of urbanization and shifts in labor norms not yet experienced in

North Carolina or most of the South. This also shaped the forms of advice they gave to Normal students about their working lives. Overall, their discourses demonstrated a distinct set of moral background assumptions, centered on an interpretation of contemporary social life that gave authority to evidence gathered through empirical observation.

The Moral Background of the Labor Market Decider

In arguments about student futures, the labor market decider pattern shifted its primary object of moral evaluation from the motives of individuals and their relationship with a transcendental power to the workings of the labor market and the individual's ability to find the right place therein through a rationalized decision-making process. They grounded their moral judgments in a particular explanation of the nature of contemporary society derived from empirical observation and historical study. An emphasis on social change and expanded employment options precipitated the need for new ways of aligning the self with socially oriented work and activity.

Methods of Argumentation and Evidence

According to Robinson and Cone, society was a complex, ever-changing entity. As evidence, they appealed to facts which they argued were plainly observable to the average person in recent generations. Industrialization and large-scale reorganizations of labor had largely removed women's work in domestic and small-scale production:

...the growing complexity of social conditions. The wheels of progress grind out changes which involve alike the work of man and woman. Much of the work which was formerly done by woman alone, in these days is relegated to man or machine. And now that she need no longer spin and weave and toil in the fields and do various kinds of domestic service, the question comes, 'What is her work'? (Cone 1900, 96)

These changes had left many women vulnerable to new forms of exploitative labor and to hasty marriages borne out of economic need.³⁵

Furthermore, as localized production ceded to large-scale commodity markets, the relationship between “wants” and “needs” had shifted: “In this day of progress we have more wants to supply than did our fathers and mothers. Many things that were luxuries to them are necessities to us. It therefore costs more to live in this present world than it did in the world of thirty years ago” (Robinson 1899, 391). Education, too, had “kindled the fires of ambition” among the general public, and new desires and ambitions had “begotten in us an eagerness to gather for ourselves the fruits of endeavor that we may, to an extent at least, become able to gratify our desires and cultivate our hopes without feeling dependent upon others” and to “go down to those below us and lift them up to our own level” (Robinson 1899, 391).

In so many words, they described the process of proletarianization and the shifting subjectivities and social relations that it had set into motion. A conceptual repertoire of labor process, the division of labor, need, want, education, desires, hopes, dependence and uplift encapsulated an intertwining of forces of coercion and liberation. Women must have “fair” access to employment because they had no choice but to work. Other forms of provision and production were no longer viable, and access to goods and social relationships were increasingly mediated through prices and the wage. But new ways of interrelating with others and the world were creating connections and possibilities beyond what was known. Education mediated these

³⁵ Some of the Bureau of Labor’s early statistical and social scientific innovations had been developed in researching the issue of women’s employment, including how to decrease exploitative work conditions, low pay, and the problem of undesirable marriages (Goldberg and Moye 1985). In his essay, Robinson alluded to these issues, writing: “[Woman’s] chief ambition should be to sometime direct the affairs of a happy home. But I do not think she should beg or starve while she is reaching this goal of her life. Good men are not so abundant that a woman can select a satisfactory husband at any time she may choose. In the meantime how shall she occupy her time?” (1899, 392).

twin processes, promising opportunities for the future as the familiar was falling away. In the face of these tumultuous social conditions, Robinson and Cone suggested that students must learn to read the trends and align their decisions with a history that was always in motion.

Constituting Decision-Makers: Tools for an Ethic of Doing

Describing the cultural formation of “choice,” Schwarz argues that “culture can shape choice not only through its *contents* (by instilling in individuals preferences and dispositions) but also through its *form*, by organizing choice processes,” which involve “culturally specific ‘choosing techniques’ embedded in particular normativities, epistemologies and materialities” (2018, 846-847). As a practical tool for navigating a complex, changing society, Robinson and Cone demonstrated for students a series of choosing techniques which operated as a formal element in the moral background: creating a list of considerations and priorities for employment, studying labor statistics to assess relative demand in occupational fields, and exploring facets of person-job fit. The implication was that by following these procedures, which would align individual actions with labor market dynamics, students would become capable of making the best possible decision for themselves and society. This introduced an ethic of doing, in which the steps of a decision-making process acquired moral weight.

