

**The Jubilee Centre for
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**A RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR'S JAMES
ARTHUR AND TRACEY ROWLAND ON
INTRODUCING THE GOALS OF
ARISTOTELIAN-THOMISTIC EDUCATION**

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FOSTERING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL VIRTUES IN EDUCATION

5. Introducing the Goals of Aristotelian-Thomistic Education

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Thank you very much, Prof. Rowland and Prof. Arthur, for your excellent papers and inspiring insights into Aristotelian-Thomistic educational goals. I feel honoured to be able to comment on the two papers now. Thank you very much for the invitation!

My observations are:

Both speakers have opened up a broad field, not only shedding light on the dimensions at which Aristotelian-Thomistic education aims. You have explained the foundations which the goals are based on and you pointed out the lines of origin from which Thomas and Aristotle draw their argument. You have named the implications that are hidden in them and worked out possibilities of how all this can be implemented today. In this perspective, I have discovered five aspects or areas – all of them closely related to each other – that I will reinforce and point out and that I will link to further questions.

I will do that against my own background as Church Historian and as a teacher at university engaged in character education. I should say that I do church history on the basis of a hermeneutics of cultural studies. That means that I ask less for data, numbers and facts than for how people acted in past times and how they justified their actions against the background of their value system. As a teacher at university, I design my lessons entirely based on the Catholic ideal of education combined with neurodidactical principles. With this in mind, I think I should emphasise the following five aspects:

1. Students and pupils have to become holistically educated personalities or – to quote Tracey – to become “complete personalities” who use their minds as much as they develop their spirituality and take care for each other. Prof. Rowland and Prof. Arthur spoke of heart building, self-reflection, reflectivity, critical thinking, to connect and network positions and pass on. As they pointed out, students and pupils do not develop themselves for their own sake but for society, too. Man must not realise himself alone, but must do so for his own good and for the good of all, i.e. participate in the creation of a humane, democratic, peaceful society. In times of globalization, economization,

diversification and digitalisation, this is more important than ever, and it is essential that our schools and universities aim to embody love and understanding, and to nurture individuals as they grow and develop into responsible and successful citizens and Christians. Only in this way, students will truly become leaders. At the moment, this seems to me more necessary than ever. Interestingly enough, at the beginning of the Corona pandemic, people thought that we would come out of this crisis changed, with more focus on the common good. In many places, there is more of a tendency towards self-fulfilment without regard for others. So my questions are: **How can we raise awareness here, work towards people developing within society for their own good and for the good of all? How and under which premises can this happen? Prof. Rowland and Prof. Arthur answer with the Aristotelian-Thomistic concept.**

2. When we deal with education and formation, we must first be sure of the image of the human being that underlies the educational process. What do we believe the human being to be? What are our aptitudes? What are our abilities? More precisely, this means which concept of the human being do we take as a basis, which abilities are suited to the human being, and are we able, and if so how, to educate and develop ourselves. Prof. Rowland and Prof. Arthur point out that the Aristotelian-Thomistic concept is based on an extremely positive image of man. Man has intellect, reason, and free will, so that it is possible for him to recognise the good and strive towards it, not least because goodness is a divine act of grace, a gift from God, which is inherent in human beings. The concept is based on a holistic approach that starts with the whole person as a unique individual. This is a concept that is rather present from the beginning of Christian history and has been adapted according to cultural context, so that Thomas Aquinas is part of a longer tradition. That means: Every human being was in the beginning created by God. He calls us to live life abundantly as individuals made in his image and likeness and to serve one another in community – living and flourishing together. God has equipped every human being with certain gifts and we are presented with a life-changing message of transformation. Everyone is encouraged to use their gifts. And everyone is able to do so. In my experience, however, not all people have this concept in mind, neither teachers nor pupils, and certainly not all people in society, neither within the narrowly Catholic context, nor outside it. **What can we do to change the image of man in each individual? How can we still talk about God, especially within Western European society? How can we explain who HE is? How can we speak of spirituality? How can we speak convincingly of the Holy Spirit?**

3. When we talk about such education and formation, we have to bear in mind that it does not just happen. Students and pupils need appropriate companions, mentors, educators, i.e. people who support their educational and developmental process and introduce them to the relevant specialist knowledge and value system. Teachers and professors have to be advisors and coaches to help building up competences and mentor students regarding their special talents. So, teachers must not only be competent subject facilitators, but also excellent leaders with the duty to accompany. This point was not only made strongly by Aquinas, but also by Clement of Alexandria and Origen, to give just two examples. This is also the tradition of Eastern monasticism and early medieval penitentialism, in which the confessor is seen as an educator who accompanies the penitent on the path to goodness. At the beginning of the 2000s it was John Hattie, who showed us how important the teacher personality is in the learning process. You can see how modern the historical approaches to education were. Yet, this is hardly known, moreover, not every teacher is aware of this role model. **How can we change that? How do we create a whole new attitude on the part of the teachers?**
4. With all this, learning and education are based on self-employment and self-reliance. This is not only what Aquinas and Aristotle said. All the educational approaches in church history, before and after Thomas, emphasise the same and it is what the entire reform pedagogy pointed out and what today's neurobiology and modern learning theories say. In consequence, students no longer are consumers but producers of knowledge and competences. This sounds very logical and simple. **However, how do we manage this change of perspective?**
5. All in all and to sum up, it is interesting how old all the principles mentioned are. They did not only emerge in the Age of Enlightenment, as is often assumed. Rather, they go back to the beginnings of Christianity and have been repeatedly reinterpreted throughout history and translated into the respective cultural context. Accordingly, Christianity and especially Catholicism have a rich heritage and many inspiring approaches, as a glance at history shows. They all can be not only exemplary but also normative for today's education and formation because their nature and structure as well as their objective are not inclusive but all-encompassing and universal. This is what Prof. Rowland and Prof. Arthur also emphasise for the Aristotelian-Thomistic concept. Thus, it has a high potential to shape not only church but also (world) society. **How do we manage this translation line today?**

Thank you very much for your attention!

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