

Character Education without Indoctrination or Relativism

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ABSTRACT: We are interested in a philosophical view of character education that avoids both indoctrination and relativism and we find that Leonardo Polo's proposal meets both conditions. We argue that the problem of reducing virtue to either conceptualized (or idealized) expression or to behavior makes indoctrination possible. The reduction of virtue to its conceptual expression confuses virtues with values, and the reduction of virtue to its behavioral expression confuses virtues with routines. To understand the first reduction, we turn to Scheler and for the second to James. On the contrary, the Aristotelian proposal of virtue prevents reducing virtue to routine and Polo's understanding of habit prevents the confusion of virtue and value. In addition, Leonardo Polo's way of understanding the person and specifically the transcendentals of co-existence and personal love avoids the opposite danger of relativism. The educational implications of these views are elaborated upon.

KEYWORDS: virtue, value, idealism, behavior, indoctrination, relativism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education in virtues is one of the standard goals of character education. In this conception, character education is defined as the promotion of positive character traits, dispositions, or virtues¹. When these “positive character traits” or “virtues” are defined, the problematic possibility of manipulation or indoctrination appears. Also, when we speak of socialization, the problem of manipulation or indoctrination appears when the new member of society is expected to adapt and adjust to the needs and expectations of adult society. Similarly, the problem appears when speaking of “internalization” since it could be that someone previously defines what should be internalized.

In all these cases the definition of “what” must be assumed, acquired, or internalized is fixed and obligatory. This “what” can be identified either as “values”, “virtues”, “ideals” or even “routines”. It is especially the fixed and obligatory character that does not allow for personalization that we find problematic.

The flip side of indoctrination or manipulation is relativism, which occurs when everything is possible and there is no reference.

The issue of indoctrination has been (and is) very present in ethical and character education. This debate is associated with the issues of values and socialization. While some thought that pre-defining values to aspire to was indoctrination, others thought it was not.²

One of the great authorities on moral development, Kohlberg³ also discussed the problem of the two opposites: relativism and indoctrination. He thought that the solution that avoids falling

¹ H.A. ALEXANDER, “Assessing virtue: measurement in moral education at home and abroad” *Ethics and Education* 11/3 (2016): 310-325. And WALKER, D. I., THOMA, S. J., C. JONES, and K. KRISTJANSSON, “Adolescent moral judgement: A study of UK secondary school pupils”. *British Educational Research Journal*. (2017)

² P.A. WAGNER, “Simon, Indoctrination and Ethical Relativism”. *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET) / Revue de la Pensée Éducative* 15/3(1981):187-194.

³ L. KOHLBERG, “Indoctrination versus Relativity in Value Education,” *Zygonu* (1971): 285-310

into either of the two extremes was to enter into the subject of moral development.

Turning to a more current debate,⁴ we find that the question of indoctrination is still open. However, the debate is widening because this issue is not only related to moral issues, but to all educational issues. For example, it is difficult to teach history without a vision of history. This leads to the debate on the subject of meaning.

Even in the current review of existing proposals,⁵ one discovers that the debate between indoctrination and relativism remains unresolved. One discovers that behind the issue of indoctrination and relativism lies the question of to what extent and in what way the person is the author of his or her decisions in the relationship and encounter with others. We fall into indoctrination when we exclusively copy the environment and into relativism when we build without any point of reference

It is, therefore, necessary to find a proposal that avoids both indoctrination and relativism. For in case of indoctrination one is not living one's own life. In case of relativism, social construction and a common project are not possible.

We are going to try to solve the problem of indoctrination and then, fundamentally relying on Leonardo Polo, we will look for a proposal that avoids both indoctrination and relativism.

2. THE PROBLEM OF INDOCTRINATION⁶

We would like to argue that the problem of indoctrination or manipulation entails a deformation of the term virtue; instead of

⁴ D. COPP. "Moral Education versus Indoctrination". *Theory and Research in Education* 14 (2016): 149-167.

⁵ E. HATAMI, A. GHAFARI, K. BAGHERI, B. SHABANI. "Explaining & Internal Critique of the integrative model of Narvaez's moral education", *Foundations of Education*, 10/1(2020):76-95 and I. ZRUDLO, "Moving beyond rationalistic responses to the concern about indoctrination in moral education". *Theory and Research in Education*, 19/2(2021):185-203.