In terms of considerations and priorities in employment, Robinson demonstrated a succinct, prescriptive list: the work should be “honorable,” reasonably assure a “comfortable living” and contribute to “elevating humanity” (1899, 38). Cone offered a more comprehensive model, which involved calibrating judgments according to an interweaving array of personal and socioeconomic factors:

Now, ‘woman is not undeveloped man, but diverse’; and the general *biological* conditions which affect the sex are her physical organization: her quality of strength, her power of endurance, and such *psychical* particularities as keen intuition, quick emotion, rapid perception, delicate sensitiveness....The general social conditions are the demand

for certain kinds of work from women; popular sentiment, which limits her choice of work, and the shifting of her fields of labor by the rapid changes of complex modern life. ... Then, there comes the personal equation: What is this particular woman fitted to do? What is her peculiar temperament, her aptitude, her talent, perhaps? Her physical, mental, moral strength? And is her environment such as to foster work? (1900, 100)

Likened to an “equation,” this process of studying complex conditions took on the semblance of a science.

Studying employment statistics provided another lens through which to gauge these conditions; in particular, the relative demand for employees across occupations. Robinson, armed with statistics produced by his employer, reasoned that “Some figures showing how women are employed may assist in determining the best place to turn for employment,” as he turned to provide an overview of the number of women in the professions, trade, manufactories, domestic service and agriculture (1899, 392). Cone, relying less on numerical data but following the same logic, presented a series of occupational fields from those most to least populated by women. As she proceeded, she offered commentary about which were in danger of “oversaturation” (1900, 100), which were “less crowded” (104) and had a “vital need” (102) for employees, and for what types of training there was “always demand” (105). Statistical reasoning generated the perception of a birds-eye view of conditions of supply and demand, which must be factored into a students’ reasoning process.

A final consideration was the quality of the perceived “fit” between the individual and their work. While fit might be figured in Robinson’s gender essentialist terms, it could also be imagined as an ideal, mutually benefitting match of unique individual interests, personality traits and skills with the needs inherent in a position. Cone conjured “day in the life” portraits of various jobs to give students a sense of the work’s energetic and emotional texture, as well as the

personal faculties that could seamlessly find their social expression through the position's demands. Work in medicine, for example:

...calls into play the same humane virtues, the same activity and strength [as in nursing]... Yet, in addition to these gentler virtues, there must be found, in the highest degree, the judgment to direct, the power to control, the tact to convince, 'a calm force for difficulty,' a broad-minded liberality, and, above all, that necessary knowledge and skill which only in these later days are obtainable by women in large numbers. (1900, 102)³⁶

These occupational profiles encouraged students to compare themselves with the composite portraits of people needed to undertake each form of work and facilitated their imagining a future amidst those everyday rhythms of activity and interaction.

Through their demonstration of a systematic vocational reasoning process framed by "choice," Robinson and Cone constituted Normal students as labor market deciders. In this vision, students took on the semblance of rational actors in the broad tradition of John Stuart Mill's so-called "economic man" (Persky 1995)—beings bearing an identifiable range of psychological and physical needs, interests and skills who, facing particular external conditions, engage in a rational process of evaluation to make the best possible choice for themselves. These arguments promoting choosing also carried an implicit causation account. They suggested in that if each individual were to make the best choice for themselves, over time the world's work would become more equal, beneficial and efficacious. At the same time the labor market, which offered women both safe harbor from exploitation and an outlet for self-realization, became a moral actor itself, capable of rationally guiding the right people to undertake the many tasks that needed to be done in the world.

