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A light gray world map is centered in the background of the page, showing the outlines of continents and major islands.

**Citizenship, Education and Governance:
Identifying the Good Society**

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Introduction

This article intends to raise a number of issues regarding higher education and the value it has for individuals and society. The discussion was first broached by antiquity in terms of the good individual and society and how the two interact. Overall, no hard and fast conclusions have been reached. However, for some reason society seems to value higher education.

Given the value that society puts on education this paper investigates what higher education should do for society. For instance, should universities educate people to be functionaries for the work place or should they provide rational individuals that healthy democracies are supposed to need? Should universities be institutions where people are taught or should they encompass facilitating organisations that provide the environment for individuals to develop individuality? On a more practical level, can the opening up of the higher education system deliver what is needed for society or is it unable to deal with the increased numbers and consequently offering a poor substitute? Overall, can the broadening of the UK education system deliver rational citizens and the good society? This of course leads us to a situation where we need to understand what we mean by the rational citizen, the good society and education in broad terms. In this context, we are led toward the debates of antiquity in an attempt to shed some light on these issues.

Rhetoric and Persuasion a Dispute Over Morals

The ancient Greek meaning of virtue was marginally different to the modern. The ancient Greek word *arete* meaning excellence or success may give a better definition of the ancient Greek concept of virtue. Virtue emphasises good intention whereas *arete* emphasises good results. Indeed, the concept of *arete* ranges from physical robustness, such as sturdy boots or a bow that shoots well to the pursuit of honourable actions in the achievement of human endeavour and behaviour toward others. Fundamentally, *arete* means to govern well. This may encompass all aspects of government from ones household, to the *polis* or company. In Plato (1976), Meno wishes “. . . to acquire wisdom and virtue (*arete*) which fits men to manage an estate or govern a city” (p 145). *Arete* and virtue have complex meanings. Each refers to both the disposition of an individual and to things individuals do. A person is devoid of *arete* or virtue if they are not of a certain kind or fail to do good deeds. Of course, there is some dispute about what the virtuous individual is or does. Socrates considered that good governance often correlated with virtue, which makes people prosperous and free. However, prosperity and liberty are not good or bad in themselves. To achieve a good end people must be knowledgeable. But what is meant by knowledge? Knowledge of virtue which comes from within, knowledge that is remembered.

In (Plato, 1976) Socrates saw virtue as knowledge and to be virtuous was to both know ones self and understand what one ought to do. One would consider that because virtue is knowledge and knowledge can be taught then so can virtue. However, on the one hand, Socrates argues that there are no experts of virtue while on the other he considers that virtue may be taught. But what if there are no experts to teach virtue? Indeed he attempts to overcome this problem by considering that “. . . the soul . . . has learned everything that there is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which . . . it once possessed” (Plato, 1976; pp 129-30). When we learn a basic principle, if we persevere, the rest

will follow The soul remembers what it forgot at birth “ . . . for seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection” (ibid, p 130). It is in this context, that knowledge of self and the pursuit of this knowledge is virtuous. Fundamentally, they are the same.

Plato outlined a world where ideas were more real than those that existed in the material world. The ideas of temperance, justice and all other virtues resided in the world of ideas and if one could attain knowledge one would become temperate and just. Indeed, if one attained knowledge of the idea of goodness the highest idea one would become truly virtuous and would understand how to direct others toward virtue (Huby, 1998). However, because an understanding of basic principles is necessary some form of sign posting needed to be put in place. In educational terms an accepted framework based within a place of learning; a place where direction may be undertaken. A place where *arete* may be learned and a moral perspective of the world developed. This again though has its problems what was the supreme good, what is virtuous and how is it to be communicated?

For Gorgias the supreme good was freedom and the best way of achieving this was through rhetoric and persuasion. Freedom was to have one's own way in everything. Consequently, in order to have one's own way in the *polis* or community, one must be capable of convincing one's fellow citizens. He argued that one should have the “ . . . ability to convince by means of speech”. Indeed Gorgias argued that “ . . . through the exercise of this ability you will have the doctor and the trainer as your slaves, and your man of business will turn out to be making money not for himself but for another; for you in fact, who has the ability to speak and to convince the masses”(Plato, 1960; p 28). Socrates answers Gorgias, by introducing a distinction between persuasion that produces understanding in the person persuaded and that, which does not (ibid).

When persuasion produces understanding, there should be rational reasons for holding a belief and once a belief is accepted a rationale should be given to account for that belief. Whereas, when persuasion does not produce understanding it relies on producing ungrounded conviction through psychological manipulation. “So it appears that the conviction which oratory produces about right and wrong is of the kind which is followed by belief not of the kind which arises from teaching?” (Plato, 1960; p 32). Gorgias accepts that rhetoric is not of the former but of the latter kind and is full of admiration for the orator who is able to persuade audiences of matters on which they are unskilled. Socrates questions Gorgias on whether the orator needed more than a comprehension of technology but an understanding of right and wrong. Gorgias presents rhetoric as morally neutral which can be used for purposes which are right or wrong; to blame a teacher of rhetoric for the uses made of it would be like blaming a boxing teacher for the uses pupils make of the skill once they have learned it (ibid).

The understanding that persuasion is amoral is one that constantly recurs. However, to state this amorality it is also to hold that it is morally irrelevant whether an individual reaches a belief by reason or through some non-rational way. To hold that such is morally irrelevant would insinuate that the exercise of human rationality is irrelevant to an individual's standing as a moral agent. In other words humans do not need to be responsible for their actions.

