

The Jubilee Centre for  
Character and Virtues

In Collaboration with  
The Congregation for Catholic  
Education, Vatican, Rome

RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR JOHN HALDANE  
AND PROFESSOR CANDACE VOGLER ON  
“THE TWIN ENDS OF EDUCATION: THE  
WELL-BEING OF THE COMMUNITY AND  
THE FULFILMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL”

*Professor Holger Zaborowski*  
*Holder of the Professorship for*  
*Philosophy*  
*University of Erfurt*

Fostering Personal and Social Virtues  
*Response to Professor John Haldane and Professor Candace Vogler on “The Twin ends of Education: the well-being of the community and the fulfilment of the individual”*

Holger Zaborowski, University of Erfurt

Let me first of all thank Professor Vogler and Professor Haldane for their insightful presentations this afternoon. We all, I think, have learnt a lot from them—about the significance of ancient virtue theories, about the difference that monotheism makes, and about the challenges of revitalizing virtue theories in the context of late modern (political) culture. I would like respond to their papers by raising a number of questions that are based on their reflections and that may help us all in our thinking about good and virtuous education.

1) Professor Candace Vogler has rightly pointed out that modern secular work on character education stands in the shadow of monotheism. This has considerable implications for our understanding of equality and human dignity, for example. The belief in one God is still resonating in contemporary culture. This resonance, however, is fading. What does this mean for (secular) character education, but also for society at large? Don't we need—with respect to the challenges of both anti-humanism and trans- or post-humanism—a coalition not necessarily of all monotheists, but of all humanists who hold on to the truth of the dignity of all human persons? What could this mean in practical terms?

2) Professor Haldane provides us with some questions himself. Given the limits of time, I cannot answer any of them. In fact, as I said, I will even increase the number of questions. It seems to me that there are many signs in contemporary culture that show the limits and the crisis of individualistic liberalism. I only would like to mention the increasing interest in a new kind of economy focusing not on individual gains, but on the common good and, particularly in the ecological movement, the awareness that a new or, if you like, more traditional relation to nature—and thus also to oneself and to other human beings—is necessary. How do these recent developments in civil society affect our thinking about virtues and virtue education? Are these already signs or forms of a "liberal communitarianism"? And could the intermediary phenomenon and concept of civil society—as mediating between the individual sphere and the political realm—help to bridge the gap between individual and political virtues?

3) There are powerful "neo-Biedermeier" tendencies that are critical and skeptical of the political in general and of the future of democracy in particular. Some argue that democracy, as we have come to know it, has come to an end for economic and technological reasons. Others refrain from political life for religious or other personal reasons. What are possible answers to these challenges? Can virtue education help us to revitalize the (sense for the) political and, if so, how?

4) We find virtues theories in other cultures, too. Here, I am particularly, but not exclusively, thinking of Confucianism. It could be important to start a dialogue with this tradition and similar traditions, too—particularly vis-à-vis the increasing political and cultural tensions between China and the West. How could this dialogue be conducted? How would it transform our Western thinking about virtues, education, and its twin ends?