

NATURE AND GOALS OF PHILOSOPHY EDUCATION AT JESUIT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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I hope you'll forgive me taking advantage of this occasion for some parental bragging, for in thinking about the nature and goals of philosophical education at Jesuit colleges and universities, I've been thinking about the way in which my daughter Elizabeth, in her role as president of Loyola Marymount University's Faculty Senate, characterized Jesuit education in her welcoming remarks to Timothy Law Snyder at his inauguration this past Tuesday as the new President of LMU. Jesuit education, she said, "inspires us to treasure and cultivate the values of wonder, curiosity, and creativity." It "joins us in a common love of knowledge animated by a firm commitment to academic freedom and the open exchange of ideas." It "challenges us to combat what Father General Adolfo Nicolás...has called the globalization of superficiality" and "to develop in ourselves the art of inquiry that requires us to grapple with ambiguity and uncertainty as we search for meaning in a complex and ever changing world." The Jesuit educational tradition, she continued, "means a rigorous engagement with questions about the human condition, the natural world, the meaning of justice, notions of common good, and the nature [and I'll add, content] of faith," and it "compels us to move from theory to action, to become contemplatives in action, to cultivate a sense of civic and social responsibility, and to act in solidarity with and for others." We must, she suggested, "see our local communities in a global context...The Jesuit tradition has promoted the idea of going out into the world" as well as "respect for others and open dialogues with other societies and peoples." Finally, it calls upon us

“to foster generous and sympathetic imaginings of the other, recognizing what we all share by virtue of our common humanity, even as we embrace our differences as enriching.”

I think this a good picture of Jesuit education, and as I think about how philosophy fits into it, two particular features of the Jesuit tradition come to mind: (1) the grounding of Jesuit education in the humanities, and (2) the commitment to “the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement,” as it is put in Decree 4 of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (1975).¹ The two are not unrelated; indeed, I think the latter presumes the former. As the Congregation asked, “Are we ready to give ourselves to the demanding and serious study of theology, philosophy and the human sciences, which are ever more necessary if we are to understand and try to resolve the problems of the world?”²

First, then, the humanities. The Jesuit colleges and universities foreseen by the *Constitutions* and the *Ratio Studiorum* prescribed the study first of the “human letters,” that is, classical languages and literatures, history, grammar, and rhetoric.³ Students would then progress to the Faculty of Arts where they would follow a three-year course in Aristotelian philosophy, including logic (along with some mathematics), the philosophy of nature, moral philosophy, and philosophical theology.⁴ Only then would students progress to one of the graduate, “professional” schools in theology, law, or medicine, although the earliest Jesuit universities limited themselves to a professional faculty in theology.⁵ Philosophy in this model was the culmination of college and pre-professional education, and it had *the* central role in integrating a student’s knowledge of the world as a whole.

Does this Ignatian vision of education have any relevance for us today? The Aristotelian hegemony embedded in this model was eroded first by the rise of independent sciences of nature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and then by the rise from the nineteenth century

onwards of the social sciences, especially psychology. No longer was it possible to think that philosophy could be an integrating discipline as it was in the Aristotelian system, that is, by virtue of being the unity of philosophical sub-disciplines. Education today is and must be more expansive in scope, and it might appear that the fracturing of the disciplines speaks against the possibility of a unified understanding of the natural, the human, and the divine. Nevertheless, I think the spirit embedded in the model of an education rooted in the humanities and integrated by means of philosophical reflection still has much to offer.

If I may be permitted for the moment a distinction between a core curriculum and general education requirements, I believe the humanism at the heart of the Ignatian ideal expresses the “core” of what we should do in Jesuit institutions, even if there is a broader notion of general and specialized education that we must at the same time address. General education is concerned to develop a breadth of knowledge that surpasses both major concentrations and marketable skills. The core, on the other hand, explores the depths of what makes us human, of what makes us thoughtful and responsible agents in the world, of how we are to relate ourselves to our world, to other humans, and to God. These philosophical issues press themselves upon anyone whatever disciplinary pursuits, within or without the humanities, engage them. And philosophical reflection on these issues does the work of integrating our different experiences and different fields of knowledge in a way that no other discipline can. It thereby contributes in a way that no other discipline does to the understanding of what it is to be human and what it is to be a good human. These two fundamental and simple questions, What is it to be human? and What is it to be a good human?— the questions are simple, not their answers—are, I believe, the two questions that should drive philosophical education in a Jesuit college or university. The humanities, in other words, remain at the core of Jesuit education, and philosophy is the central

humanistic discipline insofar as it provides the perspective required to arrive at a unified understanding of our varied experiences and the different disciplines, most notably, the relation between reason and faith. Philosophy must play this central role, and philosophers at Jesuit institutions should insist on its playing that role.

