



THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Character Education

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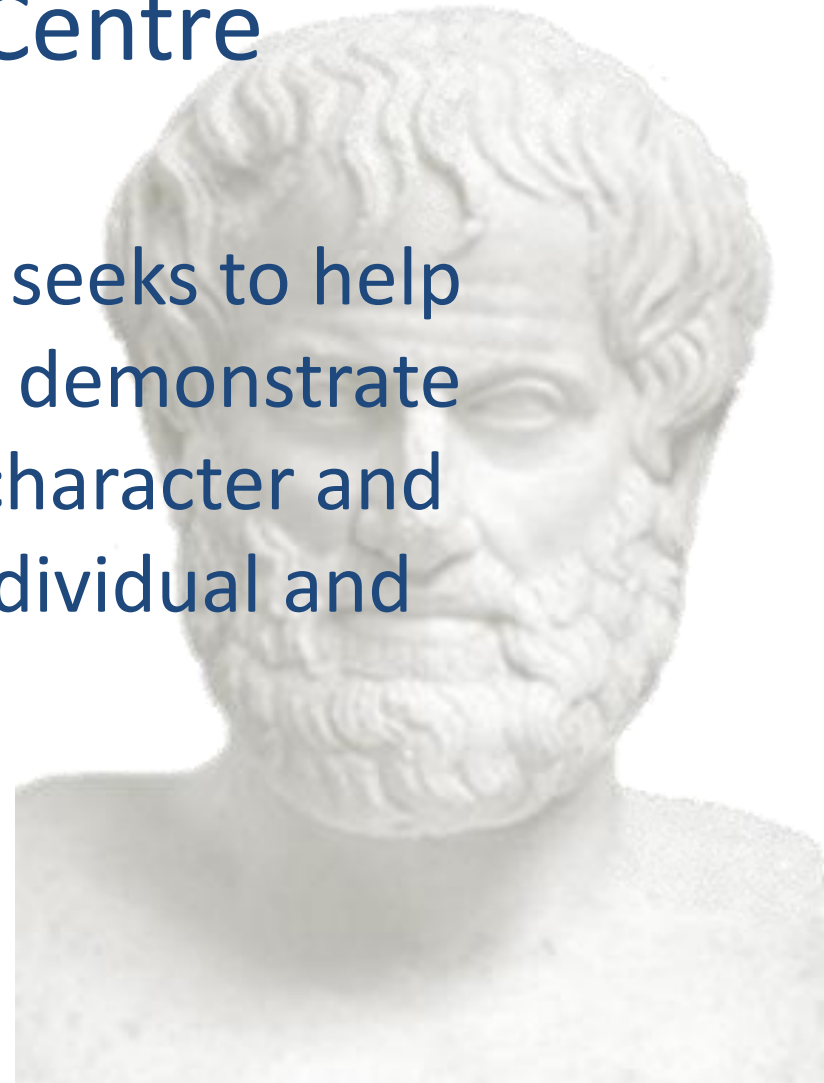
The Task

- ④ How do we help children and young adults towards full human flourishing, in a context that is highly individualistic, materialistic, and in which ethical pluralism reigns?



