

Education at Broadway Academy

Executive summary:

The following seeks to describe education as offering a choice between a Sophistic and a Socratic model. The latter requires the activity of schooling to be embedded in an ethical framework that entails: 1/ *Personal Development*, and 2/ a moral community with strategies of *Belonging and Inclusion*, whilst any functioning community in turn requires language, i.e. 3/ *Literacy* as a core agenda. It is language that is ultimately at the roots of knowledge and understanding. Thus while the individual pupil needs to be attentive and develop a mastery of language, all knowledge is fundamentally communal by being accessed and mediated through linguistic discourse.

Introduction

There is an implicit meaning or sense in everything that humans do. That meaning, or sense, may be conscious or unconscious, stated or unstated. It is the conviction of most, if not all, psychologists, sociologists and philosophers amongst others (including educationalists), that there are enormous benefits to be gained from explicitly articulating the meaning and sense of our actions and subjecting them to processes of analysis, examination and clarification. What emerges from these processes is more effective practice, greater clarity of purpose, and greater human freedom and responsibility.

First, it must be noted that this is not a new agenda. From the foundations of Western civilisation and culture, people have acknowledged the wisdom of the ancient Greek aphorism inscribed at the Delphic temple of Apollo¹, “Know Thyself”². This aphorism applies as much to institutions as it does to individuals. Secondly, just to reinforce the link to the ancient world, one might note the connection of Broadway Academy to the ancient Greek world that is implicit in the very word “Academy”. This links the institution by name to the Academy founded by Plato in the 4th century BC after the demise of Socrates in 399 BC. It might additionally be observed that our connection to that ancient tradition confronts us at once with a basic choice in what we think about education. One might summarise the alternatives as a choice between a “Sophistic” or “Socratic” model of education.

Whilst reflecting on one’s classical roots, it is no doubt a sobering thought for all educationalists that Socrates, one of the ideal educators in Plato’s thought, was executed by his society for the alleged crimes of: 1/ atheism, and 2/ corrupting the youth. In Plato’s dialogue, *Apology*, depicting Socrates’ trial and defence, Socrates turns the table on his accusers by provocatively stating: 1/ that his accusers were the real atheists and that he in his

¹ Perhaps it is worthy of note that Apollo was the sun god, mythologically illuminating our world as he drove his chariot across the farthest reaches of our horizons.

² Γνῶθι σεαυτόν

quest for truth was in fact the genuine devotee of the God³, and that 2/ his work with young people deserved serious social recognition by being awarded a proper life time pension⁴. His defence, as we all know, fell on deaf ears! As we also know from Plato's dialogue, *Crito*, Socrates could have escaped into exile by means of a rich friend and admirer bribing his jailer, but instead in the grip of his integrity he chose to submit to the judgement of the society which had nurtured him and sustained him. In relating all these events surrounding the life of Socrates, Plato confronts us with a perennial choice in our philosophy of education. Shall we follow in the footsteps of the Sophists, the professional educators in ancient Greece, or in those of Socrates, Plato's hero, whatever the cost? This decisive choice, I believe, may be illuminated under three headings: 1/ Personal Development, 2/ Inclusion and Belonging, 3/ Literacy.

Personal Development

In ancient Greece the sophists or the professional educators effectively offered the young: (a) the knowledge and understanding, and (b) the skills to get on in the world, i.e. to be "successful". They and their parents certainly deemed it to be something worth paying for. Education is an investment which might offer handsome returns both to the individual and to society. The individual reasonably asks, what am I getting out of this enterprise of schooling by dedicating my time, my energy and (less often in the world today) my money? Societies (more often paying today) might also reasonably ask, how does our funding of educational institutions benefit the economy and the quality of life of the nation state? Couched in these terms the individual may be offered recognition, influence and promising financial rewards as the long term return on their personal investment. Along the same lines of thought, society can anticipate greater economic creativity and efficiency from a well informed and skilled workforce, and consequently exercise greater power and influence in the world as the reward for its "investment". These were probably among the main reasons in the 19th century why the state got involved in education in the first place, just as the industrial revolution began to take off. Prior to this time, education was largely in the hands of religious institutions.

