# Classical ethics and contemporary psychology: some fundamental hints for education

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**Abstract**

Aristotle considers the acting human agent as endowed with reason, will, and a tendency towards good, moderated by the superior faculties. This endowment is ordered to the attainment of goods (ends) and growing in the virtues is indispensable to obtaining them. At the basis of the Aristotelian proposal there is a strong connection between some metaphysical concepts (*being, good, truth*) and human action: we move towards *goods* (the object of the will) that have been known (*truth*, the object of reason). Aristotle describes the *ethiké* virtues, not as mere repetitive actions, but as constituents of one's character.

The consideration that our capacity to act upon ourselves may make us better or worse, good or evil, remains outside the perspective of many authors. Nevertheless some, such as Maslow, working on the borders between psychology and philosophy restore important contacts with the proposal of the ancients. Despite being an anti-metaphysical thinker, Maslow concluded that the *true*, the *good*, and the *beautiful* are positively interrelated in the behaviour of self-actualizing individuals.

Carl Rogers discovered empirically that empathic understanding positively influences contact with reality and promotes an internal development of truth, improving our response to it. In this context a better theoretical understanding has immediate effects on the practical reason of the classics and therefore has real impact on our attitudes and character.

Professional practices inspired by Humanistic Psychology underscore the role of the will to jump-start a personal process of improvement, as external influences scarcely have any effect. The Aristotelian tradition is compatible with this and could lead to the development of a deeper explanation of the facts because of the idea that human faculties are teleological. The Aristotelian anthropological platform offers good structures on which to ground the use of instruments developed by recent psychology.

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° Professor of Applied Ethics, Pontifical University Santa Croce(Rome), MCE Research Centre. email: mercado@pusc.it

## 1. A theoretical premise and a personal one

Classical philosophy, namely the philosophy of man or philosophical anthropology, offers a defined and complete image of man. Contemporary psychology, particularly the humanistic psychology of the 60s and 70s, and contemporary positive psychology, insists on promoting certain attitudes to promote personal growth. Recent research projects have ably explored the relationship between the classical proposal, based on Greek philosophy and the Christian tradition, and contemporary psychology.[1]

This paper is linked to both the teaching of classical anthropology in dialogue with contemporary psychology as a project to incorporate certain techniques that promote positive attitudes in university professors to improve the quality of their work.[2] It is not focused on the content of university education, but rather on the attitudes of the people working in educational institutions, after having briefly exposed fundamental issues in classical anthropology and some important connections with contemporary thought.

## 2. Nature and life's dynamism according to Plato and Aristotle

Intellectual debate from Socrates to Aristotle is not limited to speculation about the nature of man and society. Rather, it constitutes reflection on anthropological foundations and their social manifestations. Depending on the focus of the discussion, interest in certain permanent and mutable aspects does not arise seamlessly and one or the other is also accented more.[3]

In this sense, one of Plato's methodological approaches was based on studying the parts of the soul in order to explain the development of the person. He thus proposed a classification of virtues anchored in a rigid division of the psyche's potentialities. Aristotle then took advantage of this scheme to develop a complete proposal, which

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[1] Cf. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues.* VIA Institute on Character (http://www.viacharacter.org/www/) and The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/355/about)

[2] This paper is therefore a collaborative effort among several professors from different institutions. I want to especially thank Luis Romera and Federica Bergamino (Pontifical University Santa Croce), Evaristo Aguado (International University of Catalonia, Barcelona), Alberto Ribera (IESE Business School).

[3] Cf. Aristotle, *NE.* 1094a25-b19 and the beginning of Aristotle's *Pol.,* 1253a.

strongly influenced Stoic thought and the Christian tradition. While many of the issues associated with this topic are of interest, they go beyond the scope of this paper, including the relationships by which Plato assigns a foundational role to four key virtues and their dissemination in Stoicism[4], Aristotle's relativisation of this approach in favour of a more detailed version of the virtues' substance, the influence of the Platonic division in the Christian tradition and the move to harmonize Aristotelian and Stoic proposals, which Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas championed[5], and the fact that the virtues lost their central role in successive proposals and the imposition of a model based on the law[6], etc.