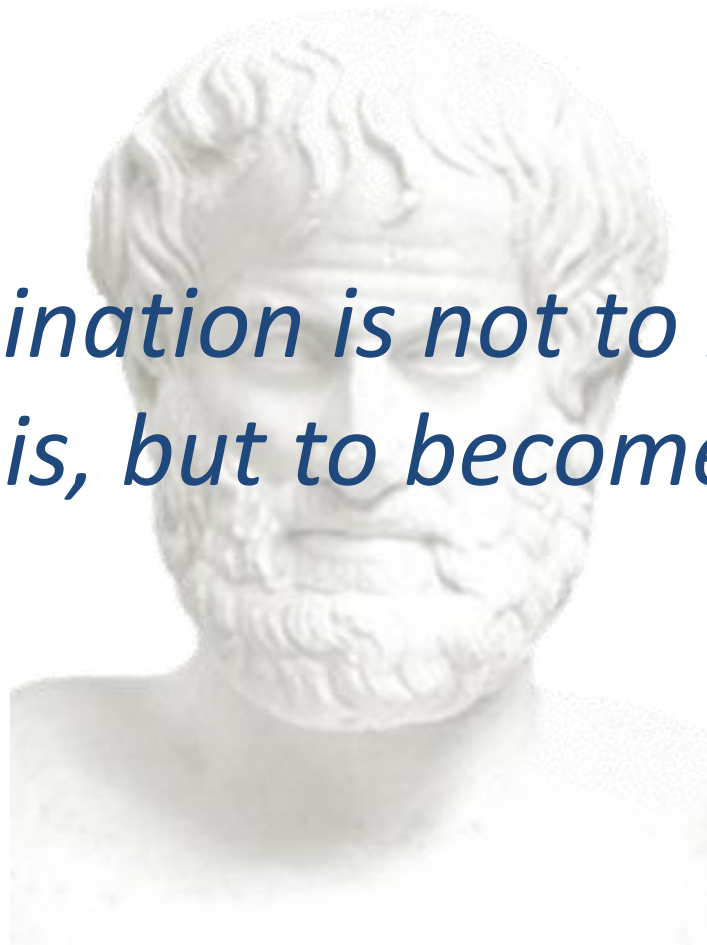
The Jubilee Centre

The work of the Centre seeks to help people understand and demonstrate the benefit that good character and virtues bring to the individual and society.