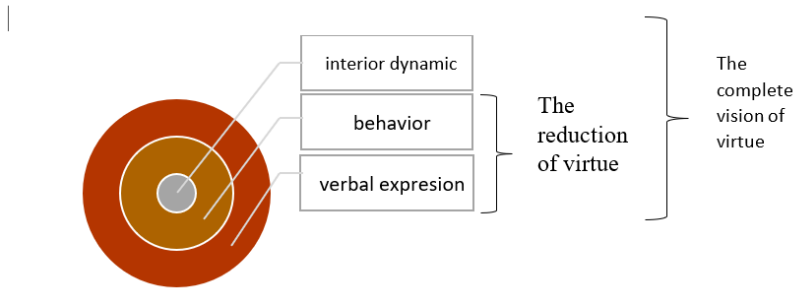
⁶ Sections 2, 3 and 5 basically follow the speech already published in the article J.V. ORÓN. "Virtue as ideal behavior or internal dynamics". *Polianos Philosophical Studies* 3 (2016) 22-28. that has been changed and adapted for the present context.

considering virtue in its entirety, indoctrination and manipulation reduce virtue to some of its aspects. These reduced visions allow virtue to be idealized and converted into stable, recognizable, attainable, and shared ideas that can be acquired by all, so that everyone can adjust to them. This is how the problem of indoctrination or manipulation arises.

At the same time, we propose that the way in which Polo understands habits as oriented towards growth, helps to make a good characterization of Aristotelian virtue which precludes indoctrination. This is because it prevents virtue from being understood as a value, which leads to idealizing virtue. Aristotle's description of virtue makes abundantly clear that virtue is a way of being.⁷ Because according to Polo's anthropology the human being is a person with interiority or intimacy, the way of being should take in account the interior of the person. Obviously, the person who is the way she is, will manifest herself in logical correspondence to this way of being. In this sense we cannot establish a healthy dichotomy between being inwardly in one way and expressing that outwardly in another way through behavior and speech. So while it is possible to distinguish dimensions in virtue, these can never be independent. We can, for example, distinguish the inner dimension, the behavioral dimension, and the conceptualization or rational explanation of the person. There are more dimensions, like for instance the emotional dimension. The other dimensions of virtue will not be treated here, but we will focus on the interior, behavioral and conceptual dimensions. These relationships are important to the understanding of virtue education.

Schematically expressed, the situation would be as follows:

⁷ ARISTOTLE, *Ética a Nicómaco*, Gredos, Madrid, 2014, 1144b.25-30.



Despite the fact that the different dimensions of virtue cannot be made independent, it is not uncommon to discover that, in certain environments, virtue is idealized and behavioralized to such extremes that the inner dimension is forgotten. Virtue is idealized when it is treated as a value, which some even see as synonymous terms. For example: people talk about the value of solidarity in conceptual or idealized terms. Virtue is behavioralized when it is reduced to routine behavior. There can also be reduction to the two aspects of value and routine, disconnected from the other dimensions of virtue and in particular from the inner dimension. In that case, solidarity is assessed by solidary behavior and because the person expresses herself orally in terms of solidarity, ignoring personal processes and the inner experience. Also, through behaviourizing and idealizing the inner dimension of virtue is forgotten and indoctrination takes place. In this case the personal processes that the person goes through are not given attention, because virtue has been evaluated through behavior and through theoretical discourse, but not through internal growth dynamics.

Therefore, when behavior is independent from interiority because it is clearly defined, virtue is reduced to routine; when verbal expression is independent from interiority, virtue is reduced to value.

In the anthropology of Leonardo Polo, the center of the Being and acting of the person is constituted by the person, which can also be called the personal character, intimacy, or 'each one' in their singularity. These expressions can be taken as approximately

synonymous⁸. If we have learnt to live interior freedom, human action is born from within. Therefore, if virtue is taken as "way of being", it has to be a dynamic that arises from within. In fact the virtue "inclines" us,⁹ an inclination to which we will give way, because the actions they incline towards are worthwhile and desirable.¹⁰ Therefore, wanting to make these three elements independent is artificial and goes against the very concept of virtue. Sadly, this exactly what happens when, as has been said, virtue is understood as behavior and verbal expression, ignoring internal dynamics.

At the pedagogical level such reduction is transformed into harmful practices. For it is frequently thought that someone is educated in virtues when that person acquires specific behavior and when that behavior is expressed orally, but the internal process is forgotten. This is seen when education focuses on behavioral practice and theoretical discourse rather than on fostering experiences of inner growth. That is, it is instructed through more or less uplifting theoretical speeches and the student is asked to display a specific behavior. This instructive and directive mentality has nothing to do with true education but rather with a technical or competence-based vision or of education that has been denounced for a long time already¹¹ and again recently¹². The two approaches are very different. In the first, the student is told how to think and how to live. In the second personal experiences that enable a process of personal growth are fostered. These experiences will lead the student to express themselves and speak in a concrete way in coherence with their inner dynamics. In the second case, the person is being offered help to grow, along the lines that Polo pointed out.¹³

⁸ L. POLO, *Antropología trascendental*. Tomo I, EUNSA, Pamplona, 2008

⁹ ARISTOTLE, *Ética Op. cit.*, 1106a.5-10

¹⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Ética Op. cit.*, 1119a.20-25

¹¹ R. STANLEY PETERS, *Ethics and education*, George allen & unwin ltd, sixth edition, London, 1966.