So much for the first thought of Jesuit education as grounded in the humanities. The second thought concerned the promotion of justice that is an indispensable part of the service of faith. This concern, of course, flows directly from reflection on what it is to be a good human. We might easily rephrase the second question as, What is it to be a good human in the service of others? The development of philosophical habits of mind that are concerned to penetrate theoretically the nature of human being and doing and to put the results of that investigation into practice in the promotion of justice is what we as educators in the Jesuit tradition want. Philosophy's role is once again central because apart from an understanding of the various normative perspectives that underlie our debates about what is moral and what is politically valuable, attempts in other disciplines to explore moral issues in applied ethics courses will not be properly anchored. Philosophical ethics courses can also be exemplars of reaching out to local communities and addressing social justice issues in those communities through the development of service learning courses that engage and serve the community in a lasting way. Environmental scientists, for example, can work with local groups on environmental issues, but it is a philosophical perspective that genuinely puts a moral frame around this work.

At a talk on the role of philosophy in Jesuit education at Seattle University several years ago, I noted that my favorite Jesuit buzzword—or, rather, buzz phrase— was “contemplatives in action.” I was struck by Elizabeth's picking up that expression as well (I don't think she got it from me!) Philosophical education at Jesuit colleges and universities *should* be contemplative

but not merely contemplative. Philosophical education at Jesuit colleges and universities should never become education merely for action and the professions—a worry that goes as far back as the model laid out in the *Constitutions* and *Ratio Studiorum*—but neither should it be merely contemplative. It acknowledges the value of knowledge for its own sake and the value of the activity of philosophical reflection itself. It also acknowledges, however, the value of thoughtful and responsible action. And for the unity of contemplative reflection and responsible action to happen, philosophy must have a central role in the curriculum and the University.

I would like to add a note for those institutions among us that have graduate and, more specifically, Ph.D. programs. We can safely assume that our Ph.D. students already possess to a greater or lesser extent philosophical habits of mind, and at the graduate level we seek, as it were, to “professionalize” them so that the students can become both teachers of the next generation and active scholars who produce new scholarship in the field. But I think that there is something more—dare I mention the word *magis*?—to what we do, or should do, at the graduate level that is distinctively in the Jesuit tradition. We should impress upon our students the ways in which teaching and scholarship are themselves forms of service—service to our universities, our departments, and our discipline, but also beyond; we should impress upon our students how they should conceive this service as service to the communities in which we live and to the world as a whole; and we should impress upon our students how they should engage that responsibility to be of service to the world. We should impress upon our students our Jesuit view of education, of what it means to be a Jesuit educator at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. We need to develop students as educators who internalize this view of education and who, as they take on their own teaching positions, will be inspired by and guided by such ideals.

In particular, it is important that we recognize that Jesuit colleges and universities must figure out how to be and remain Jesuit in the face of a declining number of Jesuits. This is why it is so important that we focus at the graduate level not only on teaching students how to write so as to get papers published, how to teach so as to attract students to one's courses, but also the importance of doing these things in a way that is directed to the development of philosophical habits in those whom they address, to the development of contemplatives in action. I am going to brag again: this is why we have to aim at producing Ph.D. graduates, like Elizabeth, who recognize the value of this approach to education, who actively and joyfully adopt it and allow it to inform all their work, and who will continue to staff and maintain the identity of our Jesuit institutions.

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1. Decree 4, “Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice,” 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, December 2nd, 1974–March 7th, 1975; cf. <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/our-mission-today.html>.
 2. Decree 4.
 3. *Constitutions* [351], [366], [447–8], [450–1].
 4. *Constitutions* [470], [473]; *Ratio Studiorum* [23], [213].
 5. *Constitutions* [452].