³⁶ Some additional examples: Kindergarten work provides "...a congenial outlet for her energies." (1900, 104). A career in science, while "...the work is neither rapidly productive nor richly remunerative...gives a mental discipline and balance—an outlet for the energies and a moral stimulus and satisfaction, to be found, I think, in few other kinds of work." (1900, 108).

There is evidence that this perspective became institutionalized at the Normal to some degree. In December 1901, the column “Women at Work” appeared in the *State Normal Magazine* for the first time, and it would be published on a regular basis throughout the 1910s. It presented brief news items about women across the world who had succeeded in entering and achieving in fields of employment and education that were traditionally inaccessible to them. This included women who had become business owners, ranch managers, post mistresses, bank directors, artists and inventors. This type of material also appeared in class prophecies during commencement exercises. While discussions of supply and demand and examples of choice practices were mostly absent in these contexts, it is clear that students perceived an expanding range of employment options and legitimate considerations in career-seeking.

Conflict and Compatibility in the Moral Background

The labor market decider approach rested upon more empirical, scientific methods of knowing and understanding the world, the nature of individuals, and the relationship between individuals and society. In place of the Protestant-based metaphysics of the calling, which operated through a dynamic of gifts, debts and duties and which tended to prescribe particular forms of lifework and their attendant motives—an ethic of being—Robinson and Cone proposed an ethic of doing, which suggested the moral weight inherent in the steps of a decision-making process. From the perspective of the spirit of service, this approach came uncomfortably close to opening the door to immoral motives in lifework oriented toward the material scale of value—prideful ambitions for career mobility, slothful desire for leisure time or greed for a high wage.

In a magazine article promoting careers in stenography, Normal alumna Clara B. Byrd exemplified the moral ambivalence of the labor market decider. In Byrd’s estimation, stenography was attractive first and foremost because of its “lucrative-ness,” which was an

important consideration in conditions in which “year by year the number of women who go out from their homes to earn a living increases” (1909, 220). To the spirit of service believer, Byrd’s suggestion that pay should be a top priority would signify motives unworthy of a true calling. It aimed for the wrong form of value. Likely anticipating this argument, Byrd was careful to note that earning a good salary was not motivated by avarice. It enabled the stenographer to avoid being a burden on others and to become a social benefactor herself:

Because of the excellent remuneration which she receives, the stenographer is a very independent woman. She not infrequently builds a home of her own; she often owns stock in corporations along with her brother, and oftener still, she is able to have a bank account sufficiently large to be a genuine comfort to her soul. She is able, moreover, to contribute much to the church, and to social and civic organizations, thereby having the satisfaction of knowing that she is doing something towards the permanent advancement of the world. (1909, 220)

Choosing to become a stenographer, then, could have effects in the world that were just as beneficial as the those of the teacher dedicated to service. Byrd elided conflict with the spirit of service and its conception of the calling by insisting on the purity of her motives and aligning herself with the model of the Protestant businessman righteously stewarding his wealth.³⁷ How much difference was there really, then, between the spirit of service believer and the labor market decider?

Metaphysical Convergence

Indeed, while it emphasized the transitoriness of recent generations, the labor market decider’s vision of modern life was not incompatible with the Christian metaphysics of the

³⁷ Stenography was widely perceived as a business career for women. An article by alumna Daisy Lee Randle sharing information about the employment of graduates who had become stenographers was titled “Our Women in Business” and described that “...the idea that a woman can understand business affairs has taken hold of the public and we find a few of our mothers in the business world. Some in offices, some in business for themselves, and a few have even dared to learn a profession. These mothers of ours have proved to the world that many a woman has as good a head for business as her brother or husband...” (1902, 248).