There was, and is, some merit in the substance of the outlook of the educational trade plied by the professional sophists. But from the perspective of the Socratic tradition espoused by Plato, the sophistic outlook *on its own* is insufficient if not downright dangerous for any individual and community or society. It might be noted that Plato did not casually dismiss the education the sophists offered. If the sophists gave their pupils knowledge, understanding and skills in part through the development of their oral and literacy skills that constitute what was known as "rhetoric", then few could match Plato himself in that sphere. His dialogues are master pieces of literature. For good reason he dominated philosophy and its educational

³ See e.g. *Apology* 35D in *Plato, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trsl H. N. Fowler, William Heinemann, London, 1919

⁴ *Apology*, 36D-E

substance for centuries to come. Plato's serious reservations about an education that focused exclusively on knowledge and understanding and skills as the most effective means to success, may be gleaned from his dialogue the *Gorgias*⁵. In brief, he believed such an education could corrupt the "soul".

The logical goal and acme of the quest for recognition, influence and financial reward are the persons who can do what they want whenever they want to whoever they want. To a person of a Darwinian frame of mind, a meritocratic educational agenda, in which the strongest and most fit dominate and benefit, may be the ideal. However, for Plato, even the absolute ruler with all his (or her) power and resources might nevertheless be harming his (or her) soul. In other words, at the deepest level, an education focused solely on knowledge, understanding and skills may do more harm than good to a person and to a society. To put it in its most modern terms: a knowledgeable, well-informed and highly skilled Nazi⁶ can do a great deal of harm to his/her own humanity and to his/her own society. Any educational agenda that ignores the personal development of the pupil does so at its peril. As it happens, and fortuitously⁷ so, attention to personal and moral development of the young also facilitates the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills.

The essential difference between a Sophistic education and a Socratic education is that the latter attends to the soul, i.e. to the deepest form of personal and moral development as the essential culture in which to nurture knowledge, understanding and skills. Of course, a soul is rather more complicated than a genetically constructed brain that has been well-programmed like a computer. Plato, too, speaks of the soul, using imagery. For example, in his dialogue, *Phaedrus*, he likens the soul to a chariot in which a charioteer is driving a couple of horses attracted to a transcendent goal⁸, consisting of Truth, Goodness and Beauty. The upward journey to that heavenly goal is frustrated by inner and outer forces. Firstly, the human feelings and drives are not always easily managed, and secondly, the gravitational forces of the outside world all too readily pull the chariot, both horses and charioteer, back to earth. Without the transcendent goal, the soul was essentially bound by his or her own impulses and worldly distractions. Real freedom was to be found in the love of Truth, Goodness and Beauty; the vision of that goal was ultimately a vision of love that could in turn inspire, motivate, and empower the soul. This Hellenic characterisation is echoed in the Judeo-Christian tradition with its narrative of Moses summoned at the burning bush to liberate his people from slavery in Egypt⁹. After their narrow escape, facing the hardships of the desert and the elusiveness of their goal, the people murmur and complain. They resort to

⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, trsl W. Hamilton, Penguin Books, London, 1960

⁶ i.e. a morally corrupt individual.

⁷ Note the Socratic claim in the *Apology* 30A-B, "For I go about doing nothing else than urging you, young and old, not to care for your persons or your property more than for the perfection of your souls, or even so much; and I tell you that virtue does not come from money, but from virtue comes money and all other good things to man, both to the individual and to the state."

⁸ *Phaedrus*, 246A - 247E

⁹ Exodus ch.3f

constructing and adoring their own god in the form of a golden calf/bull¹⁰, i.e. the symbol of power in Mediterranean culture. However, the will to power in the end is only a distraction from the real freedom to be found in a captivating love of Truth, Goodness and Beauty.

If personal development, inspired by its proper goal or end, is the key to good education, then one needs to think of the *whole* person. In this regard it is to be noted that the classic virtues, or strengths of character, namely, 1/ wisdom, 2/ temperance, 3/ courage and 4/ justice, relate directly to a person in the round, i.e. to a person's intellect, feelings, will, and social relations. Of course, these four virtues are merely the pinnacle of many other related virtues, but they are distinctive because they refer to important dimensions of the person as a whole. The Christian tradition, e.g. in the writings of St Thomas Aquinas¹¹, echoing St Paul¹², added the virtues of Faith (confidence, trust), Hope, and Love as additional desirable qualities. Good education will consider how these various virtues are best cultivated, but a good start is to be explicit about them as strengths of character that the institution and its members will treasure.