*‘Our examination is not to know what
virtue is, but to become good’*



Aristotle

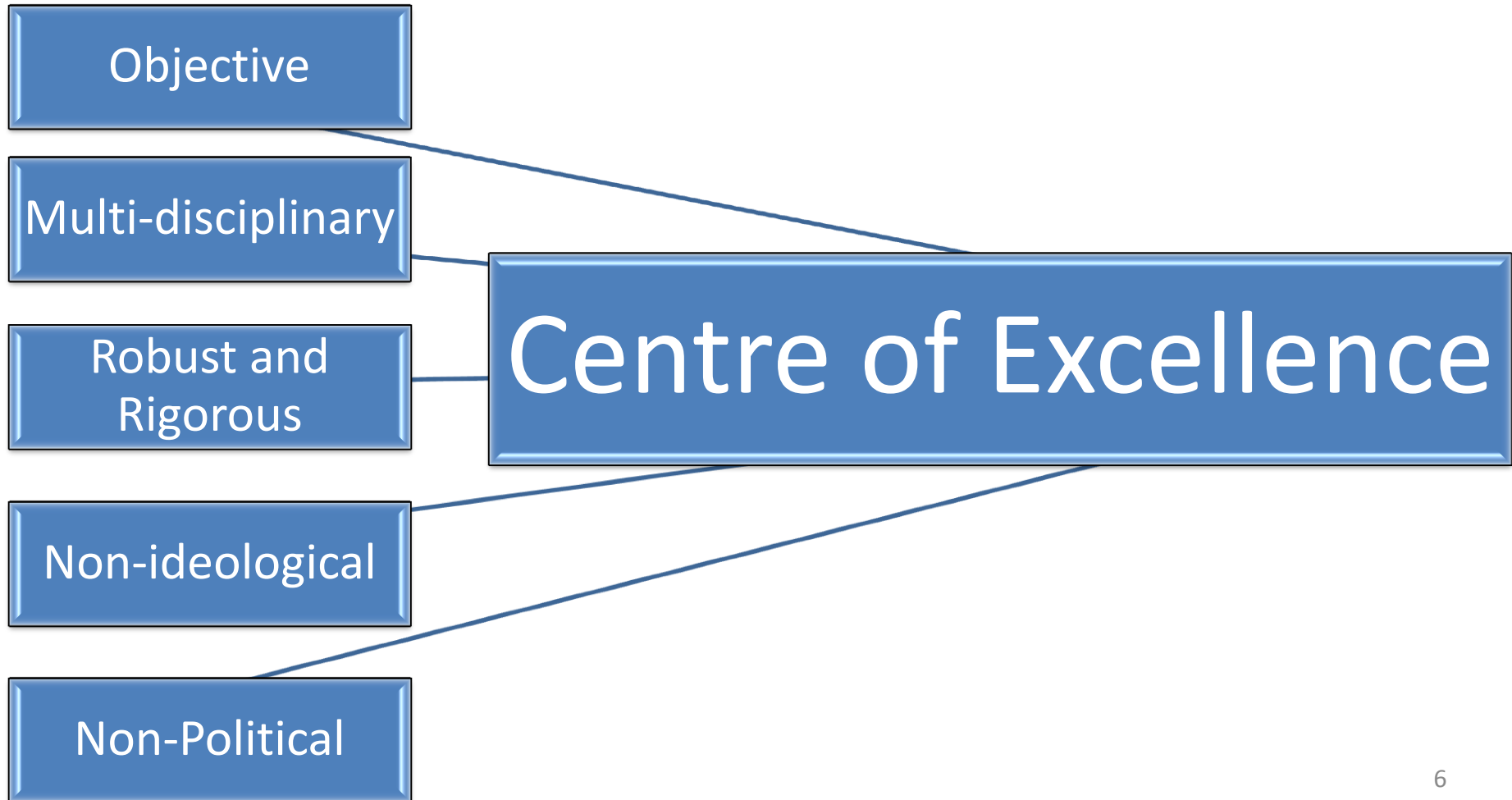


Key Features of The Jubilee Centre

- ① A cross-disciplinary centre of 30 leading academics at the University of Birmingham.
- ① Carrying out robust and innovative research on the importance of character and virtues.
- ① Working in partnership with schools and national professional bodies.
- ① Providing advice and demonstrating best practice



The Centre's Approach





The Importance of the Centre

- ④ The issue of character has been neglected in schools and the professions.
- ④ Good character matters to individuals and society.
- ④ The qualities which make up character can be learnt and taught – and we need a new emphasis on their importance in schools and professional education.



A Virtue Ethics Approach to Character

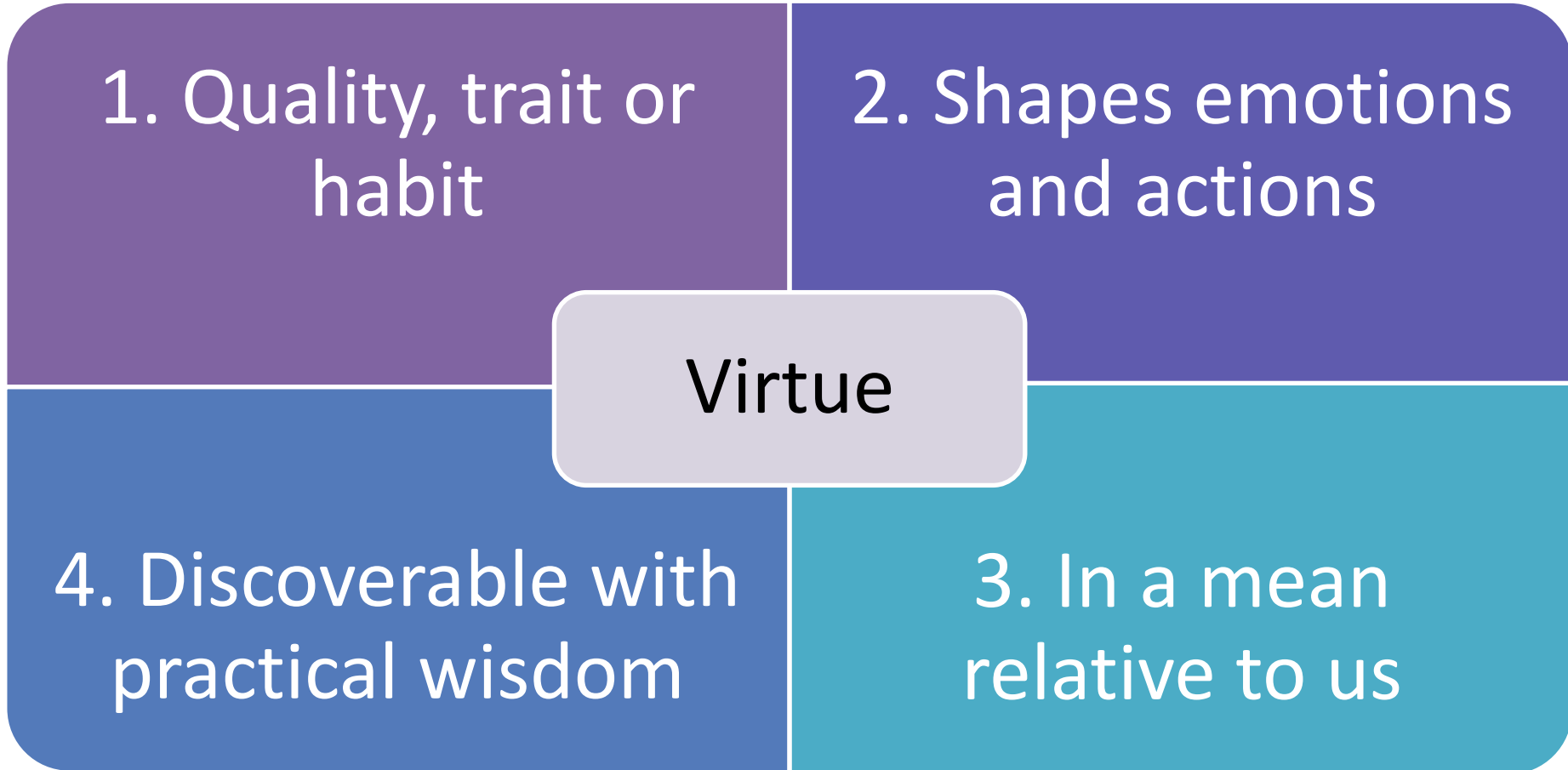
- ① What kind of person do I want to become, when confronting situations that call for an ethical response?
- ① How do I balance out the competing demands of the moral life?
- ① How do I flourish as a person?
- ① Aristotle, Anscombe, MacIntyre, Hursthouse, Nussbaum