calling, including its teleological understanding of humanity and its concept of stewardship. Robinson and Cone both described recent social changes as “progress,” and rousinglly asserted that women were on a path to more egalitarian opportunities in employment. Statistical reasoning communicated information about relative occupational demand, but it doubled as a form of moral exemplar. Robinson, for example, compared women’s employment figures in Massachusetts and Illinois with those of North Carolina and Georgia to signal signs of the opportunity to come, arguing “...these figures do indicate that women succeed in these fields in Massachusetts and that there is abundant room in North Carolina for success here” (1899, 293).³⁸ Similarly, Cone conjured a teleological ideal for the working woman: “...if she select her work wisely, and if she do the thing she has the faculty for, and if she strive for the highest ideals in that work, she will the more nearly approach that ideal state of being—the highest womanhood” (1900, 111). The right career, then, which would become accessible “in this day of enlightenment and justice,” would become the individual’s path to perfection (1900, 109).

Their method for career decision-making was also compatible with the metaphysics of stewardship. In addition to being a rationalized process for weighing and prioritizing factors to seek an optimal outcome, choice practices were in part intended to find the individual’s ideal outlet for the expression of self in the wider world of work. As further evidence of this convergence in the moral background, alongside a statistical style of reasoning grounded in concepts like demand and oversaturation, Cone offered the religious-style calling conversion story of Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to receive a medical degree in the U.S.³⁹ In

³⁸ This echoed a common practice by North Carolina education reform advocates, who made comparisons between North Carolina and Northern states like Massachusetts in their arguments about taxation and public services.

³⁹ Blackwell had come as a young woman from up North to teach music at the school of a physician in Asheville, North Carolina. On her first night there, she faced a dark night of the soul: “Doubt and dread of what

effect, these multivalent background arguments opened the Normal student to the wider labor market's call: the individual would still find her "calling," but through a rationalized process of evaluating self, available work and the occupations most in need of their participation.

This was not the full extent of the overlap between the spirit of service and the labor market decider in the moral background. Where Christian metaphysics could undergird the labor market decider's rational decision-making process, the conceptual repertoire of the labor market and empirical evidence supplied by statistical analysis could similarly support spirit of service moral evaluations about material compensation for their work. In effect, their service-oriented labor could consciously move from being "priceless" to having a price, when this price was understood to represent the perceived social value of their efforts (Zelizer 2010).

Demonstrating this shift, Charles McIver's daughter, Annie Martin McIver, wrote an essay published in the *State Normal Magazine* titled "The Salaries of the Public School Teacher." Part of her argument sought to compare teaching labor with other forms of work. She expressed the belief that a teacher's efforts could and should be translatable to a material measure of value, and that wages should communicate something accurate about the relative social value of their activity. Her argument was grounded in a form of systematic, statistical reasoning, incorporating a series of variables to make wage comparisons, including type of work, level of training required, location of the work, and race and gender of the worker:

might be before me gathered in my mind. I was overwhelmed with sudden terror of what I was undertaking. In the agony of mental despair I cried out, 'O God, help me; support me!' My very being went out in this yearning cry for Divine help. Suddenly, overwhelmingly, an answer came. A glorious presence, as of brilliant light, flooded my soul. There was nothing visible to the physical sense; but a spiritual influence, so joyful, gentle, but powerful, surrounded me that the despair which had overwhelmed me vanished. All doubt as to the future, all hesitation as to the rightfulness of my purpose, left me, and never in after-life returned. I *knew* that, however insignificant my individual effort might be, it was in the right direction, and in accordance with the great Providential ordering of our race's progress "(1900, 104). The story's form echoed Rev. Dr. Sigmund's recounting of God's calling of Gideon in the Old Testament.

The inadequacy of teachers' salaries becomes apparent as soon as they are compared with those received in other occupations. The ordinary day laborer, who is frequently an untrained negro, without the ability to read his own name, receives one dollar a day, making about \$26.00 a month, which amount is greater than that received by the average white teacher. The more skilled workmen, such as the better class of masons, carpenters and bricklayers, on an average, in a town the size of Greensboro, \$2.75 a day, or about \$72.00 a month. This is more than any county in North Carolina pays to its best public school teachers. The average salary paid to the stenographer, clerk, or book-keeper is \$40.00, while that given to the man teacher is \$11.00 less and that to the woman \$15.00 less. (1905, 38)

Marshaling this data, McIver argued that "These men and women [who pursued other career paths] find that teaching under the present condition of salaries is too much of a sacrifice.

