

The Jubilee Centre for  
Character and Virtues

In Collaboration with  
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THE TWIN ENDS OF EDUCATION: THE  
WELL-BEING OF THE COMMUNITY  
AND THE FULFILLMENT OF THE  
INDIVIDUAL

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Fostering Personal and Social Virtues  
*The Twin Ends of Education: The Well-Being of the Community  
and the Fulfilment of the Individual.*

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**Part 1. Good News.**

The turn in educational philosophy towards the idea that schooling should give a central place to inculcating virtue, or to facilitating its development is the result of four main factors:

1. Dissatisfaction with earlier models of moral education:
  - a) *promulgation of rules* (held to be at odds with autonomy, and/or partisan, and/or cognitively impoverished, and/or indeterminate);
  - b) *advocacy of 'universal' values* (hard to identify, and or/ambiguous between descriptive and normative senses of 'human values, and/or too abstract)
  - c) *values clarification* (uncritical, and/or disguisedly directive, and/or relativistic).<sup>1</sup>
2. A prior turn towards 'virtue' and aspects of character and motivation in the patron discipline (philosophy).<sup>2</sup>
3. A broader movement within humanities and social sciences to the study of factors conducive to happiness and fulfilment.
4. A concern voiced by social commentators and politicians about loss of a sense of personal responsibility, accountability and social and societal commitment

In response, the idea that education should foster the development of personal and social virtues and that these might be keyed to aspects of human nature has clear appeal as

- a) Giving centrality to deliberative agency, engaging and connecting cognition, affection and volition
- b) Relating value characteristic human needs, interests and purposes
- c) Connecting personal formation to long term flourishing.

Given 1) that the prior philosophical turn to virtue, and consequent development of 'virtue ethics', associated these with Aristotelian understandings (as found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) and 2) that the Aristotle's ethical writings had been the primary philosophical (in contrast to scriptural and theological) source for Aquinas's moral theory and moral psychology,<sup>3</sup> and 3) that these had become normative within Catholic thought and practice, it is natural that Catholics interested in education should look with interest and optimism to the virtue turn in philosophy of education and hope to learn from and co-operate with it.

**Part 2. Complications.**

The title refers to 'twin ends of education': one relating to the flourishing of the individual the other to that of society. If Aristotle is to be a guide that suggests that as well as looking to his moral philosophy as propounded in *NE* we should also look to his social philosophy as given in the *Politics*, but his conception of the relation between these may be different from modern and contemporary understandings. Specifically:

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<sup>1</sup> See 'J. Haldane and C. Paddock, 'Why Flourishing is Difficult' in C. Vogler ed. *Virtues and the Flourishing Life* (London: Routledge, in preparation).

<sup>2</sup> See 'Some Questions about Virtue' in E. Grimi ed., *Virtue Ethics: Retrospect and Prospect* (New York: Springer, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> J. Haldane, 'Virtue Ethics in the Medieval Period' in D. Carr, J. Arthur & K. Kristjansson eds. *Varieties of Virtue Ethics* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

1. There is a dispute in present day thinking about the relation between the moral and the political between a) *liberals* or *republicans* (in the classical Lockean / Montesquieuan / Millian sense) who distinguish between moral and political values and favour limited government) and b) *moralists* who would subsume politics within morality – conservative Catholic integralists, and radical secular progressives are contrasting examples of moralists. Where does Aristotle stand in relation to this contrast? (more a moralist than a liberal). So before turning to him as a source we need to think about how we see the relation between the personal and the political.
2. Aristotle sees the moral and the political as closely connected, with the latter completing the account of the human good and the means of its realisation and promotion. This is based on three ideas. First, that the ethical pertains to the development of character in ways that promote the acquisition and perfection of qualities (virtues) that are conducive to and/or constitutive of human flourishing. Second, that human beings are naturally social, and that specific communalities: household (*oikia*), village (*kome*) and state (*polis*) are themselves natural in the respect that they conform to and serve the needs of human nature. We, however, tend to think of communities above the level of the family as voluntary associations, and even the family is currently being ‘de-naturalised’
3. Aristotle’s general outlook is ‘selfless, ‘externalist’ and ‘universalist’: he thinks of human persons as members of a species of rational animals whose nature is expressed in outward directed activity and whose good is general, ie, what is good for an individual is what is good for the kind. We, by contrast, thanks to the development of a strong sense of the individual self (promoted both by philosophical notions of autonomy, authenticity and uniqueness, and by cultural tendencies towards distinctive self-defined identities) think in terms of persons as internal and particular beings whose good is singular or aggregative but not common or shared.

### **Part 3. Some Questions.**

The title refers to twin ends of education: the well-being of the *community* and the fulfilment of the *individual*. In so far as the tradition of liberal individualism survives, we are apt to think of the latter as prior to and only contingently connected with the former. By contrast Aristotle, Aquinas, and other communitarians favour the view that individuals cannot flourish save by being members of, and active participants in the life of the state (political society). We need then to consider the following questions:

1. In thinking about the role of education in serving the twin ends should we favour the view that gives priority to individual well-being and treats that of the community as something to be attended to only if and to the extent that it serves individual needs?
2. If, by contrast we think that there is a responsibility to cultivate social virtues independently of individual interest what is the rationale for that and what virtues should be cultivated and to what purpose?
3. Can a virtue approach in the Aristotelian/Thomistic tradition separate individual and social ends, and if it cannot is that an advantage or a liability? Put another way might it be that a virtue approach to education needs to develop an account of liberal communitarianism for which it needs to go beyond Aristotle or Aquinas?