A Neo-Aristotelian Interpretation of Virtue Ethics

- ① Education is to guide us towards objectively worthwhile goals, i.e. the Aristotelian virtues, e.g. being wise, courageous, just, self controlled, truthful and friendly, or civil.
- ① It is about acquiring, cultivating and exercising these excellences of character.
- ① The virtues refine and educate our emotional and rational lives, enabling us to flourish as human beings!

What's a virtue. . .



. . . A consistent quality of character that guides us towards becoming a better person . . .



What is Character Education ?

Character is a set of personal traits or dispositions that evoke specific emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct.

Character education is an umbrella term for all explicit and implicit educational activities that helps young people develop positive personal traits called *virtues*.



The Benefits of Good Character

- ④ The virtues which make up character enable us to enjoy rewarding and productive lives.
- ④ The more people with good character the healthier our society.
- ④ People live and learn better with character.
- ④ Virtues, as well as knowledge, are vital to our professions.



'The formation of a person's character lies in their own hands'

Anne Frank





‘You can easily judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him’

James D. Miles



Why Character Education?

- ⊗ Tests of life, not just a life of tests
- ⊗ What it means to be, as well as think and do.
- ⊗ Schooling is a deeply formative experience.
- ⊗ Character and virtues are the basis for individual and societal flourishing.
- ⊗ Everyone believes it is important: parents, teachers, young people, employers and increasingly policy makers.



Common Myths about Character Education:

- ⊗ Indoctrination?
- ⊗ Mindless conditioning?
- ⊗ Conservative?
- ⊗ Paternalistic?
- ⊗ Necessarily religious?
- ⊗ About promoting the ideals of a particular moral system?
- ⊗ Either character or attainment, but not both?



“I expect you all to be independent, innovative, critical thinkers who will do exactly as I say!”