Therefore, it is impossible to hope that the most aspiring, the most active, and the most capable minds among young women, and especially young men...will choose teaching as their calling" (1904, 40).

Ensuring sufficient pay, then, was necessary to salvage the calling ideal of the spirit of service with its requirement for total dedication of self to work. It was also necessary to ensure that the "right" kinds of people were attracted to the teaching occupation. In this way, arguments advocating for higher teacher pay took on the consequentialist approach more characteristic of labor market deciders, who hoped that individuals could be guided through a rationalized process of evaluation to the work for which they were best suited, to both ensure the individual's livelihood and happiness and to improve the overall efficiency and the efficacy of labor market dynamics.

Chapter Summary

In the moral background, proponents of the labor market decider pattern of vocational reasoning grounded their recommendations in arguments describing the changeability of society, including recent dramatic shifts in work, production, education and social relationships. In this vision, the labor market became an important moral actor, its fair functioning seen as a sign of

society's moral state. Special methods of evaluation and assessment were needed to make modern changes intelligible so that the individual could align their actions with social reality and occupational demand. They introduced a series of rationalized choice practices and spoke to Normal students as decision-makers about their future lifework. The implied goal of adopting these practices was generally consequentialist—to achieve the best possible outcome, both for the individual and the labor market, which was broadly symbolic of society.

In some ways, these background assumptions presented a challenge to the spirit of service. It suggested that the calling was the outcome of a rationalized decision-making process rather than a gift from a higher being. It shifted the moral microscope away from individual motives to unjust employment practices, and opened the door to more considerations in employment, like money-making. But in other ways, they were deeply compatible. While labor market deciders emphasized social change, they still demonstrated allegiance to a teleological vision—contemporary change was a sign of progress toward ideals of both individual perfection and labor market equality. And while they argued that students must consider various factors in choosing an occupation, their end goal was that everyone would find a best match for their skills, knowledge, faculties and personalities—in effect, that they would find the form of employment that would best steward their gifts. Beyond these compatibilities, representatives of each pattern flexibly adopted background components from the other to make similar first-order judgments about individual lifework decisions and optimal labor market functioning.

The labor market decider pattern shared similarities with Abend's Standards of Practice business ethicist, whose metaphysical understandings were scientific and secular, and who relied upon empirical data to make first-order prescriptions about ethical action. The choice practices introduced by Robinson and Cone were broadly analogous to the functions and effects of

analyzing business “cases,” which foregrounded studying external conditions to make good decisions. At the same time, the labor market decider’s metaphysics were not entirely scientific and secular. They appeared to be somewhere in-between, promoting more scientific methods to achieve ends that aligned with a teleology of progress and the stewardship of the calling.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS

The Moral Background and Vocational Reasoning

Like many contemporary studies of vocational reasoning and career decision-making, this case identified values and schemas—service, calling, self-support, “outlet for the faculties”—for career ideals grounded in a form of work ethic or vocational morality, which were visible in discourses about what Normal students should do in their futures after graduation. However, in contrast to many contemporary studies, which primarily analyze vocational reasoning at Abend’s level of first-order normativity and moral behavior, this study foregrounded the moral background and its role in enabling first-order phenomena. This two-fold analysis presented a more comprehensive account of the ways in which morality shaped the subjectivities of students preparing to enter a future “lifework,” including two distinct patterns through which students were constituted as people who could and should engage in ongoing, public-facing forms of waged work and (paid or unpaid) productive activity.