It is further to be noted that all moral development is grounded in freedom and has freedom and responsibility as its end. For this reason it cannot be based on manipulation or a psychological programme incorporating a stimulus-response mechanism as if one were dealing with automatons. Essentially the moral growth of individuals takes place in a moral community with a passion for, and vision of, the Truth, Goodness and Beauty. Each of the classic virtues and the theological virtues warrant a paper¹³ of their own for a more detailed analysis of processes by which to nurture and grow these strengths of character. At this point one concludes that personal development is essential to a Socratic education.

Inclusion and Belonging

The reference to the moral community with a clear vision and love of the transcendent Truth, Goodness and Beauty as a condition for nurturing the virtues in the young, takes one directly to the topic of inclusion and belonging. It is not unusual to encounter exclusive clubs where membership can only be attained by nomination and the scrutiny of one's credentials. Membership of such clubs may be forfeited on the occasion of some trespass of its rules. The moral community is by definition inclusive insofar as *all*¹⁴ human beings by virtue of being human¹⁵ are reckoned to belong to it. The school as one of the institutions of the moral

¹⁰ Exodus Ch. 32

¹¹ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, part 2, ed. T. McDermott, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1989

¹² 1 Corinthians ch. 13

¹³ See e.g. M. C. Felderhof, draft paper on "A Reflection on Courage, can it be taught?"

¹⁴ Note I. Kant's analysis of moral life and the role of the principle of universalizability, see his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) or *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trsl. and ed. Mary Gregor, CUP, 1996, p. 24 "Any action is right if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law."

¹⁵ Admittedly equal status in the moral community was not always recognised e.g. in the days of slavery, in certain fascistic societies, or in societies with a caste system.

community is bound to be inclusive and will actively cultivate belonging. There are, however, situations in which human beings, including the young, exclude themselves. This self-exclusion occurs as a result of breaking the very conditions of membership in a moral community, e.g. 1/ by failing to provide mutual recognition and respect of the other, 2/ by denying oneself the status of being a responsible self, e.g. in a culture of victimhood.

Traditionally, restoration to the moral community as a result of the processes of self-exclusion has been achieved by one of two methods, or both: 1/ punishment¹⁶, and 2/ forgiveness as an element of the grace found in love. In the *Gorgias* Plato affirms the position that if one has done wrong then it is better to be punished than not to be punished¹⁷. It is a position that hinges on the belief in the possibility of a moral restoration which relies on a person taking responsibility for the actions perpetrated by him or her, and in which punishment introduces an element of equity for the pain caused to (the) other(s). The most severe of punishments is the withdrawal of the conditions of freedom, and the isolation or exile from other members of the community. Lesser punishments might include restorative tasks. Justice normally requires the punishments to be proportionate and appropriate to the character of the self-exclusion.

The second form of moral restoration comes through forgiveness. Forgiveness implicitly recognises the seriousness of a moral failure whilst offering a healing of the rift created by such failures. Forgiveness would normally presuppose an appreciation of the conditions that might have led a responsible person to act in self-excluding ways, conditions such as the suffering caused by experienced injustices, real or perceived rejections, or by a lack of love. The school as a moral community will seek to introduce healing processes out of a love and concern for the other. It has done this in the young by nurturing personal responsibility and the practice of caring e.g. by letting them concentrate attention on the environment or on animals before they are expected to face the human beings who might have failed them.

To sum up: The school as a moral community encourages personal development by addressing the whole person: mind, feelings and will, as well as the social relations built on equity and respect. Additionally, it seeks to grow as a moral community, involving practices of inclusion and belonging. And as such it will have developed strategies for the restoration of members, who resorted to acts of self-exclusion.

Literacy

Intrinsically all communities, including the school as a moral community, grow and develop through the development of language. One sees this in the *original* community of the

¹⁶One might possibly add others e.g. "sacrifice", as yet another means to moral/religious restoration but this would require a longer treatment.

