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Virtues and their role in education

Introduction

Man comes into the world with the natural possession that may be described – from the educational perspective – as the state of natural ‘characterlessness’ (Friedrich W. Foerster), i.e., the state of disturbed order in the functioning of the human spiritual and sensual capacities. Its symptomatic feature is a strong egocentric tendency, characterised by Foerster as “ungrateful, ruthless, raving ‘I, knowing and acknowledging only one’s own matters and own rights”¹. The same reality was pointed out, but phrased in other words, by other German education theorists: Johann F. Herbart (4 May 1776 – 11 August 1841), who wrote about ‘subjective character’ as opposed to objective one, or Georg Kerschensteiner (29 July 1854 – 15 January 1932), who mentioned *makings of character*, whereas in Poland Jacek Woroniecki (21 December 1878 – 18 May 1949) forced through the notion of *inborn tendency*².

Because of that, the educational process should lead to a situation where these diverse and individualised predispositions would work as a homogenous and harmonised prime movers of a man. That should take place through such improvement of the powers of man to enable their best possible action: strengthening of the higher power – i.e., reason and will – so that they are capable of recognising and following the proper good, with simultaneous overcoming the sphere of emotions so that they obey the former. In classical interpretation of pedagogy the way to achieve this state is to form *moral character* (or simply

¹ E. Smółka, *Filozofia kształtowania charakteru*, Tychy 2005, p. 122.

² Ibidem, p. 104.

character), which may be understood as an evaluation of an individual's moral virtues. The origin of 'virtue' is the Latin *virtus*, which means 'strength' or 'skill'. This potential of the virtues is necessary for an individual, because he constantly struggles with the imperfection of his nature: limitations of his intellect, weakness of his will, and submission to emotions.

Types of virtues

The tradition of classifying virtues has its origin in the ancient philosophy. Specifications and numerous systematisations of the virtues have been carried out throughout the history depending on the adopted concepts of human personality. In accordance with the classification constructed on realistic assumptions of Thomistic philosophy, virtues may be divided into intellectual, moral, and theological.

Intellectual virtues

Virtues of this type perfect man in his knowledge of the truth. They enable the human intellect to know the moral order and the correct way of acting within this order, making it easier for man, through his actions, to attain his final goal³. Because intellect may confine itself to the sole contemplation of truth or consider truth in reference to action, we can classify the intellectual virtues into speculative and practical.

- The *speculative intellectual virtues* are understanding, wisdom, and science.
- Understanding may be defined as 1) the habit of first speculative principles (*intellectus*), which perfects the intelligence in its knowledge of the first principles of reality that are evident in themselves⁴, or 2) the habit of first moral principles (*synderesis*), through which man gets to know the ethical principles that should regulate his conduct and help him to detect moral good and evil.

³ P. Debeljuh, *Ethics: learning to live*, transl. C. Dean, Nairobi 2006, p. 223.

⁴ P. Debeljuh explains: "They are not inborn ideas nor conventional postulates, but rather they are an intellectual light that makes it easier to judge correctly, distinguishing when the reasons or data coming from experience are true or false" (idem, p. 234).

- Wisdom (*sapientia*) is the habit of considering things from the perspective of the final causes of reality. With the light of the above-mentioned first principles, perfected by the habit of wisdom, the person is able to recognize God as the first cause of all things.
- Science (*scientia*) is the habit of studying the final causes of each type of thing. Thanks to science, the intellect can reach the knowledge of different phenomena and draw definite conclusions⁵.

There are two *practical intellectual virtues*: prudence and art.

- Prudence (*prudentia*) determines what we should do in each specific case in order to act in a virtuous way. This virtue perfects the knowledge of the ethical dimension of our acts. It guides our activity, enabling us to reach perfection. This is why prudence is called *recta ratio agibilium*: correct knowledge of what ought to be done.
- Art (*ars*) helps us to produce particular objects. It perfects our intelligence so that we know how to do something well to achieve our proximate goals. This virtue is also called *recta ratio factibilium*: correct knowledge of how to do things⁶.

The difference between prudence and technical skill presupposes the difference between acting (*agere*) and making or producing (*facere*)⁷. In principle, prudence is an intellectual virtue; nevertheless, under a certain respect it may be considered a moral virtue, because its subject matter is the act of the moral virtues⁸.