Describing Aristotle's ethical works gives rise to a catalogue of virtues whose complexity may overshadow the valuation of its empirical and methodological roots. In this sense, it is often forgotten that Greek philosophers have several criteria in mind when selecting questions for study. For Aristotle, every field must be clear about its object of study, the methodology that best suits it, and the end it pursues, thus allowing for a distinction among the speculative knowledge associated with the arts, etc.[7] For its part, ethics presents a separate debate on framing its object of study and the fundamental notion of happiness.[8] There have been continuous studies on the most appropriate 'tools' for reaching that state of bliss, hence the widely-discussed Platonic discourse on the parts of the soul found in *On the soul* emerges again.[9]

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[4] Plato, *Rep.*, 443e5-444a1.

[5] Ambrose of Milan coined the phrase 'cardinal' to designate the four cardinal virtues in *Republic.* See: Aquinas and Vaccarezza, *Tommaso. Le Virtù.*, 38-40.

[6] This is one Abbà's foundational theories, *Lex et Virtus*; Abbà, *Quale Impostazione Per La Filosofia Morale.*

[7] For example, Aristotle, *Met.* 1, 980a. On the particularities of anthropology, see: Aristotle, *De Anima.* 1, 402a1-403a17; 2, 415a14-23, on ethics, see: Aristotle, *NE.* 1094b20-22; 1126a31-36, etc.

[8] Aristotle, *NE.*, Book 1.

[9] On the fundamental distinctions that the parts of the soul present, see: Aristotle, *De Anima. in fine* and the detailed development in mucho of book 2 and all of book 3, 414a-435b. Guthrie offers a general introduction to these questions: Guthrie, *Aristotle.* 277-282.

However briefly, it is worth mentioning certain notions from the Aristotelian proposal because of its decisive influence on the formation of Western thought and because it coincides with contemporary thinking in important ways.[10]

One key notion is that of nature. For Aristotle, the *physis* is a source of orderly operation, i.e., an internal principle of movement[11] guided by an end.[12] For living beings, this way of being is associated with organized dynamism; life corresponds to defined bodies and its essential character is growth.[13] This development is complex and human beings possess an indefinite openness in two ways: on the one hand, humans can guide this development and, on the other hand, the highest aspects of that growth do not have a precise limit. One can always be more virtuous or love more or better, etc. This is not true of all abilities, which is especially clear in the corporeal sense where physical growth has limits and well-defined proportions.[14]

## 3. Maslow and Rogers on human nature and organisms

In some ways, Aristotle, Carl Rogers (1902-1987) and Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) have similar understandings of human nature. In relation to the complexity of human powers and action, these authors have both significant methodological differences and numerous thematic similarities that cannot all be explored within the confines of this paper. However, it is important to highlight here in more detail how they formulate human essence. Maslow argues,

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[10] Annas, *The Morality of Happiness.*

[11] Cf. Plato, *Phaedro.* 270 c-d; Aristotle, *Phys.* Beginning of Book 2; Aristotle, *Met.* 5, 1014b-1015a.

[12] Teleology is a common notion in Aristotle's texts with significant adjustments depending on the object of study; natural teleology and cosmological order are fundamental elements of his works on cosmology, animals, etc. The end of human action presents significant variations, for example in artistic creation and intention in moral acts. On this basic question in Guthrie, *Aristotle.* 106-119.

[13] Aristotle, *De Anima. passim*, especially from Book 2, 415a. In his proposal to reform experimental sciences' methodology, Maslow mentions ideas from holism that notably approach the Aristotelian perspective, especially concerning understanding complex realities as a whole, i.e., as interrelated systems where the functions of the various bodies are meaningless without an orderly context. See: Maslow, *Motivation and Personality.* 295-325. On Goldstein's influence on Maslow, see: Hoffman, *The Right to Be Human.* 106-109.

[14] Aristotle, *De Anima.* 416a15-19.

> Man has an essential nature of his own, some skeleton of psychological structure that may be treated and discussed analogously with his physical structure, that he has some needs, capacities, and tendencies that are in part genetically based, some of which are characteristic of the whole human species, cutting across all cultural lines, and some of which are unique to the individual.[15]

And for Rogers, man is not,

> in his basic nature, completely without a nature, a tabula rasa on which *anything* may be written, nor malleable putty which can be shaped into *any* form.[16]

This means that natural conditions are part of people's development and this is so on various levels; determinations of the species are in play, as well as those related to the individual. To this, we must add constraints related to the environment, culture and the timely satisfaction of various needs, etc.