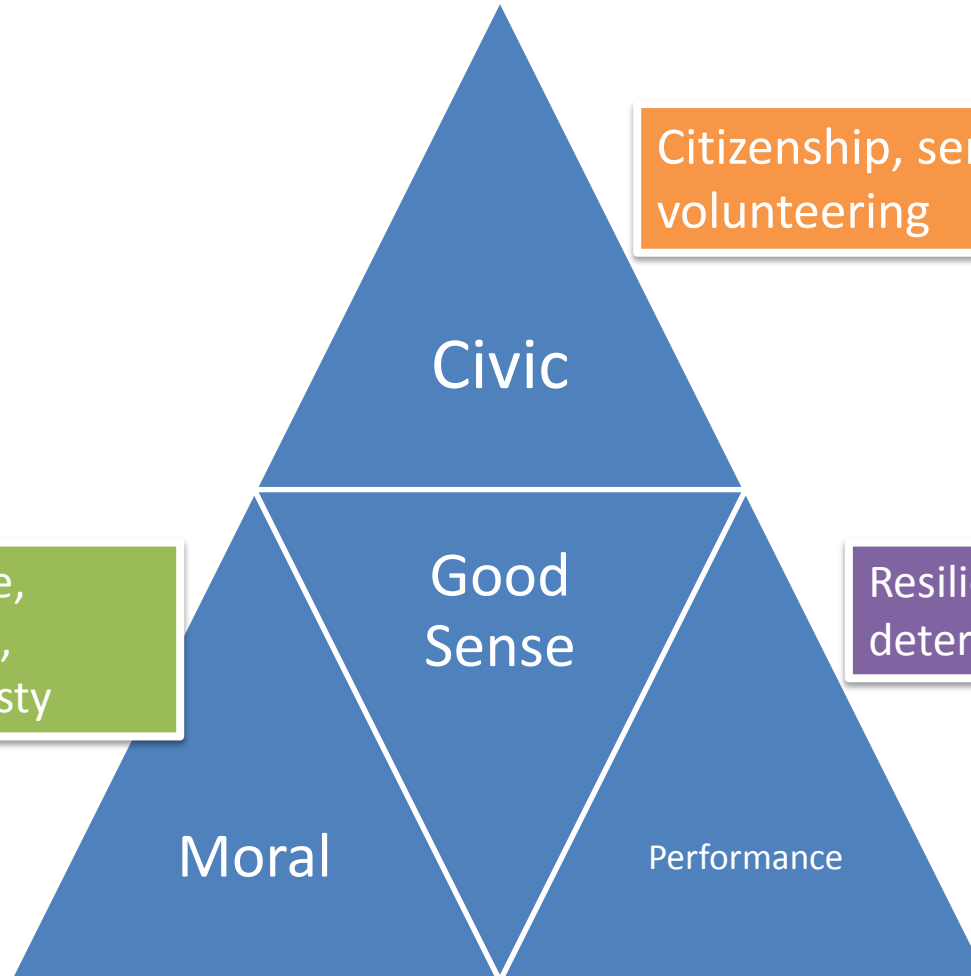


Why Aristotle?

- ⊗ Because this tradition has the best hope of fusing:
 1. The rational and the emotional
 2. The theoretical and the practical
 3. Notions of the 'good human being' with notions of the 'good citizen'
 4. The 'self' and 'others' – your flourishing is my flourishing



Which virtues?



Citizenship, service,
volunteering

Courage, self discipline,
compassion, gratitude,
justice, humility, honesty

Resilience,
determination, creativity



What is the Key Virtue?

**“Moderating Virtue”:
Good Sense (Practical Wisdom)**



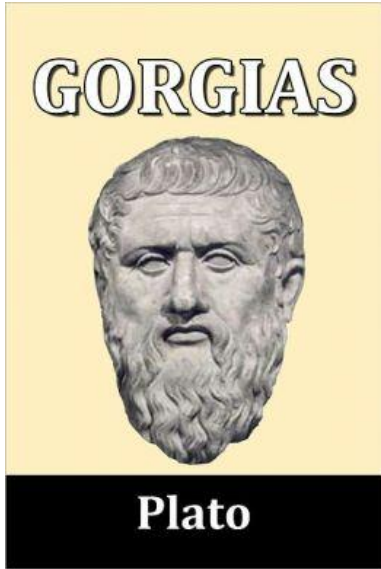
Implication 1: What's an educational community for?

- a moral community, interested in educating its members towards fully flourishing human development, within which growth in knowledge and skills also takes place?

Or,

- simply an arena for schooling in knowledge and skills?

What is schooling for?

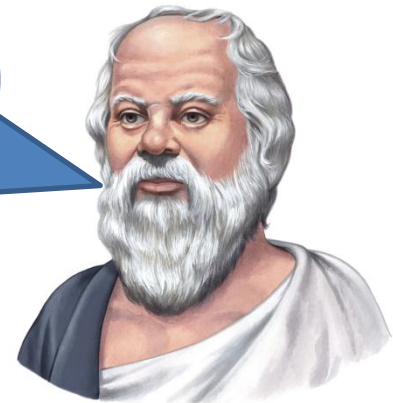


The Sophists

*Learning knowledge and skills
that will secure our personal
advantage, and power and
influence*

OR . . .