Moral background components, including metaphysics, grounding arguments, methods of argumentation, forms of evidence and conceptual repertoires, communicated shared understandings and assumptions about the nature of the world, society and individual life which operated as conditions of possibility for investments in moralized patterns of vocational reasoning. Without an analysis of how actors connected to the Normal understood a range of para-moral categories and concepts—chief among them the purpose of human life, God, the role of the state and the educated citizen, gender, proletarianization, waged work, education, uplift, self-support and supply and demand for labor—it is not entirely possible to understand why certain work values and forms of vocational morality were comprehensible and compelling. This case indicates the value of systematically investigating the moral background of vocational

reasoning and career decision-making, even in studies that focus on individual attitudes and behaviors related to work and career. To provide accounts of why certain work values and cultural schemas emerge and become pervasive as well as why the work ethic remains a dominant form of morality, patterns of variation in the moral background should be traced alongside the first-order phenomena they enable.

Abend's Moral Background Framework

In analyzing this case, Abend's framework was an invaluable tool for identifying and describing variation underlying many similarities. All actors were concerned with similar contemporary social problems, including the expanding need for women's labor market entry as an effect of proletarianization in the U.S. South. They sought to prepare Normal students to support themselves materially if necessary and to constitute working subjectivities that were morally appropriate considering contemporary gender norms and socioeconomic conditions.

At the level of first-order morality, the two vocational reasoning patterns—the spirit of service and the labor market decider—offered broadly similar prescriptions about students' future lifework. They agreed that finding an appropriate form of public-facing work or activity was important, and they promoted a similar range of feminized occupations, largely oriented toward ideals of service and finding a calling. They also agreed that what students did in their life would have important moral effects, both for the individual and for society. These prescriptions were compatible with historical and contemporary manifestations of the work ethic, and in this case, they were still closely tied to Protestant belief and practice.

However, at the level of the moral background, the two patterns demonstrated significant differences. They foregrounded different objects of moral evaluation/moral actors (individual motives and their relationship with a higher power vs. labor market fairness and, secondarily,

individual decisions), made different forms of arguments about these moral objects (ethic of being, deontological vs. ethic of doing, consequentialist, choice practices), and presented distinct forms of evidence (heroic narratives, moral exemplars vs. empirical description, statistics). These differences appeared to mark a distinction between “religious/spiritual” and “rationalized/scientific” approaches—a distinction which might be interpreted as indicative of impending economic rationalization in Weber’s terms.

At the same time, many of the labor market decider’s more scientific background components were compatible with a Christian-derived metaphysical landscape, and particularly the metaphysical dynamics of the calling. Empirical forms of evidence like statistics, for example, carried dual significations amenable to both scientific and religious interpretations, and choice practices and person-job fit analysis endeavored to find the best employment to steward an individual’s gifts in the world. Overall, the moral backgrounds of both patterns conceptualized relationships between individuals and supraindividual moral forces—God, the state and the labor market. The morality of individual action was articulated according to its adherence to the perceived demands of these larger moral forces. In this way, even ostensibly secular and rationalized social forms—economic forms like “the labor market,” for example—were imbued with moral meaning and power.

Beyond conceptual compatibilities between moral backgrounds, actors in this case often shared moral background elements across vocational reasoning patterns. The stenographer alumnae foregrounded her righteous motives in earning a good salary and Dr. Caribel Cone—while she primarily advocated for a rationalized career decision-making process—supported the vocational ideal of finding an authentic calling. Similarly, teachers and teacher aspirants could articulate arguments about the value of their labor according to the logics of the capitalist labor

market when they deemed that those logics could be morally convincing. This case's localized focus made it possible to home in on specific contextual differences between the two vocational reasoning patterns as well as several instances of sharing across moral backgrounds.