It is important to draw attention to this point for several reasons. From a historical perspective, it is important because it relates to the conclusions of intellectuals educated in an experimental environment and who built a philosophical culture during the height of existentialism. During the 1950s and 1970s, Heidegger and Sartre's ideas on the human capacity for self-determination and a self-determined way of life were highly influential. It seems that by anchoring their work in laboratory studies and in counselling, Maslow and Rogers's studies maintained a balance between the almost total indeterminacy within a dominant strain of European existentialism and the biological determinism within different schools of psychology. In addition, for very different reasons, these two authors have significantly influenced later developments in psychology and its applications in the theoretical realm of human behaviour and organisations.

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[15] Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*. 269-270. In one of his early texts, he already began arguing as follows, 'Human nature is not indefinitely malleable [...] Certain drives there are, and satisfied they will be in one way or another, regardless the governmental, economic, and social taboos extant at the time', Hoffman, *The Right to Be Human*. 73. Rogers and Maslow are conscious of forming part of a reaction to the determinism that behavioural scientists defend.

[16] Rogers, Kirschenbaum, and Henderson, *The Carl Rogers Reader*. 403. The text comes from 'A Note on the Nature of Man' (1957).

## 4. The natural tendency toward self-perfection

At different times, these two authors have repeated the idea that the direction in which living beings move is not indifferent, but rather ordered toward growth.

Maslow stresses the preponderance of the internal principle of development:

> Full health and normal and desirable consist in actualizing this nature, in fulfilling these potentialities, and in developing into maturity along the lines that this hidden, covert, dimly seen essential nature dictates, growing from within rather than being shaped from without.[17]

In a 1952 text that refers to Maslow, Rogers argues that,

> One of the most revolutionary concepts to grow out of our clinical experience is the growing recognition that the innermost core of man's nature, the deepest layers of his personality, the base of his "animal nature," is a positive nature – is basically socialize, forward-moving, rational and realistic[18].

And another 1954 text argues as follows:

> My experience has forced me to conclude that the individual has within himself the capacity and the tendency, latent if not evident, to move forward maturity... It is the urge which is evident in all organic and human life – to expand, extend, become autonomous, develop, mature – the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism, to the extent that such activation enhances the organism or the self.[19]

Both authors recognize the evidence that perfect human models are not easy to find:

> My personal judgments – Maslow writes – are that no perfect human being is possible or even conceivable, but that human beings are *far* more improvable than most people believe. As for the perfect society, this seems to me to be an impossible hope, especially in view of the obvious fact that it is close to impossible even to make a perfect marriage, a friendship, or parent-child relationship. If untainted love is so difficult to achieve in a pair, a family, a group, how much more difficult for 200 million? For 3 billion? And yet again, it is clear that pairings, groupings and

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[17] Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*. 269-270. On page 77 he argues, 'The organism is more trustworthy, more self-protecting, self-directing, and self-governing than it is usually given credit for. In addition, we may add that various recent developments have shown the theoretical necessity for the postulation of some sort of positive growth or self-actualisation tendency within the organism'.

[18] Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*. 90-91. The paper's subtitle is appropriate: 'The discovery that the core of personality is positive'. The text's original version, 'Some of the Directions Evident in Therapy', is from 1951-1952. See also Thorne, *Carl Rogers*. 67.

[19] Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*. 35. Cf. 184-196

societies, though not perfectible, are very clearly improvable and can range from very good to very bad[20].

These two American psychologists' statements are founded on the conviction that intelligent beings can extend the reach of their naturally endowed abilities towards growth that is not predetermined, even if there are few examples of people who fully achieve it[21]. Self-determination, or being *self-movers* as Maslow called it, consists in guiding nature – the principle of operation according to Aristotle – beyond itself without contradicting it.

## 5. Growth through the virtues

Aristotle, Rogers and Maslow also coincide in their description of human nature's elasticity being found in the explanation of the virtues. For them, this involves qualities that are not activated alone. While nature is predisposed to it, their growth is not spontaneous.

A passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* intuitively shows the tension between nature and growth, comparing the development of habits with inanimate beings' inability to obtain them. For example, no matter how hard someone tries to throw a stone, it will not 'learn' to do so for itself and will always fall to the ground; something similar happens when momentarily directing fire downwards— it always rises again, following its natural direction. Living beings' dispositions, and especially the superior habits of intelligent beings, can be modified with effort. This does not mean that an alteration is contrary to nature; in fact, modifications do not automatically develop, but they can *accord with* nature, even if they are not given *by* nature[22].

Maslow expresses the conviction that development requires a constant effort in the following terms:

> We *do* have a nature, a structure, a shadowy bone structure of instinctoid tendencies and capacities, but it is a great and difficult achievement to know it in ourselves. To

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[20] Maslow, *Motivation and Personality.* 257.
[21] Ibid. 161, contains other researchers' findings, according to which only between 5 and 30% of people exercise real control over their own activities.
[22] Cf. Aristotle, *NE.* 1103a20-31.

be natural and spontaneous, to know what one is, and what one *really* wants, is a rare and high culmination that comes infrequently, and that usually takes long years of courage and hard work[23].

For Rogers, however, openness to internal and external experience makes everything else possible. Assuming that an organism moves in the right direction when feelings and knowledge are aligned, transformation must focus on harmonizing affective and cognitive abilities. Doing so allows for a better picture of reality and more coherent action, thus facilitating well-rounded personality development.[24]

These three authors' proposals contain a strong belief in the permanence of two complementary principles: (1) human beings develop according to an *internal normativity* and (2) there is ample room to intervene in that development. With regard to scientifically defining these features of nature, Rogers argues as follows:

> The conviction grows in me that we shall discover laws of personality and behaviour which are as significant for human progress or human understanding as the law of gravity or the laws of thermodynamics.[25]

Returning to the realm of personal effort, it is important to note that constituting character intimately changes the subject. A growing organism leaves its imprint on its own development and, to some extent, is the architect of its way of being, forging a personality in an ever-dynamic process.[26] While it goes beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth mentioning how this important point connects with other thinkers and

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[23] Maslow, *Motivation and Personality.* 273.
[24] Cf. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person.* 184-196. Rogers does not concentrate on a description of the virtues given that he assumes that harmonising these faculties fosters positive development and thus classifying behaviour and describing the good life is secondary.
[25] Ibid. 14. Cf. Thorne, *Carl Rogers.* 62.
[26] These three authors also hold a shared belief in permanent dynamism, a summary of which does not fit in the scope of this paper. On Aristotle see: Mercado, 'Origins of the Metaphysics of the Living'. On Maslow's opposition to the notion of homeostasis, see: Maslow, *Motivation and Personality.* 77, where they make explicit reference to Aristotle and Bergson. See also Rogers, *On Becoming a Person.* 184-186.

scholars on Aristotelian philosophy, such as Elizabeth Anscombe, [27] Alasdair MacIntyre,[28] Julia Annas,[29] Philippa Foot[30] and Alejandro Vigo.[31]

In addition, it is worth emphasizing that twentieth-century psychological language speaks more of *attitudes* than of *virtues* and more of *personality* than of *character*, but, for a first analysis, it is sufficient to underline the profound overlap between these principal notions.

## 6. The unity of knowledge and feeling

It is worth summarizing how Aristotle applies his analytical methodology to the relationship between knowledge and the will. The proposal deals with the distinction of the human faculties according to their objects: the intellect is focused on truth while the will is directed towards the good. Self-determination or autonomy depends upon the comprehension of the known good (by means of the intellect) and the determination to achieve it. This determination implies the control of inferior tendencies, which stimulate the appetites. Human beings decide towards which goods to move and in which order.

According to Aristotle, to succeed in determining the objectives and in the disposition of the means, the intellect must persuade the will: the command to move in a certain direction must take into account the different impulses, which often are in conflict with the rational ordering that the capacity to love receives. The intellect must exert a *political* power over the will, because if the latter does *not want* to move in that direction, it simply will not move. The intellect must convince the other faculty that it

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[27] Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy'. 41-42.
[28] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. 151, 187, 232; MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*. Passim, especially chapter 7.
[29] Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*. Chapter 1.
[30] Foot, *Natural Goodness*. Passim.
[31] Vigo, *Estudios Aristotélicos*. 374-375.

is advantageous to renounce certain competing possibilities[32]. Aristotle's main point is that the harmonization of human potential is based on reason (*katà logon*)[33].

Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas stage this dialogue between the faculties in order to highlight that there is a tension between the individual's different potentialities and that their harmonization depends upon multiple factors. However, the fundamental question does not pertain to this conflict, but rather to movement towards the good[34]. Virtue is not primarily meant to help one endure evil with dignity or to avoid wrong and misguided action; rather, virtue, above all, supports one in doing the good and taking up beautiful action[35]. Asking the paramount question concerning the ethics of the good life involves the progressive acquisition of goods in the perspective of a meaningful life.

It is important to highlight two characteristics found in this analysis of human activity, including:

a) On the one hand, its analytical character based on a division of the soul starting with its functions and objects.

b) On the other, the importance of the end, i.e., the search for the good. This observation may seem superfluous, but its importance is reflected both in the direction it gives to the study of ethics because one studies ethics not to find out what is good, but rather to be good[36]. Aristotle and Aquinas study human activity, collect relevant assessments (opinions about what is good and what is bad), and carry out their arguments by relying on the study of the parts of the soul. This analytical structure serves the study of good action.

Maslow, Rogers, and the leading exponents of positive psychology study human behaviour in actions and evaluate them according to their results. Their assessment is

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[32] Cfr. Aristotle, *NE.* 1102b-1103a9, 1119b5-18 also Aristotle, *Pol.* 1. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae.* I, 81, 3, ad 2.
[33] Aristotle, *NE.* 1095a10-12.
[34] Cf. Ibid. 1094a1-23; Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum (Commento all'Etica nicomachea).* v. 2, p. 20-21, 94-96.
[35] Aristotle, *NE.* 1120a11-13.
[36] Ibid. 1103b26-28; 1105a-b. Cfr. 1095a5-6

based on how consistent given activities are with a human model that corresponds to Maslow's self-actualizing individual, which Rogers, and positive psychology in large part, accepted. In their study of the faculties that enable the harmonization of the whole, Rogers and Maslow significantly differ with respect to ancient thinkers. They continually refer to the emotions, reason and especially a healthy relationship between the two. Although they appeal to the value of the virtues at different times, they do not provide a precise connection between them and the 'parts' of the soul; in addition, although they often refer to truth and the good, they do not carefully explain the relationship between them, which are objects of reason and the will, respectively, according to Aristotle and Aquinas.

Contemporary psychologists do not formulate a metaphysics of truth and the good or a theory of knowledge. However, when they give order to experimental data and seek a basis for a coherent theory, they use fundamental notions from Aristotelian philosophy. In this sense, there is a paradigmatic passage in Maslow's writings regarding the behaviour of self-actualizing individuals; it argues that their life style leads to the logical conclusion that the *true*, the *good*, and the *beautiful* are positively interrelated[37]. In his enumeration of self-actualizing individuals' characteristics, beauty and truth are always present and are often linked to an increased ability to perceive reality. That is, there is a profound connection between our cognitive potentialities and an appreciation of beauty, which influence the development of affectivity and manifest themselves in constructive activities[38].

## 7. A good person's action

The most interesting part of this comparison is found in examining the similarities between Maslow's human model and that of Aristotle. Aristotle believes that a person with a well-formed character not only acts well, but also feels in the right way, at the right moment, in accordance with stimuli. In fact, one can say that this *spoudaios*, or

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[37] Maslow, *Motivation and Personality.* 202.
[38] Ibid. xii, xxii, 101, 116, 131, 202, 229n, 282, 288. On the B(eing)-values according to Maslow, cf. Hoffman, *The Right to Be Human.* 265-267.

person of value[39], acts well precisely because he first feels that which one must feel (pleasure, fear, anger, etc.) and because he is capable of responding actively and proportionately to the demands of the moment.[40]

According to Maslow these individuals have a more efficient perception of reality and a more comfortable relationship with it, leading them to more accurately distinguish good from evil, the end from the means, and to accept things, as well as themselves, more easily. In addition, they focus on solving problems, which makes their relationship with reality and with other individuals constructive, leaving unnecessary complications out of the picture. They are spontaneous, simple, and natural; while they maintain independence, their relationships are intense, profound and long lasting. Their action is based more on their will and the ability to act than on cultural and environmental factors; they are always open to expanding their cognitive horizons and willing to learn from others. They act with a sense of community or civic responsibility (Gemeingefühl); they possess a sense of humour, promote cordial relationships and are creative[41].

