

# **Randall Curren (University of Rochester, USA) - III. Being human, 14,15. II.Democracy,9. IV. Pedagogy,24,26. I.Policy,3**

Being human. Human nature as the basis of human education.

14) Reconsidering aims of education: Wellbeing, happiness, and flourishing as educational aims.

My eudaimonic theory of justice begins with the claim that human beings naturally desire to live well, in the twofold sense of living in ways that are both admirable and personally fulfilling. In Aristotle's terms, we naturally desire to live eudaimonic or flourishing lives. Given this desire, the theory holds that it is rational for human beings to cooperate in creating and sustaining societies with institutions that provide necessities for us all to live well together. If there is well-established knowledge of human nature and universal necessities for living well, then we should rely on this knowledge in defining the guiding purposes and principles of these institutions. The theory identifies such knowledge, rooted in ancient traditions and also scientifically supported by research in Self-Determination Theory. This knowledge of human wellbeing and motivation pertains to universal basic psychological needs to experience ourselves as positively related to others, to be competent and growing in our capabilities, and to be self-determining in the ways we live our lives. These needs are reliably satisfied only when we fulfill our social, intellectual, and creative potential well, and fulfilling all of these needs well (i.e., in admirable ways) is essential to experiencing happiness or wellbeing. Living well thus requires that we acquire forms of human excellence – moral, intellectual, and creative virtues – and that we have ample opportunities to enact these virtues in the activities of a flourishing life (i.e., activities that are both admirable and personally fulfilling).

Educational institutions are fundamentally formative in nature, and their proper function (according to this eudaimonic theory of justice) is to promote forms of development that are conducive to living well. Given the three basic psychological needs and three related basic forms of human potential I have identified, education should be organized around the development of intellectual, moral, and creative virtues or forms of excellence. There are countless arenas, practices, traditions, and forms of endeavor in which capabilities and forms of excellence can be developed and fulfillment obtained, and the best mix of educational experiences for each student and context should be determined by the needs of each student and the ways in which each can potentially contribute to the capacity of the society to enable all of its members to live well. This is much broader than preparation for paid employment, and the fundamental aim is not to serve the economy but to promote the development of each member of the society in such a way that they can all live well.

15) Education in values such as love, cooperation, solidarity, justice, compassion, and wisdom.

The eudaimonic theory of justice and just education I have described makes character education a fundamental aspect of proper education – the education that children need in order to live well. The theory of human nature presented in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is also very helpful in understanding how character education can build on children's intrinsically motivated sympathy, compassion, and benevolence. SDT places itself within the tradition of humanistic psychology but its aspiration has been to scientifically test and develop ideas in this tradition, going back to Aristotle. It identifies four distinct grades of integration of values into a person's identity, and explains how satisfaction and frustration of basic psychological needs for autonomy (self-determination), positive relatedness, and competence regulate the process of integration. The implications for how educators can successfully promote moral development are rich and important. SDT implies that for character education to succeed it must be predicated on satisfying all three basic psychological needs. It commends an approach that is nurturing, promotes intellectual competence, and engages learners in moral inquiry that allows them to

think through the moral landscape of their experience without pressure to adopt views they do not find reason to accept as their own.

To be virtuously motivated is to be appropriately responsive to the value of everything of value, and the essence of moral motivation in particular is autonomously valuing persons, other living beings, and what is essential to their flourishing. A value orientation of this kind is a predictable outcome for people nurtured in a needs-supportive social environment – an environment that models the valuing of persons and the world, and practices such valuing by providing sufficient opportunity for the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs as children begin to explore and make their way in the world. Actions that are autonomous products of a virtuous value orientation are similarly rewarded by the internal satisfaction of those same basic needs.

Democracy: 9) Empowering people to be critically engaged citizens

Pedagogy: 24) Education for wisdom: critical thinking, inquiry, understanding, and judgment.

The eudaimonic theory of justice and just education I have described also makes the educational development of intellectual virtues a fundamental aspect of proper education, and education. Wisdom and good judgment are more or less synonymous translations of the Greek term *phronesis*, which requires a deep understanding of human nature and the world, attunement to the situation at hand, and the deliberative capacity and care to bring these together in sound judgments concerning what is true and what to do. Critical thinking is a term that is used to describe qualities and processes of thought essential to arriving at these sound judgments, and we can (following Harvey Siegel) conceptualize the critical thinker as a person who is appropriately moved by reasons.

Empowering people to be critically engaged citizens involves empowering them to be critical thinkers. Acquiring the skills and virtues of a critical thinker is something that in itself involves learning to engage other people as valuable but imperfect sources of understanding and rational considerations. Students must learn the importance of both analytical rigor and virtues of intellectual open-mindedness, imagination, diligence, courage, and humility.

The context of engaged citizenship requires even more than this, because it is a sphere in which we all need the preparation to understand the complex matters essential to a society's wellbeing, and we all need the preparation to engage people sometimes very different from ourselves in mutually respectful engagement in reasoning together about the best way forward in dealing with challenging problems and controversies. Engaging students in fruitful discussion of controversial subject matter seems essential to civic education but it is not easy. I argue that an essential foundation for success is for schools to be inclusive and empowering just communities in which civic friendship is fostered. Bonds of civic friendship can make the hard conversations easier and more likely to be sustained.

26) Agonistic pedagogy and other approaches.

Aspects of education in critical thinking for citizenship may be regarded as agonistic. The Greek root of this word, *agon*, means contest or struggle. An agonistic ethic is, thus, an ethic in which respect is not freely accorded on the basis of our common humanity, but must be earned (or exacted) by prevailing in contests or conflict. This is the 'Homeric' ethic that Socrates and other moral reformers of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE sought to replace with an ethic of universal respect. Our primary goal should be to cultivate virtues of universal respect and cooperation, hence to overcome the residue of an agonistic ethic that continues to undermine social and civic equality. One could regard a pedagogy of engaging students in debate of controversial subjects as agonistic if the premise of debate is for there to be winners and losers. This is unfortunately often the case with debate, yet it should not be the case if the goal is to cultivate virtues of cooperative progress toward finding the truth and solving the problems we face as members of

various societies and a global human community with problems we can only solve through global cooperation. While we must equip students with the virtues of cooperative inquiry and problem solving, however, we must also prepare them to resist injustice in a world in which not everyone is will listen to reason. In this sense, an

education for cooperative local and global citizenship may include an aspect that is agonistic, in the sense that it prepares students to engage in moral struggle through moral means.

Policy: 3) The role of education in meeting global ecological challenges.

An education for responsible global citizenship must address the challenge of climate destabilization and other aspects of the unsustainable burdens that humanity imposes on the Earth systems that are essential to our future and the future of countless other forms of life. This is a corollary to my view that the proper function of educational institutions is to promote forms of development that are conducive to living well in the world in which students find themselves. I argue that the moral heart of the idea of sustainability is that justice requires us to collectively live in ways that preserve opportunity to live well for generations to come. For human beings to live well both now and in the future, it is essential that we focus on what we truly need to live well, rather than on what we want. This implies systematic reforms on a very large scale – reforms that endure and adapt as circumstances change. I argue that children are entitled to know the sustainability “facts of life,” and that an education in sustainability is a complex undertaking. I have largely endorsed the understanding of sustainability education proposed by UNESCO’s Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

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