Sources of Variation in the Moral Background

If many of the same moral background categories were potentially available to actors across vocational reasoning patterns, what explained variations in how they were adopted and mobilized in this case? The interpretations actors offered of an experienced social reality and the moral entities deemed most important in shaping and affecting this reality may have been most significant in influencing which moral background components surfaced or were prioritized in a particular context. Spirit of service background components, especially in earlier years, were more often wielded by advocates of educational reform. They tended to emphasize the problems of North Carolina's widespread rural underdevelopment and poverty. They imagined that these could be solved by fomenting a religiously inspired commitment to progress among its citizens, each of whom had a "calling" to fulfill in a collective effort directed at and reciprocally supported by the state. Religious activity was a common and reliable means for gathering communities and organizing collective initiatives in rural areas, and McIver and his fellow reformers (Protestants themselves) consciously adopted these practices, symbols and imagery to promote their education reform project (Leloudis 1996; Dean 1995).

Labor market decider background elements, most visible in the discourses of two professionals from large cities where waged employment was standard and the threat of women's impoverishment was high, emphasized socioeconomic changes that from their perspective were irreversible and ongoing. The labor market—a new potential source of security and justice for women—was imbued with moral power to resolve the problematic effects of

industrial capitalism. When teachers and teacher trainees adopted labor market decider forms of reasoning, this was an outcome of shared awareness of poor working conditions, experiences of unsustainable pay rates and the knowledge that other forms of work were better compensated, along with the observation that citizens' commitment to state development through increased taxation was not occurring rapidly enough to ensure the health of their profession. In sum, it seems that the conceptual apparatus of the moral background acted as an important condition of possibility for interpreting social reality in patterned ways, but also that varied experiences of this reality—its practices, institutions, relationships—introduced concepts and forms of reasoning that molded the moral background, generating new moral objects and actors.

As a further example of this dynamic, the background category of gender was differently articulated at the level of first-order morality depending upon how it interacted with interpretations of social reality conveyed through other background components. The spirit of service pattern more heavily emphasized the connection between women and morality. This was enabled by concepts of motherhood, nurturing and nearness to spirituality, which were all incorporated as grounds for women's unique duties to contribute to state development. The labor market decider pattern, on the other hand, emphasized women's generalized economic vulnerability, which was connected to reasonings about the spread of industrial capitalism. This led to first-order judgments that were more concerned with women's ability to access quality employment, rather than their responsibility to mold the moral life of society (though the two were not exclusive, of course).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The value of women's education was also articulated differently according to interpretations of social reality. In the spirit of service pattern, there was more emphasis on how education enhanced women's natural capacities for various forms of nurture. In the labor market decider pattern, women's education was more valued for enhancing employability and the ability to positively contribute to an occupational field.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study identified a Protestant ethic formation that was influential in North Carolina's public education reform movement at the turn of the twentieth century. While a full analysis of the phenomenon was beyond the scope of this study, future research should investigate its role in projects of state development, its gendered manifestations and its connections to Weber's Protestant ethic, theory of rationalization and value sphere-based vocational ideals. Additional exploration of how the expression of this ethic may have varied in this time period across different Protestant sects (i.e. mainline vs. evangelical), regions and other social locations (gender, race, class, occupation, etc.) would also be valuable, and contribute to the extensive genealogy of this cultural form, which continues to appear in contemporary variations like "passion" (Cech 2021; Farrugia 2021, 2019; James 2017), the "post-Fordist" work ethic (Farrugia 2021, 2019; Weeks 2009) and the "new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski and Chiapello [1999] 2005).

One line of inquiry worth exploring would be a comparison of manifestations of this ethic before and after the onset of regional railroad expansion, the decline of agricultural livelihoods, the growth of industrial capitalism and the expansion of public graded education in the decades following the Civil War to trace interactions between religion and economic development over time. Protestant Christianity was consistently the dominant religious affiliation in North Carolina, but as Leloudis (1996) describes it, the growing influence of market towns conferred new value upon individualism, competition and achievement, and the graded school movement sought to shape citizen subjectivities according to these ideals. What was the nature of this shift in values and the social dynamics of its spread? Weber's observations about the connection between religion, associational life and business drawn from his 1904 visit to North Carolina

(Scaff 2011, 136) indicate some important dynamics that might be explored further with relation to postbellum economic change, universal public education and the experiences of different occupational and social groups.