Moral virtues

As I said, the intellectual virtues perfect our knowledge of the truth, whereas the moral virtues incline us directly towards the rational good, i.e., they give not only the facility, but also the right use of the facility. Martin A. Waldron observed aptly that “[f]rom this necessity of the moral virtues we see the falsity of the theory of Socrates, who held that all virtue was knowledge, as he held that all vice was ignorance”⁹.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 233–234.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 234–235.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 235.

⁸ Z. Pańpuch, *Cnoty i wady*, in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 2, Lublin 2001, p. 222.

⁹ M.A. Waldron, *Virtue*, in: *The Catholic encyclopedia*, vol. 15, New York 1912, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15472a.htm> (28 September 2014).

The above-mentioned rational good can be made real according to the four general ways in which the human being acts: practical determination of the good (*prudence*), moderating the lower or sensuous appetite (*temperance*), firmness in order to defend it (*fortitude*), and actualization of the good in society (*justice*).

1) Prudence, as we observed, is both an intellectual and a moral virtue. As the moral one, it indicates what to do in every individual case in order to achieve moral good. Prudence is the foundation for other moral virtues – thus it becomes clear why this virtue was described in the ancient texts as ‘charioteer of the virtues’ (*auriga virtutum*).

According to Thomas Aquinas¹⁰, prudence is exercised through three main acts that constitute the different stages that accompany every upright decision:

- *Knowledge*: we must know the reality of things and the moral principles that guide conscience clearly; this knowledge may be enriched through study, memory of past experiences, and the advice of prudent people.
- *Judgment*: aforesaid knowledge removes our indecision in the face of different possibilities, and helps us to choose the best way of acting.
- *Command*: after making a decision, we take the action or abstain from acting; prudence moves us to do what we consider to be good in the specific situation¹¹.

2) Temperance (*temperantia*) moderates, in accordance with reason, the desires and pleasures of the lower or sensuous appetite. The subordinate species of temperance are:

- *abstinence*, which disposes to moderation in the use of food;
- *sobriety*, which inclines to moderation in the use of spirituous liquors;
- *chastity*, which regulates the appetite in regard to sexual pleasures¹².

One can also indicate the virtues annexed to temperance. These are:

- *continence*, which according to the Scholastics, restrains the will from consenting to violent movements or concupiscence;
- *humility*, which restrains inordinate desires of one’s own excellence;
- *meekness*, which checks inordinate movements of anger;

¹⁰ Th. Aquinas, *The summa theologica*, transl. fathers of the English Dominican Province, New York 1947–1948, II–II, q. 47, a. 8.

¹¹ P. Debeljuh, op. cit., p. 238–239.

¹² M.A. Waldron, op. cit., chap. 3.

- *modesty* or decorum, which consists in duly ordering the external movements of anger; to the direction of reason¹³.

Pleasures of the senses are not bad in themselves and it is not improper to desire them; this is why the role of the virtue of temperance is not to remove passions but to guide them “under the control of the intellect and the will, directing them towards what is good”¹⁴.

3) Fortitude (*fortitudo*) enables the person to do good – in a constant and patient way – in spite of the difficulties encountered. The virtues annexed to fortitude are:

- *Patience*, which disposes us to bear present evils with equanimity; it can be said that while fortitude itself enables us to endure the evil that is brief but the biggest – the threat of losing one’s life, patience should give us the power to endure much lesser sufferings, but ones that last longer or reoccur more frequently. Patience is a form of fortitude that we need in everyday life¹⁵.
- *Munificence*, which inclines us to incur great expenses for the suitable doing of a great work. It differs from mere liberality, as it has reference not to ordinary expenses and donations, but to those that are great. The munificent man does things on a magnificent scale, however always in accordance with right reason.
- *Magnanimity*, which implies a reaching out of the soul to great things. The magnanimous man aims at great works in every line of virtue, making it his purpose to do things worthy of great honour. However, we can’t talk about magnanimity if it is not accompanied by true humility.
- *Perseverance*, the virtue which disposes to continuance in the accomplishment of good works in spite of the difficulties attendant upon them. As a moral virtue, it is not to be taken precisely for what is designated as final perseverance, that special gift of the predestined by which one is found in the state of grace at the moment of death. It is used here to designate that virtue which disposes one to continuance in any virtuous work whatsoever¹⁶.

¹³ Ibidem; see also: Th. Aquinas, op. cit., II–II, q. 141–170.

¹⁴ P. Debeljuh, op. cit., p. 246.