¹⁷ *Gorgias*, 61f (Socrates) "...I maintain that you and the world in general, as well as I, consider doing wrong worse than suffering wrong and not being punished worse than being punished."

Madonna and child, or the paradigmatic mother and her offspring, in which language is developed as a key element in their shared life. The Christian tradition affirms this emphasis on the central role of language through its various narratives. Firstly, the whole universe is thought to be created by the (Divine) Word¹⁸; secondly, a wandering nation is recalled again and again to its proper path in life through the Word that comes to inspired individuals or prophets; and thirdly, through the gospel that the “fallen” world is restored by that self-same creative and inspiring Word in a very physical, truly human form¹⁹. In each case there is a given sense or meaning, the Word, that humans must learn to recognise in their own words or in their own language.

One can link the interest in language with the earlier interest in the importance of community with the shared sense of belonging and inclusion since language is by definition *social*. It also links to the interest in personal and community development as having an essentially moral dimension. Within the religious sphere, the narrative of the Tower of Babel²⁰ reflects the temptation and human failing of pursuing the will to power. In the story the people know no limits to their love of power and as a consequence they end up speaking different languages or, at least, to speak in such a manner that they no longer understand each other. It is in the story of Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit of Love prevails, that relates how once again, people from diverse parts of world are enabled to understand each other²¹. It is clear that the love of Truth, Goodness and Beauty is restorative.

It is not too much to claim that the basis of all knowledge and understanding is found in language. According to the dominant school of philosophy in the English speaking world, notably Linguistic Analysis, one clears up intellectual confusions through the examination of meaning to be found in language. It is the case that traditionally the core of education consisted of the Trivium and the Quadrivium. The Trivium focussed on language through the disciplines of Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric. The Quadrivium related to the application of language and its meaning to the physical universe. The intimate connection between knowledge and understanding and language leads to the observation that literacy is the business of the *whole* school. Each subject and discipline has its own concepts and terms; each subject needs the clarity of thought and expression peculiar to itself but which is at the same time a part of a larger whole. In brief, induction into a subject, or discipline, is an induction into its discourse.

In the Trivium, grammar familiarises pupils with the structure of language; logic introduces pupils to processes of reasoning; rhetoric as a field of study aims to instruct the speakers or

¹⁸ Genesis ch.1: 3; John ch.1: 1 - 3

¹⁹ John ch.1: 14

²⁰ Genesis ch.11: 1 - 9

²¹ Acts ch.2: 1 - 12

authors at achieving clarity of expression, ensuring the listener is able to follow the speaker's or writer's intentions. Rhetoric is normally linked to Hermeneutics²², which is the discipline that helps the listener or reader to access the discourse of the speaker or author. In general, literacy demands a concentrated attentiveness that facilitates a mastery of language in all its guises whether that be English, (an) additional language(s), musical notation, mathematics, symbolic logic or any of the other systematic forms of human communication. One might also note that Jose Ortega y Gasset²³ once described love as “an utter concentration of attention” so that one might rightly conclude that education is fundamentally instruction in the love of the Wholly Other, of other people, of the natural world and of self, mediated through the Word.

Conclusion

In educational thinking we are given a choice between a *Sophistic* model and a *Socratic* model. The former emphasises 1/ a will to power and 2/ the success that knowledge, understanding and skills may bring to an individual and to a society. The latter model stresses that these must be embedded in an ethical agenda that thinks about *personal development* with the cultivation of virtues. A holistic personal development leads to the notion of a responsible self in a community with others. A strictly moral community is fundamentally universal and seeks actively to cultivate *belonging and inclusion*. Where there are fractures, the institution will develop strategies of healing through discipline and forgiveness. Finally, the responsible, social self relies on language in all its guises. Because it is language that actually leads to knowledge, understanding and to skills, literacy is the most basic educational task, and must be consciously cultivated by all the subject disciplines in an educational institution.

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²² See e.g. F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, ed. by H. Kimmerle, trsl J. Duke & J. Forstman, Scholars Press, Missoula, Montana, USA

²³ See Jose Ortega y Gasset, pp 14 – 20, in *Philosophies of Love*, eds. D. L. Norton and M. F. Kille, Rowman & Allanheld, New Jersey, 1971