¹² J.V. ORON and M. BLASCO. "Revealing the Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education". *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. 37/ 5 (2018): 481-498 and J.V. ORON, "Educación centrada en el crecimiento de la relación interpersonal". *Studia Poliana*: (2018) 241-62.

¹³ L. POLO, *Ayudar a crecer. Cuestiones de filosofía de la educación*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 2006.

The consequences of an education focused on behavioral routines and idealized values leads to a situation in which the person feels ignored, which in turn impedes ethical action. When the inner dimension is ignored and therefore virtue is idealized and behavioralized the person becomes broken on the inside, because the person cannot "be herself". Deep down, the person doesn't feel recognized and even feels despised, because no one has cared for her intimacy, nor for the reality of her life. The student discovers that no one cares about what is happening on the inside, nor is anything that arises properly from inside really expected. Instead, the student discovers that the only thing that is asked is to behave and express themselves in a certain way. The student has to limit himself to meet the expectations that have already been marked out. Growing is something technical because it aims to reach a specific outcome. This also leads a view of the virtues as mutually independent, since on the one hand one can acquire the idealized behavior of solidarity and on the other hand one either can or cannot acquire the perseverance. Instead, Aristotle, when speaking of the virtues of moral character already showed that these form a system, and that all support each other. This is logical because all arise from the interior of the same person.

Moreover, we said that one may even prevent the ethical act itself, because without choice there is no ethical act. If a person is told to think and how to behave, that person is not choosing anything, and the teacher incurs in the great absurdity of wanting to teach virtues by impeding the ethical act at its root. Without an elective act there is no ethical act ¹⁴. We could ask ourselves how it is possible to reach such pathological dissociation. Following the denunciation shown by Francisco Altarejos in his book "the ethical dimension of education" ¹⁵ which is a compilation of various published articles, it can be said that such a dissociative pathological situation is reached because virtue is confused with values. The confusion between virtue and value is due to the idealization of the disconnected virtue with the inner dynamic that assumes to be concretely as Aristotle said. In truth, educating in virtues and educating in values can become two antagonistic

¹⁴ ARISTOTLE, *Ética Op. cit.*, 1105a. 25-35.

¹⁵ F. ALTAREJOS, *Dimensión ética de la educación*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1999.

processes if not enough attention is given to interiority¹⁶. The key to deforming or not deforming virtue will lie, as I hope to show, in the conception of habit one has.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM BEHIND INDOCTRINATION

To understand idealization through which virtue is understood as value we will turn to Max Scheler; to understand behaviorization through which virtue is understood as routine we will turn to Williams James. Our key affirmations are: reducing virtue to mere conceptualization leads to understanding virtue as value, and reducing virtue to mere behavior leads to understanding virtue as routine.

Idealized Virtue in Scheler

Scheler is a key reference to understand what values are and a fundamental work in this regard is his "Ethics"¹⁷. For Scheler values are objective goods. In that sense they are no one's invention, but in fact, value is known thanks to the emotions of the spirit, which are subjective. Therefore, Scheler's values are objective-subjective. The emotional reality at the spiritual level is what perceives the values. In Scheler emotions know. How is it possible that Scheler reaches the conclusion that emotions know? In Leonardo Polo, clearly, a feeling knows nothing, because a feeling is an effect: "A feeling is information about the suitability of the object to the faculty"¹⁸.

Let us explore why Scheler reaches his conclusion. In Aristotle, we have seen that the habit is a perfection of the operation, but not an act detached from the operation. In this case habit and feeling are not very far apart, because both are located "at the end". In Aristotle feeling is something that happens "at the end", and habit is something that happens "at the end". Let us explore more precisely what "at the end" means.

¹⁶ See especially chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 of the cited book by Francisco Altarejos.

¹⁷ M. SCHELER, *Ética*, Rev de Occidente, Madrid, 1042-43 and re-edited by Caparrós Editores 2001.

¹⁸ L. POLO, *Teoría del conocimiento I* cit, p. 276

Aristotle said: "Every faculty of sensation exercises its activity towards an object and that such a faculty, when well arranged... it follows... (that) this activity will be the most perfect and the most pleasant"¹⁹ so that emotion (in this case pleasure) arises (is followed) at the end of an activity in concrete circumstances. This is what we mean when we say the emotion is "at the end". Virtues will appear as the fruit of an activity²⁰, therefore they too are "at the end". They are temporally close, but conceptually very far away in Aristotle. Habit and emotion in Aristotle are not confused, although they share the temporal moment. Aristotle will not fall into the error of saying that feelings know, not only because he has conceptualized well what emotion is, but also because Aristotle knows that there are more ways of knowing than the rational way. Aristotle, on the one hand, understands the limitations of logos²¹ and, on the other hand, he recognizes the superiority of nous over logos²².