¹⁵ J. Woroniecki, *Katolicka etyka wychowawcza*, vol. II/1, Lublin 1995, p. 438–439.

¹⁶ M.A. Waldron, op. cit., chap. 3; see also: Th. Aquinas, op. cit., II–II, q. 123–140.

4) Justice (*iustitia*) regulates our relations with fellow-men. It disposes us to respect the rights of others, to give each man his due. Among the virtues annexed to justice we can enumerate:

- *religion*, which regulates our relations to God, disposing us to pay due worship to our Creator;
- *piety*, which disposes to the fulfilment of duties which we owe to parents and country (patriotism)¹⁷;
- *gratitude*, which inclines us to recognition of benefits received;
- *liberality*, which restrains the immoderate affection for wealth;
- *affability*, by which we are suitably adapted to our fellow-men in social intercourse, and consequently behave toward each man appropriately¹⁸.

Moral virtues are often called cardinal because they are like the hinges (the Latin *cardo*, *cardines*) on which all the other moral virtues revolve¹⁹.

Theological virtues

The classical ideal of *kallos kai agathos*, which means ‘noble and good’, is appealing in itself; nevertheless, we won’t limit our attention to it. The true and full dimension of human character may be formed only in the light of the supernatural virtues. This is why we should take these two categories of virtues into account: natural ones, which are attainable by human natural powers, and supernatural ones, which exceed the capacity of unaided human nature.

Supernatural virtues endow us with supernatural powers to enable us to attain our final destiny. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity:

- Thanks to *faith*, the intellect is perfected by a supernatural light, and assents firmly to the supernatural truths of Revelation, not on the motive of intrinsic evidence, but on the sole ground of the infallible authority of God revealing.

¹⁷ See more: B. Więckiewicz, *Rodzice i szkoła wobec edukacji dzieci w wieku sześciu lat*, in: idem (ed.), *Rodzina polska – nowe wyzwania. Wybrane aspekty*, Stalowa Wola 2013, p. 16.

¹⁸ M.A. Waldron, op. cit., chap. 3; see also: Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, transl. W.D. Ross, London 1954, book 5.

¹⁹ Ch.W. Gichure, *Basic concepts in ethics: with an outline of different methods in contemporary moral philosophy*, Nairobi 1997, p. 112; J. Woroniecki, op. cit., vol. I, p. 375.

- Not only our intellect must be perfected with regard to the supernatural end, but also our will. This is why we need the theological virtue of *hope* by which we trust, with an unshaken confidence grounded on the Divine assistance, to attain life everlasting.
 - *Charity* is a divinely infused habit, inclining the human will to cherish God for his own sake above all things, and man for the sake of God. It means that the love of our neighbour falls within the theological virtue of charity in so far as its motive is the supernatural love of God – in this way we can distinguish it from common natural affection²⁰.
- Among the three theological virtues, charity is the most excellent²¹.

Role of virtues

Virtues play *an important role* in human life. Jacek Woroniecki enumerates their following attributes:

- They accelerate and facilitate our actions by the fact that they are in a way concentrated and capitalised experiences which enable – without unnecessary consideration – efficient taking a decision that best reflects the assumed purpose.
- They do not restrain freedom, but strengthen it in the direction of the once made choice, induce to undertake certain actions and to avoid others.
- They provide some plasticity or elasticity to all we do, or moderation that allows us to adopt our own action to the specific situation – colloquially we call it tact.
- They bring us the feeling of joy which proves that the virtues have already been consolidated in our character²².

All the virtues that are acquired by man are eventually composing his or her character. Woroniecki characterises that process as follows: “Moral life necessitates that we overcome our innate inclinations with conscious and purposeful efforts so that we suppress those that are harmful for our conduct and

²⁰ M.A. Waldron, op. cit., chap. 3; J. Sollier, *Love (theological virtue)*, in: *The Catholic encyclopedia*, vol. 9, New York 1910, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm> (28 September 2014); Th. Aquinas, op. cit., II–II, q. 1–46.

²¹ M.A. Waldron, op. cit., chap. 3.

²² E. Smofka, op. cit., p. 119–120.

consolidate and develop the advantageous ones, or even raise and nurture them from the very beginning if we lack those virtues. Then moral life demands from us that we put all our inclinations and capacities into certain inner restraints to provide a kind of inner measure to which they would spontaneously hold on and at last so that we combine them into one harmonious entirety, into a single living organism providing for our moral life uniformity and basic cohesion of orientation. This totality we call the moral character of a person²³.