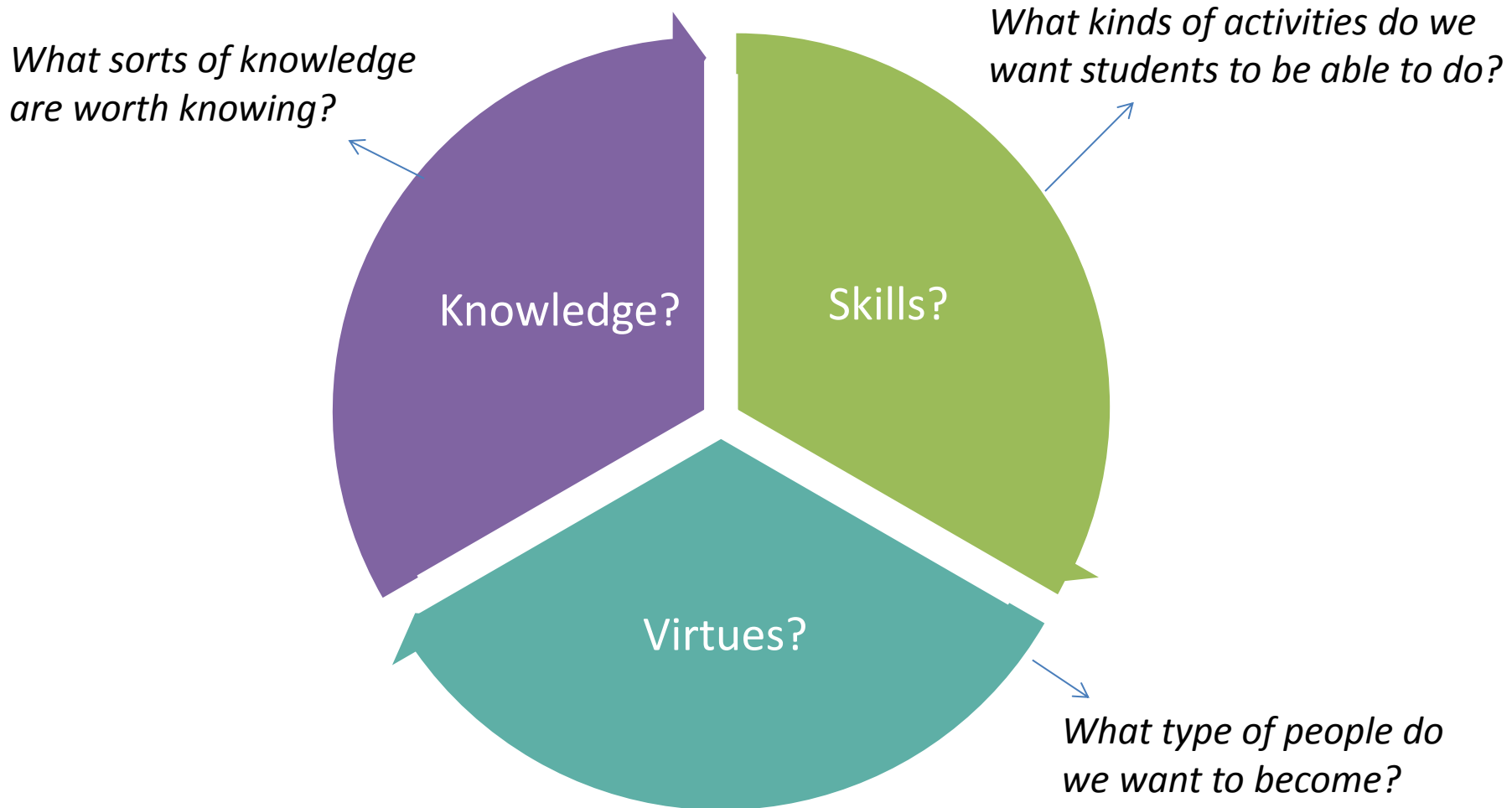
*Forming each other
in conduct that is
right and good, with
a respect for justice
and the common
good*



Socrates



Implication 2: What's a curriculum for?





Implication 3: What's the teacher for?

The teacher is a technician, a trainer . . .

Imparting knowledge and cultivating skills

The teacher is an artist, an educator . . .

Promoting human flourishing, making students better people, rather than worse:

more honest, rather than liars and cheats,
more open-minded, rather than bigoted
and prejudiced

Letter from the Principal of an American High School in Cambridge, Massachusetts to a new cohort of teachers at her School:

Dear Teacher,

I am the survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness:

Children poisoned by educated physicians.

Infants killed by trained nurses.

Women and children shot and burned by high school and university graduates.

So, I am suspicious of education.

My request is: Help your students become human.