As mentioned before, Rogers is less explicit in terms of a list of positive attitudes since he emphasizes the behavioural transformation that occurs with an appropriate use of the different cognitive powers. It is worth emphasising, however, that this transformation in a positive direction is based on the strong impact it has on mood: greater confidence in one's self follows greater depth of both positive and negative experiences and each feeling is experienced more congruently with the circumstances[42].

Clearly some positive personality traits, such as a sense of humour and creativity, are not found in ancient thinkers' descriptions. However, it is no exaggeration to admit the similarities, especially with regard to the profound relationship between cognitive and

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[39] Aristotle, *NE*. 1098b-1099a, 1104b9-24, 1106b15-1107a1, 1113a24-31, 1169a32, 1170a15.
[40] Inciarte insists emphatically on the harmony between *right reason* and *right desire* in Aristotelian thought as a condition for the goodness of choices and of actions. Cf. Inciarte Armiñán, *First Principles, Substance and Action*. 415-420.
[41] Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*. 152-174.
[42] Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*. 195-196.

affective aspects: the mature or virtuous or self-actualizing person lives and experiences an order in his or her faculties from which well-structured activity emerges[43].

## 8. Some neglected virtues and their possible impact on university life

Aristotle detailed the difficulty of fitting a group of virtues together that do not have precise names and yet are an essential underpinning of all social relationships because they are related to truth and our reactions to it[44]. This requires an explanation of social qualities that do not properly belong to either politics or friendship. Cicero[45], great medieval authors[46], Renaissance men in referring to *civile conversazione*[47] and Enlightenment thinkers[48] have all tried to summarise, in various ways, the kind of benevolence, sympathy, or attention to others that facilitates human coexistence. Today, we could call it the interface of affability for promoting healthy human relationships.

This small family of virtues or attitudes of openness towards the other and sharing largely coincides with so-called transversal skills or soft-skills, whose cultivation is considered more effective than the mere transmission of knowledge[49].

Studying classical ideas on the virtues and character and comparing them to contemporary psychology is a positive endeavour on various accounts. On the one hand, advances in experimental psychology can enrich classical thought; on the other, it gives psychology the opportunity to broaden its assumptions and incorporate theoretical parameters that better integrate changeable and permanent aspects. In addition, in reference to the former and to conclude this paper, institutions with a

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[43] I purposely avoid a discussion on the origins of disordered human faculties since Aristotelian, Christian and psychological explanations differ significantly on this point.

[44] Aristotle, *NE*. 1108a8-b10; 1126b10-1127a12.

[45] Cicero, *De amicitia*. 23 (VIII.26). Cicero, *De Officiis*. I.14; II.48.

[46] Aquinas, Sententia libri Ethicorum (Commento all'Etica nicomachea) In 2 lib, 1108a.

[47] Natali, *Aristotele. EN*. 478.

[48] Hume, *David: A Treatise of Human Nature*. Books 2-3; Hume, *David: An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. passim*. Raphael and Macfie, *Adam Smith. The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

[49] Cf. European Commission, *Report to the European Commission on Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions*. Cf. Ciappei and Cinque, *Soft skills per il governo dell'agire*. 145-153.

strong basis in classical thought and with a strong humanistic foundation can take advantage of developments in psychology to constructively interpret the requirements of contemporary university education.

In terms of studies and research, universities have always promoted contact with the advances in empirical science. In this sense, there has never been a shortage of work on ancient and modern biology. When referring to important human questions, these studies are limited in that they consider ancient thought as a mere object of study, as a repertoire of another ages' vision in a given cultural context. As argued above, human nature contains important, permanent aspects that are rediscovered through different media and from various perspectives[50]. Studying these similarities, as suggested, is always stimulating from an intellectual point of view and can also provide the basis for practical renovation. That is, multidisciplinary exchange can help improve educational systems, both through external means— such as those that education-promoting agencies suggest— and through internal improvement processes starting from an institution's tradition.