As we can see, acts must be repeated in order to consolidate one's virtue. An isolated act does not constitute a virtue, as well as an isolated habit doesn't constitute human character. For this reason Patricia Debeljuh quotes a piece of wisdom that "he who sows acts, harvests habits; and he who sows habits, harvests his own character"²⁴.

Friedrich W. Foerster lists a few essential features of moral character: 1) *order* – character is a kind of a unity ordered in a hierarchic manner and the organising factor is the ultimate purpose of human life served by fragmentary purposes; 2) *cohesion*, or conformity between the professed beliefs and their realisation in practice; 3) *autonomy* which results from lack of dependency from anything relative, hypothetical, it is a "heroic attitude towards everything trifling"; 4) *permanence*, which is unwavering 'yes' and adamant 'no', which are not changed by whims or momentary fascinations; independent on the circumstances and passing time²⁵.

The hegemony of 'weak thought'

Although formation of virtues (and character as a result) requires training, effort and sometimes struggle with oneself, it results in a dynamic power which facilitates overcoming weaknesses and supports our actions. 'Bonum arduum est', the ancient people used to say, what may be translated into English as 'good is difficult'. John Paul II remembered about the value of that effort to Polish youths in the following words: "You must ask much of yourself, even if others don't ask much from you"²⁶ (by the way, it is nothing more than a postulate

²³ J. Woroniecki, op. cit., vol. I, p. 359.

²⁴ P. Debeljuh, op. cit., p. 223.

²⁵ E. Smółka, op. cit., p. 127–128.

²⁶ Jan Paweł II, *Apel Jasnogórski. Rozważanie wygłoszone do młodzieży*, Częstochowa, 18 June 1983.

of nursing in oneself the virtue of magnanimity). Nevertheless we currently observe a not infrequent tendency in educational activities, of helping and 'sparing' the young so that they do not have to go through the toil. It is difficult to help getting the impression that it not only does harm to shaping a character but also results in a decline of ambition and squanders the desire so natural at this age of transcending oneself, overcoming one's weaknesses, catching up to the higher level²⁷.

It should be noted that this tendency is also strongly rooted in theory, as in contemporary education still the intellectual heirs of Jean-Jacques Rousseau have a great deal of sway, declaring faith in the value of primitivism, in the innate good for which it is enough not to be interfered with to develop fully in the human nature – free from corruption by civilisation. In accordance with the theory of that philosopher of the Enlightenment, adults' interference in the education of children usually results in the corruption of the latter and therefore it should be reduced to minimum. Any knowledge imposed from outside is regarded as an attempt to constrain freedom and – as some believe – proves 'totalitarian' tendencies in the teachers²⁸.

The discussed trend of diluting classic philosophical criteria has evolved into absurdity with setting in an extreme strand of anti-educationalists who negate the need of educating, fight against 'generation dependencies', and demand various rights for children – including the rights to vote. Nevertheless, it should be expected that this paidocentric trend related to the postmodernist 'weak thought'²⁹ will pass, as is the case of every trend. This is evident from failed attempts, for example the public American and German educational systems³⁰. There are additional grounds for optimism, because many educational theorists are calling for a return to the classical methods of education and character formation.

²⁷ P.T. Nowakowski, *Perheväkivalta ja ylisuojelevuus*, paper presented at the seminar *Ehkäise ja tunnista väkivalta lähi – ja perhesuhteissa*, Kouvola, 12 March 2008.

²⁸ See more in: P.T. Nowakowski, *The natural law in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy and its social and pedagogical consequences*, paper presented at the *International Symposium on Natural Law*, Nairobi, 6–8 February 2007.

²⁹ A term created by G. Vattimo, an Italian author, philosopher, and politician, whose philosophy can be characterized as postmodern with his emphasis on 'pensiero debole' (weak thought); see: idem, *La società trasparente*, Milano 1989; or in English: *The transparent society*, transl. D. Webb, Baltimore 1992.

³⁰ I remember the discussion about this problem, which began after my paper presented at the *International Symposium on Natural Law*, 6–8 February 2007.