Gendered manifestations of this ethic also merit further investigation. In this case, the “spirit of service” vocational reasoning pattern promoted forms of work and activity to women oriented toward an ideal of service and non-material reward. Methodical engagement in service work was in part a means for assuaging anxiety about the meaning and purpose of life and for avoiding alienation. The logic of the spirit of service mirrored Weber’s “spirit of capitalism,” yet its content was distinct from the Protestant businessman righteously accumulating and stewarding his wealth (Weber [1930] 1996; Abend 2014), the female manual laborer working diligently for higher earnings (Weber [1930] 1996, 62-63), the industrial worker’s productivist values (Rodgers 1979; Weeks 2009), or even the productivist demands of middle-class female homemakers (Rodgers 1979). It also presented an alternative model of subjectivity for North Carolina women from that described by Marianne Weber among her husband’s relatives in Mt. Airy (Scaff 2011). It largely drew upon the presumed natural nurturing capabilities of women and sought to rationalize them for public use. With that said, men—including McIver and moral exemplar Woodrow Wilson—might also adopt or represent the spirit of service pattern, eschewing the potential for high earnings in exchange for the power and influence acquired through public service. To what extent might the “spirit of service” align with Weber’s vocational politician, and how did gender norms shape the forms that vocation could take? Additionally, how might vocational dedication to the ideal of service have been involved in engagement in Progressive Era activism and social reform?

A final avenue worth exploring would be a comparison of the ways that actors described the vocational options of different demographic groups in institutions of higher education. Much scholarship on the historical development of vocational counseling has focused on urban areas in the North, male workers and recent immigrants. Incorporating a range of higher education institutions across the United States into this line of inquiry would offer an expanded perspective on the history of vocational counseling and its role in constituting workers and creating, maintaining and shifting divisions of labor. There was a glimpse of this process in McIver's address to male graduates of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts:

In the new life upon which we are entering in North Carolina, the young men trained at this institution will have great influence. Many of them will be at the head of large industrial enterprises, and they will control in a measure the physical, intellectual, and moral lives of thousands of people. Let no ambition for personal success in the management of a cotton mill ever make you forget that you owe it to the plain people of this state (and that means everybody) to make of yourself the best citizen of North Carolina which it is possible for you to become.⁴¹

Where white women educated at the Normal could repay their debt to the state through adopting the spirit of service as teachers, educated white men, positioned as future captains of industry, might accept the duty to support the material and moral life of their employees. Placing these moral messages directed at different groups into dialogue would generate a more dynamic understanding of social and historical forms of vocational reasoning that shaped the world of work as industrial capitalism became the dominant economic form across the United States.

⁴¹ Charles McIver, speech draft, undated, image 50 of 166, President Charles Duncan McIver Records, Box 9: Diaries, Autobiographical material, etc., 1884-1906, Folder 6: Speeches 1890s, 1901, 1904, n.d., University Archives, University of North Carolina Greensboro, https://gateway.uncg.edu/islandora/object/ua%3A278273?islandora_paged_content_page=050.

Conclusion

This historical study of the morality of vocational reasoning centered on young white women in the South at the turn of the twentieth century suggests the value of further exploration of the moral background of vocational reasoning, both in its contemporary and historical forms, and across a range of social groups, networks and contexts. Vocational reasoning is an important process in constituting working subjects and upholding the work ethic in capitalist society, and it has taken a variety of forms over time. Morality shapes these forms in complex ways. Work-based values and ideals express shared notions about what it means to live a good life, individually and collectively. Approaching them as collective social objects borne of particular social contexts and processes is important for understanding how values and ideals are generated and manifested through the vehicle of employment, and how they continue to hold together in recognizable patterns over time.

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