**Angelo Campodonico *Aretai Center on Virtues*. *Some requirements for cultivating human flourishing in Europe today***

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to indicate some conditions for cultivating human flourishing in Europe today, enhancing the potential of its culture and dwelling on the figure of the high school and university teacher.

Education must be integral. A sectorial or exclusively moral education, closed to the question of the meaning of life, of transcendence (in a wide sense) is insufficient, because it is narrow, unmotivating and risks lapsing into notionism and moralism. On the other hand, all education, whether acknowledged or not, is moral formation.

A community (of teachers etc.) that shares common values allows the teacher to gain certainty and to instil direction and seriousness into his or her intellectual life.

The teacher educates if he or she is in turn educated by reality and the living memory of people and events[[1]](#footnote-1). On the other side teaching is an adult way of learning.

Education requires an encounter with a teacher and it is possible because both, teacher and student, have some principles in common[[2]](#footnote-2). Without aninitial participation in truth of both teacher and student, teaching may risk violence or relativism.

The quest for the meaning of life and reality increases the sense of one’s own identity. Educators should have a certain idea of the good for themselves even if they do not express it explicitly in their teaching. Living the real intensely and aiming with their whole self (reason and emotion) at the meaning of life, they mature in a unified and articulate manner as a tree branches out: thus it is a matter of “distinguishing to unite” (Jacques Maritain) among the various disciplines and “distinguishing in the unified” their own human experience[[3]](#footnote-3). Resting in a rich and unified experience, the teacher can articulate it[[4]](#footnote-4). Although he or she teaches a certain discipline, he/she can have a clear sense of the place of the various disciplines and of the relationship among them.

The improvement of the contemplative dimension (*theoria*) in all spheres, scientific, philosophical, religious, coincides with that of the seriousness of research, which means the hierarchisation of topics and disciplines against their compartmentalisation, their reduction to the mere usefulness and their being subject to competition[[5]](#footnote-5). The love of reality in its order (*ordo amoris*) characterises the virtue of seriousness. Precisely insofar as it has an end in itself, knowledge has **a** positive impact on students. Unlike politics, which divides, the speculative dimension unifies.

1. Two conditions hold:
2. Synchronic-communal dimension. The teacher is not alone. A good education is fostered by participation in a community that is broader than the intellectual one made up of people of different roles and ages. Against social and political polarization there is a need to know contemporary reality mediated by people who experience it themselves (and not only by media). For example, it is a matter of being realistically attentive to the good production of wealth (and to the human meaning of work as well) and not only to its fair distribution, to the issue of immigration as to that of the generation and education of offspring.
3. Diachronic-historical dimension. To educate means to propose the past through the living testimony of the teacher[[6]](#footnote-6). Only in this way can an understanding of the past be achieved. The European tradition has distinctive values and the ability to criticize itself. It is a matter of breaking the absolutization of the present as an impenetrable cloak that is the risk today. The contemporary risk is to live in the present without taking into account thepast and future. One can acknowledge the value of the past and learn from it, while being aware of its limitations. What unites us with the past is more than what divides us. There is no such thing as absolute progress or regress, there is not equal progress in every field and hasty progress can have negative effects at least in the short term[[7]](#footnote-7).

The teacher is a mediator among people in different roles and ages and between past and future. There is a necessary link between the horizontal, synchronic, democratic, inclusive dimension, on the one hand, and the vertical, diachronic, exception-conscious, qualitative dimension, on the other (1 and 2), in the figure of the wise teacher. In fact there is a link between attention to the past and attention to differences here and now. The wise man is located at the meeting point, i.e. at the intersection of the two arms of the cross, between *horizontalism* and *verticalism*. The synergy of the horizontal, communitarian and ecological dimension and the vertical, diachronic and historical dimension, attentive to differences is particularly favoured by a *Virtue Ethics* centred on what I call *extended wisdom[[8]](#footnote-8)*, because it is more capable to reconcile different aspects such as practical wisdom and metaphysical openness, progress and sense of limits, individual rights and sense of responsibility [[9]](#footnote-9). This is the sense of the *golden mean*, understood as a summit, reflecting reality in its complexity[[10]](#footnote-10). The human ideal is that of a life capable of holding the tension between opposites (Romano Guardini)[[11]](#footnote-11).

II. How to educate by teaching?

1. A good place to start today **is** masterworks, through the concrete experience of beauty (e.g. Michelangelo's *Pietà*). Beauty always constitutes a synthetic moment (the universal in the particular) and today in a largely iconic culture. There is a primacy of awe, intellect combined with affectivity, over rational argumentation.[[12]](#footnote-12) In fact, for millennia art has been religious (even when it exalts political power) and is naturally open to the ethical-political and metaphysical dimensions. Starting from the work of art, its historical, ethical-political, metaphysical, and religious dimensions can be considered at a later stage.

2. The historical and ethical-political dimension. Beauty allows one to be open to the past, empathizing with humanity’s feelings and ethical-political dimension throughout history.

3. The metaphysical dimension. It is a matter of emphasizing the role of metaphysics, educating a sense of awe without focusing on science alone. The questions of metaphysics are broader than those of science. Furthermore sciences do not answer the fundamental question ofthe meaning of life and the *archē* of being and metaphysics has its own arguments different from those of science.