Return to the roots

An antidote to all those disturbing trends which certainly raise alarm in responsible teachers, can be a return to the roots, also to the thoughts of classic philosophers, especially of the measure of Aristotle or Aquinas, which not only constitute valuable evidence of the classic wisdom but can become an inspiration for newly developed programmes. The most striking element in the work of the mentioned philosophers is the purpose at which education should aim: the formerly pointed out ideal of the beautiful and wise man. This desire for an ideal must however face the aforementioned imperfection of human nature and ancient philosophers knew that perfectly well.

William Kirk Kilpatrick, Professor of Education at Boston College, indicates 'moral illiteracy' as the real problem in our society today. The solution he finds is called 'Character Education', a return to education that is founded upon a moral base and includes discipline and the regular practice of good manners³¹. He also reveals how stories influence human character through models who demonstrate concrete ethical behavior³². Stories with heroes and heroines, as well as poetry and music, have been the foundation for a child's education until the 20th century.

And look to the end

There is one more thing to remember, without which we cannot practically talk about development of virtues and character. It is emphasised in classical ethics that action of man must be determined by a specific purpose that is good and not evil³³. How do we aim at that purpose? Of first importance, we need to recognise it and to want it freely. Even the ancient pointed out the decisive meaning of the purpose for human life, stating: "quidquid agis, prudenter agas

³¹ Look through his popular and persuasive works: *Books that build character: a guide to teaching your child moral values through stories*, New York 1994, as well as: *Why Johnny can't tell right from wrong*, New York 1992.

³² G.E. Veith, *Reading between the lines: a Christian guide to literature*, Wheaton 1990, p. 61.

³³ Nowadays in the education process the purpose is often forgotten. That is pointed out by D.W. Lutz in: *Krytyczne ujęcie Johna Deweya filozofii wychowania*, transl. P.T. Nowakowski, "Paedagogia Christiana" 2009, no. 2 (24), p. 203–210.

et respice finem” („whatever you do, do cautiously, and look to the end”)³⁴. That is as important as we notice every day that the manifestations of human life are characterised by lack of unity, as it has been mentioned at the beginning of the paper. The vegetative functions of the human organism are in the state of constant movement as a result of development and metabolism. The sensual functions scatter in as many directions as the number of human senses. Emotional life undergoes not less important changes, as human nature is prone to shift from one mood to another. Even the spiritual aspects of life often diverge in different directions: it happens that the reason wanders from truth to error and the will wavers in the love of the good.

Therefore, if we want to put our powers in order, and thus gain unity in actions, we need to implement an order of purposes or coordinate the efforts of individual powers – both spiritual and physical – and direct them to one highest purpose³⁵. Friedrich W. Foerster points it out, writing: “Because shaping a character means: to bring man out of this state of directionlessness and purposelessness, and implement in them a strong feeling of their destination and thus protect them from the violence of constantly changing natural impulses”³⁶.

When the expressly defined highest purpose is missing, the concentration of powers becomes impossible. Without a purpose which puts the life in order everything falls into chaos and man resembles a ball thrown here and there by external conditions. The thing is that man should be anchored in *permanent and irrelative* standards. Therefore one should not succumb to postmodernists aiming at establishing a philosophy that is less ‘rigorous’, less ‘authoritarian’ and ‘discriminating’, which is described as ‘weak thought’, but to encourage the young person to seek values providing order to his/her personal world (hence the motion of return to the classic ‘strong thought’ is present). *Order* of the personal vision of the world and *hierarchy* of everything that is in it are – as persuades Gilbert Keith Chesterton – the soul-saving aspects³⁷.

³⁴ This piece of wisdom is often attributed to *Gesta Romanorum*, a Latin collection of anecdotes and tales which was compiled about the end of the 13th century or the beginning of the 14th.

³⁵ M. Pirożyński, *Kształcenie charakteru*, Warszawa 1999, p. 24.

³⁶ F.W. Foerster, *Wychowanie i samowychowanie. Wskazania zasadnicze dla rodziców i nauczycieli, duszpasterzy i piastunów młodzieży*, transl. J. Kretz-Mirski, Warszawa [etc.] [1923], p. 56.

³⁷ W. Chudy, *Śniadanie u Sokratesa, czyli trzy, cztery rzeczy najważniejsze*, Kraków 1999, p. 11.