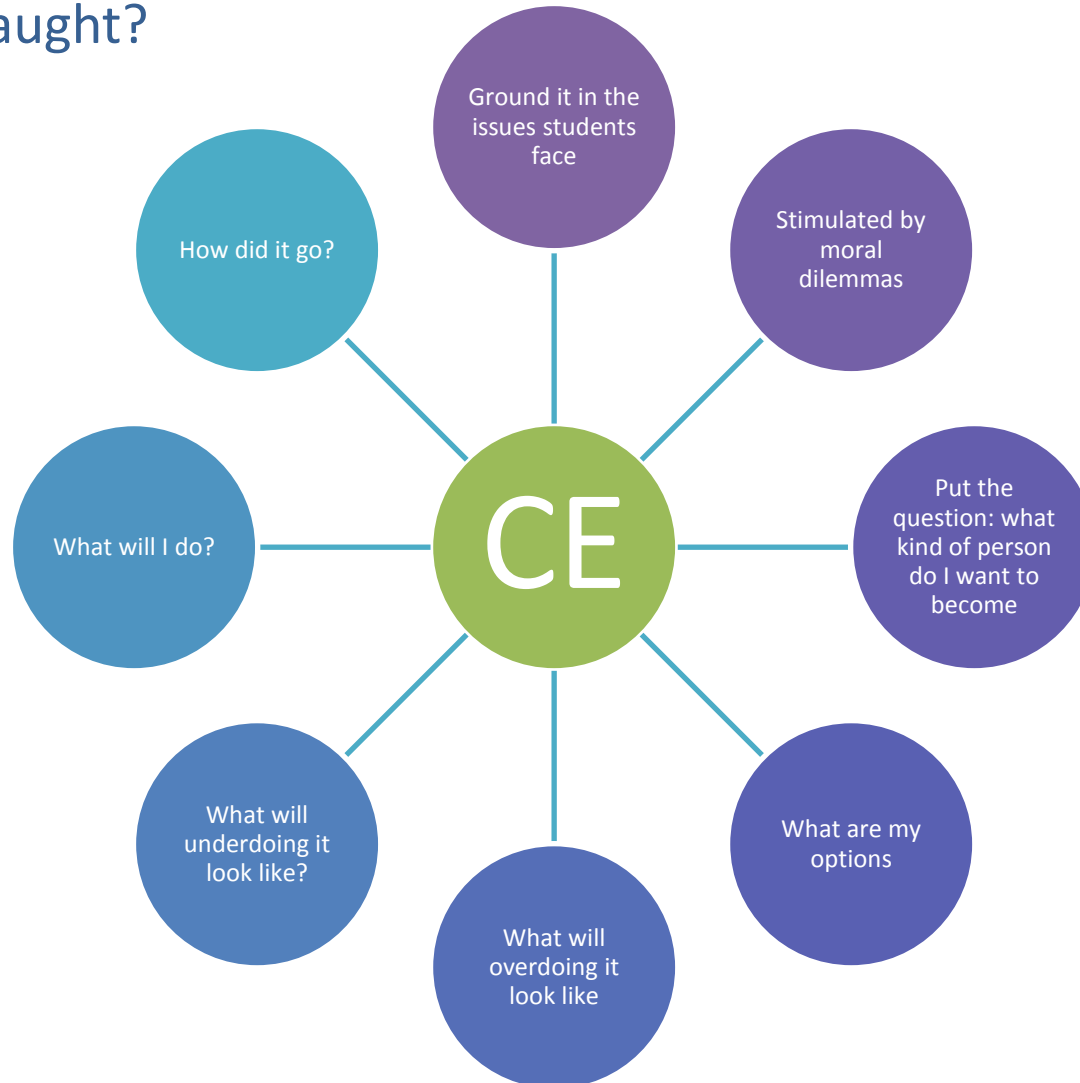
Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.

Reading, writing, arithmetic are important but only if they serve to make our children more human.

Cited in Pring, R. *Life and Death of Secondary Education For All*, Routledge 2013, p. 39-40



Character Education: caught or taught?





What's in it for the students?





What do parents think?

Polling carried out by Populus for the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, has found very strong support among parents for the idea that schools should be promoting character development alongside academic study.

Key findings in the poll include:

- 87% of parents felt that schools should focus on character development and academic study, not simply academic study alone
- 84% of parents that that teachers should encourage good morals and values in students
- 95% of parents felt that it is possible to teach a child values and shape their character in a positive sense, through lessons and dedicated projects or exercises at school
- 81% of parents wanted schools to have a core statement of the values that schools instilled in their pupils



Virtuoso Living

‘Recommend virtue to your children; it alone, not money, can make them happy.’

Ludwig Van Beethoven 1770-1827