4. The religious dimension. The demand for the salvation of life is ineradicable and stands in necessary relation to that of morality. It arises when the moralquest for the meaning of life, encountering the metaphysical dimension, becomes a radical demand for meaning addressed to the mystery itself. The negative sides of historical religions should be emphasized, without downgrading the positive demand from which they arise.

The expected result of this itinerary is to foster the growth of a person who is aware of history, open to the future, attentive to the present, but also capable of relativizing it.

Key words: integrality, past, aesthetics, metaphysics, religion

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1. Cf. L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, McGill Queens Univ. 2019, p. XXVIII-XXX: «The second need concerns the fact that the past may only be proposed to young people if it is presented within *a present, lived experience* that underscores its correspondence with the ultimate needs of the heart. That is to say within a present experience that offers reasons accounting for itself. Only an experience of this kind is capable of proposing, and has the right and duty to propose, tradition, the past. But if the past does not enter the scene, if it is not proposed in the context of a present experience that attempts to provide its reasons for being, then it will also be impossible to attain the third thing that is necessary for education: criticism […]. Our insistence is on *critical education.* Kids receive from the past through a present experience that they encounter, and which proposes that past to them, offering reasons in support of it. But they have to take this past and these reasons and lift them before their eyes, compare them with their own heart and say “It’s true” or “It’s not true” or “I doubt it”. Thus, with the support of a companionship (without this companionship, people are too much at the mercy of the winds of their hearts, in the negative and instinctive sense of the word), they can say, “Yes” or “No”. In doing so, they acquire their features as a person». [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. At least common principles (*intellectus principiorum*). Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De magistro* I, 18*:«*It should be said that the learner interrogated before the teacher speaks would respond about the principles through which he will be taught, but non about the conclusions which someone would teach him: hence he does not learn principles from the master, but only conclusions». [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. J. Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite* or, *The Degrees of Knowledge* (The collected Works), Notre Dame University Press 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. A. Campodonico, *The Idea of University in John Henry Newman*, in *Innovazione filosofica e istituzione universitaria fra Cinquecento e primo Novecento*, a cura di G. Piaia, M. Forlivesi, CLEUP, Padova 2011, p. 302: « […]we might maintain that, according to Newman, knowledge grounded on erudition, acquired thanks to notional assent (for instance thanks to wide readings) must become in part object of real assent, i.e., being perceived as an event, as far as its in integrated into the living conscience of a person, becoming one of the synthetic sources of his cultural and human education. From Newman’s point of view of the polarity between both kinds of assents, university education must educate human mind and the whole man on the one hand in widening his reason (doctrine, notional assent), on the other hand in looking for synthesis and for attachment towards concrete reality (principles, real assent). The synthetical task is certainly the idea of *sophia*, but this cannot be attained according to the Aristotelian and Christian Newman, if we look deep in his thought, without education of ethical virtues and with them of *phronesis* that “issues orders, then, for its (*sophia*) sake, but not to it”». On the level of the practical dimension of *phronesis* we find, according to the Newman of the *Grammar of Assent, real assent* and with it the assent towards Christian faith that holds the compass of human orientation and of rational reflection, enabling it to put order in his speculative knowledge, unifying it in *sophia*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. Z. Hitz, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*, Princeton University Press, 2021. On compartmentalisation see Alasdair MacIntyre, “Catholic Universities: Danger, Hopes, Choices” in *Higher Learning and Catholic Traditions* ed. Robert E. Sullivan (University of Notre Dame Press 2001), p. 15: «The graduates of the best research universities tend to become narrowly focused professionals, immensely even obsessively hard-working, disturbingly competitive and intent on success as it is measured within their own specialized professional sphere, often genuine excellent at what they do: who read little worthwhile that is not relevant to their work: who, as the idiom insightfully puts it “make time” sometimes with difficulty, for their family lives: and whose relaxation tends to consist on short strenuous bouts of competitive athletic activity and sometimes of therapeutic indulgence in the kind of religion that is well designed not to disrupt their working lives. Such lives are compartmentalized in at least two ways: (1) it is assumed that an individual passes through various spheres each with its own norms, so the self is but a collection of different roles, which (2) makes it impossible for the individual ever to view his or her life as a whole». [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The witness in Greek is called *martyr* from the verb *mimnesko* (to remember). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. On the topic of moral progress see, in particular, P. Kitcher, *Moral Progress,* OUP 2022; R. Buchanan, A. Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress: A Biocultural Theory,* OUP 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 1145a 1-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. D. Macpherson, *The Virtues of Limits*, Oxford University Press 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* II, 1106b. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Romano Guardini proposed a dialectic of polar opposition to explain the original structure of reality and the dynamism that characterizes it. In all life, he says, there is a tension between two poles which are bound together, united and indissociable. «It is not a “synthesis” of two moments into a third. Nor is it a whole, of which the two moments constitute “parts”». The two opposites are not annulled. One pole does not destroy the other. There is no contradiction and no identity. Cf. R. Guardini, *Der Gegensatz.* *Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten*, Patmos Verlag 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. # Cf. [Kristján Kristjánsson](https://www.routledge.com/search?author=Kristján%20Kristjánsson), *Flourishing as the Aim of Education. A Neo-Aristotelian View*, Routledge 2020, in particular ch. 5.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-12)