Are not all those postulates merely a passed echo of the past? In education – can we return to something that has been left out by many? I do believe it is possible. We do notice that in spite of evolution of *homo sapiens*, in spite of world-shaking historical breakthroughs and unheard-of scientific and technical progress, human being remains unchanged in their essence. Just like centuries ago, he seeks truth about the world, just as before, faces dramatic moral decisions or experiences own imperfection. Centuries pass and the basic truths about human nature are not expiring. Neither the classic concept of virtue does expire, which we equate with *character shaping*. The issue is worth remembering – especially when it is forgotten by our contemporaries.

Not for the first time I join in the discussion about this very important issue³⁸. Fortunately, it seems that my case is not an isolated one. Let's mention above-mentioned books by Kilpatrick as well as the works by Alasdair C. McIntyre³⁹ or William J. Bennett⁴⁰. There may be observed a restoration of interest in character and virtue. When for example we turn our attention to the United States, we will find a number of Character Education curriculums in schools, as well as several Character Education organizations, even the White House held some conferences on Character Education⁴¹. These are good signs.

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³⁸ In this article I deepened and developed my analyses expressed in the paper titled *Czy istnieje dzisiaj potrzeba powrotu do kształcenia cnót? Rozważania z pogranicza antropologii, aretologii i pedagogiki*, presented at the international conference *Etyka – teologia – antropologia. Dziedzictwo tradycji a dylematy współczesnego humanizmu*, Katowice, 5–6 April 2006.

³⁹ See: A.C. McIntyre, *After virtue: a study in moral theory*, Notre Dame 1981.

⁴⁰ See: W.J. Bennett (ed.), *The book of virtues: a treasury of great moral stories*, New York 1993; idem (ed.), *The children's book of virtues*, New York 1995.

⁴¹ C. Lovelace, *Lack of morals and discipline: a huge problem*, “Massachusetts News”, http://www.massnews.com/past_issues/other/10_Oct/kilpat.htm (10 September 2011).

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Streszczenie

Człowiek przychodzi na świat z przyrodzonymi właściwościami, które można określić jako stan naturalnej bezcharakterności. Stąd proces wychowawczy winien prowadzić do sytuacji, w której te różnorodne i zindywidualizowane predyspozycje zaczną działać jako jednolita i zharmonizowana siła sprawcza człowieka. Drogą do osiągnięcia tego stanu jest kształtowanie charakteru moralnego, rozumianego jako wykwit cnót moralnych jednostki. Słowo „cnota” pochodzi od łacińskiego *virtus*, co oznacza siłę lub moc. Ów potencjał jest człowiekowi niezbędny, gdyż nieustannie zмага się on z niedoskonałością swej natury. Nie mówimy w tym wypadku tylko o cnotach przyrodzonych (intelektualnych i moralnych), bo prawdziwy i pełny wymiar ludzkiego charakteru może zostać osiągnięty tylko w świetle cnót nadprzyrodzonych. Z tego powodu winniśmy uwzględnić obie kategorie cnót: przyrodzone (dostępne naturalnym władzom człowieka) i nadprzyrodzone (które przewyższają ograniczone możliwości natury ludzkiej). Niestety, idea cnót i charakteru jest niedoceniana lub nawet świadomie pomijana we współczesnej oświacie, czego przyczyną może być zarówno lenistwo umysłowe poszczególnych wychowawców, jak i nurty intelektualne obecne w filozofii. Jednak nadzieja wciąż

pozostaje, albowiem współcześni teoretycy wychowania apelują o powrót do klasycznych metod kształcenia.

Słowa kluczowe: cnota, charakter, wychowanie, natura ludzka

Summary

Each human being comes into the world with natural properties that may be described as the state of natural characterlessness. This is why the educational process should lead to the situation where these diverse and individualized predispositions work as a homogenous and harmonized prime mover of man. The way to achieve this state is through forming moral character which may be understood as the development of individual moral virtues. The origin of 'virtue' is Latin 'virtus' which means 'strength' or 'skill'. This potential of the virtues is necessary for man because he constantly struggles with imperfection of his nature. In this case we talk not only about natural virtues (intellectual and moral) since the true and full dimension of human character may be formed only in the light of the supernatural virtues. This is why we should take these two categories of virtues into account: natural (attainable by human natural powers) and supernatural (which exceed the capacity of unaided human nature). Regrettably, the idea of virtue and character is underestimated or even intentionally ignored in contemporary education. This could be the result of mental laziness of certain educators or intellectual currents in philosophy. Still there is hope for change in this area since present-day education theorists call for the return to classical methods of education.

Key words: virtue, character, education, human nature