For example, it is sometimes not enough for institutions with a strong intellectual identity to maintain their academic impact among their usual audience or to attract students from different fields. Without losing their identity and sense of mission, all institutions are required to renew their internal resources to keep them up to date and enhance their mission of service. Specifically, university authorities should involve faculty members in exchange processes and improvement. A changing and dispersed social environment does not promote unity and cooperation and striving to promote them through regulation is becoming less effective without an existing spirit of solidarity among the faculty.

At this point, practical advances in psychology, which were mostly cultivated in the management field, can be very useful. For example, Rogers' client-centred therapies have been widely disseminated in professional environments with healthy people, both

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[50] This is one conclusion drawn from positive psychology's vast studies. Cf. Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*; Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*.

at the individual and group levels[51]. These techniques are designed to put the subject in contact with his innermost desires and orient him to the means to carry them out; this is a rational exercise that profoundly impacts the will and often leads to the development of attitudes (and virtues) that positively modify peoples' actions[52]. By working on herself to align with everyday reality, a person promotes her internal organization, thus obtaining a more realistic sense of situations; this also supports equanimity because it helps to focus on real problems and not to distribute blame for one's own shortcomings or errors; it also helps one to be more aware of prejudices and confront others, attending to pending tasks without wasting time on unnecessary quarrels and other problems. As Rogers argues, 'And thus discovers that he is soundly and realistically social [...] He is becoming a more fully functioning organism, and because of the awareness of himself which flows freely in and through his experience, he is becoming a more fully functioning person'.[53]

Beyond technique, there is the will to understand the other, to recognize their otherness and respect the other as a person. From there, a welcoming relationship becomes possible, where the other begins to foment understanding of his faculties[54]. It is only a beginning, but without this initial platform, other instruments are of little value. In what remains, the other's connection with these 'minor' virtues, which according to Aristotle facilitate human relationships, is pretty immediate.

Both Maslow and Aristotle describe this fully functioning person, as previously seen. How to integrate these insights from the theoretical point of view, especially with regards to the development of specific virtues that facilitate social life and collaboration, cannot be discussed her. We can say, however, that the development of these skills, which can be promoted with specific techniques, naturally translates into more collaborative team building and productive work and into networks of

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[51] Cf. Rogers, *A Way of Being.* xi-xii; 316-335.

[52] Bergamino, *Desiderio e consapevolezza.* 'Introduzione' and chapter 1.

[53] Rogers, *On Becoming a Person.* 193.

[54] Starting in 1939, Rogers continually underlined the importance of empathic understanding and an unconditional positive regard for the other, which is manifest in acceptance, caring, prizing of the person. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy. passim.* Cf. Rogers, *A Way of Being.* 142. On his impact and these principles' connection to unspoken theological roots, cf. Thorne, *Carl Rogers.* xi, 85.

relationships with responsive communication, where feedback is given and received as a gift and as an aid in carrying out a common task in the best way possible[55]. In university life, this is paramount with or without formal requirements from external accountability organisations.

The following points serve to summarize and conclude:

- Human activity manifests an order whose value has been highlighted both by the Greek classical thinkers and by contemporary psychologists.

- All of them refer to this order as *nature* and agree that it is an internal operational principle, although their respective methodologies are very different.

- This operating principle directs, with its original tendencies, towards the perfection of the individual.

- For human beings, this direction is not automatic and requires effort. The qualities with which human beings adapt their action to these natural, but not spontaneous, tendencies (virtues) constitute their character or personality.

- This requires deep understanding between rationality and affectivity.

- People with greater understanding have a more fine tuned sensibility and act with greater harmony in different situations.

- In their responses to the demands of life, they promote healthy relationships with others and usually such relations are constructive.

- A good portion of these qualities can be developed or boosted with the development of modern psychological techniques.

- The promotion of good attitudes through such techniques can help improve the quality of university work.

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[55] Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Work.* Cf. the numerous examples cited in Bergamino, *Desiderio e consapevolezza.*

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