In this context, different explanations of responsibility are pre-supposed by different moral attitudes to the standing of techniques of persuasion. Consequently, the philosophical task of elucidation or education cannot be morally irrelevant and necessitates a process to enable thinking rational individuals not unthinking automatons.

Plato makes his understanding of the role of oration clear. He contends that body and soul have four arts corresponding to them; government through legislation and justice which deals with the soul and training and medicine which deals with the body. Each of these areas has something in common: they deal with the same object. However, they are also different from each other. These are the four arts that look to the well-being of humanity in terms of body and soul, but we also have pandering through pseudo-arts which disguise themselves as genuine arts and pretend to be those they impersonate. "The difference is that pandering pays no regard to the welfare of its object but catches fools with the bait of ephemeral pleasure and tricks them into holding it in the highest esteem" (ibid p 46). In such a context cookery takes on the guise of medicine and pretends to know which food is best for the individual.

In the Republic, the importance of education, understanding and thought is re-emphasised as the only means of attaining the good state. Power remains exclusively in the hands of those that are properly capable of wielding it; these were the philosopher kings who would rule by superior virtue and rationale. The education of the Guardians of society or the philosopher kings would be through the production of stories by Socrates and his followers so that parents would tell these stories and so mould the mind and character of their children.

Aristotle, Education & Good

Aristotle also contended that the good state and the good individual could be created through education and rational thought. He considered that supreme goodness may be pursued through political science, for it was political science that prescribed the subjects taught in the state. With the assistance of other sciences, it is politics that lays down what we should and should not do. Consequently, it must point to what is good for humanity because even though the good of the individual must coincide with the good of society, it is a far greater thing to preserve society than the individual.

Aristotle considered that the ultimate good was happiness and that pursuing virtue through the golden mean may attain this. This process needed to be apparent in the individual and the state, if the good state and good individual were to be realised. Political science should ensure that the right things are taught in the state to allow the individual the opportunity to distinguish the golden mean and become a rational thinking entity i.e. to find self. In this context, the state should ensure a competent well-resourced education system and not undermine it.

Aristotle argued that there are two kinds of virtue: intellectual virtue and moral virtue. The former is produced and nurtured through education whereas the latter is the result of habit. Neither is natural to humanity " . . . since, nothing that is what it is by nature can be made to act differently by habituation. . . . The moral virtues . . . are engendered in us neither by nor contrary to nature; we are constituted by nature to receive them, but their full development in us is due to habit" (Aristotle, 1983; p 91). In the *polis* habituation moulds good citizens. Indeed, the extent of habituation in respect of good in the *polis* indicates the difference between a good and a bad constitution. As humans become good or bad at x through doing x well or doing x badly there is a need for guidance and education in all things. This includes the idea of virtue. "It is the way that we behave in our dealings with other people that makes us just or unjust" (ibid, p 92).

Education the Good Society & the Good Individual

Today, UK higher education is open to a proportionally larger number of the populace than it was in ancient Greece. However, what are undergraduates being offered? Is it education in the context of Plato and Aristotle's understandings?

The individual is supposed to develop through an educational process. However, does today's educational process allow the student to become a rational moral agent in the process of attaining self? Individuals are more than the fragmented collection of qualifications. They are temporal beings in search of becoming themselves. Education should facilitate such becoming through the Platonic and Aristotelian perception of education, or the pursuit of knowledge and understanding to create the good individual and the good society. Qualifications that have this affect should be valid. However, it is not the qualification but the process that is important. When a student becomes a graduate, it is the person that the process has enabled that is important, not the certificate.

The problem is, with ever increasing numbers coming into higher education can such a process be upheld? Is it not simpler to train the individual through persuasion of the non-rational kind i.e. stipulate correct answers rather than encourage disparate thinking around the subject? However, training people does carry with it some theoretical problems. If you train individuals too closely in their process of becoming do they not become their trainer? Is this what we want for our future? Everyone should be given the opportunity to become self and attain good (or Maslow's self-actualisation) with guidance, but one should not grasp the tiller too tightly or guidance will become manipulation. Liberty, democracy and equality need to be under-pinned with educated thinking human beings not trained automatons. Is this not the purpose of human existence, to become whole many faceted individuals in a society that reflects this?

However, did not the Platonic and Aristotelian model of a university rest on an elite view of society an aristocracy? Can representative democracy emulate an education system designed for oligarchy and aristocracy or does it need to create one for itself? Does the very objective of education need to change? Should it not recognise that in a mass higher education system the masses need to be prepared for the work place and this should now be its objective?

It is far more difficult to create analytical and critical skills in a person than it is to train them in a particular process. So why not train people for employment? This is what society wants a workforce that will add to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and improve all of our standards of living. However, one may argue that employers know exactly what they want from an employee, academia is only guessing. Maybe academia should stick to education and leave training to the employer. This of course raises another point, when does training end and education start? Ultimately, it could be argued that education is about discovering the good society and the good individual through understanding and empathy. With higher education opening up to a wider populace, has this fundamental been overlooked and if it has are we selling students short and by definition undermining our future social development? The problems were outlined by Greek antiquity; have we overcome them and if not, should we attempt to?

Conclusion

Einstein (1982) argued that “. . . knowledge must be renewed by ceaseless effort if it is not to be lost” (p 59). Furthermore, he explained that people who have developed the ability to work independently would be better able to deal with change than those whose training consisted in accumulating detailed knowledge. He did, however finish on a proviso when he emphasised that what was said in his essay was no more than a personal opinion “. . . which is founded on nothing but his personal experience, which he has gathered as a student and as a teacher”(Einstein, 1982; p 64). Maybe this is our starting point.

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