Through his philosophical investigation, Scheler discovers that there is knowledge that is not rational. He attributes this non-rational way of knowing to feelings, specifically spiritual feelings. Value is known in a non-rational way, and habit, if we follow Aristotle, is a perfection of the operation. Then if reason does not know values, neither can it know habits, which are nothing more than improved operations. So, what remains? It remains that something other than reason also knows and, in Scheler's proposal, this can only be feeling. If reason does not know certain things, concretely values, and there are no other ways to know, only feelings remain as an alternate cognitive route, concretely spiritual feelings. We would be talking about an intuitive type of knowledge. It knows 'just because', simply, because it is evident. This is the process that Scheler associates with feeling.

In conclusion, Scheler reaches the stance that emotions know, because he discovers non-rational knowledge and attributes it to

¹⁹ ARISTOTLE, *Ética Op. cit.*, 1174b.15-20

²⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Ética Op. cit.*, 1103a.15-35

²¹ ARISTOTLE, *Ética Op. cit.*, book VI points 1 to 7, nous is one of the intellectual virtues, superior to the episteme and only inferior to sophia.

²² ARISTOTLE, *Metafísica*, Gredos, Madrid, 2014, book IX point 10 and book XII point 6 and following.

feeling. We would like to suggest that if Scheler had known that there are more ways to know than only reason, he would not have needed to turn to feeling and say that it knows. Maybe the problem we are raising is not Scheler's, but rather of those who want to combine Aristotelian virtue with values, which leads them to idealize virtue and treat things we value emotionally as knowledge. Contrary to this stance, we find in Altarejos a clear point of reference for rejecting the path of value and resorting to virtue in all its senses and without reductionisms in order to make growth possible²³.

Virtue as Routine in James

The other devirtualization of virtue is to reduce it to routine. To understand this, we turn to James. James wrote a book chapter in 1980 called "habit"²⁴ which is a key reference to understand his vision of habit. In the first sentence of the book, it says that "living creatures... are bundles of habits" which raises the question from the outset whether a habit boosts growth or rather stops it. It states that there are two types of habits. Innate habits are instincts. Some of them can be educated and become called acts of reason. So rather than two types of habits there is only one type of habit, but some can be educated and then the second category of habits appears. Habit education is enabled by the brain's plastic capacity which allows the organic support to be modified while maintaining its integrity. Plasticity is the possibility of change without losing consistency. Throughout its changes, the situations of equilibrium would be the habits. The habit at cerebral level decreases resistance by looking for a better functional state. James says that the brain cannot be accessed in a material way, but we can have some influence on what happens there through the blood or through nerve endings. Therefore, He concludes we can influence the brain by our behavior. The repetition of a certain movement will result in affecting the brain from the outside until the brain structure is modified. Thus, I insist, nature is affected little by little. Therefore, it can be argued that the function shapes the organ. Once the habit has been achieved, conscious attention is no longer needed. For this reason, James says,

²³ F. ALTAREJOS, *Dimensión Op. cit.*, p.164

²⁴ W. JAMES, *Habit*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1914

"habit diminishes conscious attention"²⁵. He also offers the example of the large number of routine things we do during the morning's personal hygiene without knowing what or how we have done it. James comments that in the acquired habit only the initial stimulus is needed so that all the associated behaviors develop in a chain. He refers to the will repeatedly as the one that directs the whole process of acquiring habits. In James, habit is a matter of will. Will is the key: "To achieve the acquisition of a new habit, or to abandon an old one, we must launch ourselves with as strong and determined an initiative as possible." This makes him fall into a materialistic reductionism²⁶. James' position has been studied and rejected in the neuroscience-philosophy dialogue of Leonardo Polo²⁷. The mechanical repetition of a behavior does not lead to the generation of a habit-routine. Let's not forget that James reduces habit to routine, and he does not see it as an act that perfects the operation, but as the result of a repeated behavior that remains as embedded or marked in the brain. Even very simple experiences show the impossibility of reducing habit to mere behavior: a group of volunteers were asked to move their finger mechanically while doing something else and another group was asked to notice the movement and think about what they were doing. Only those who paid attention improved: their motor efficiency, power, sensorimotor learning, and ability in motor production increased²⁸ (Boutin, Blandin, Massen, Heuer, & Badets, 2014).

²⁵ W. JAMES, *Habit Op. cit.*, p.31

²⁶ L. F. BARRETT, "The Future of Psychology: Connecting Mind to Brain." *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4/4 (2009): 326–39

²⁷ J. BERNACER and J.M. GIMÉNEZ-AMAYA, "On Habit Learning in Neuroscience and Free Will." In *Is Science Compatible with Free Will?*, eds. A. SUAREZ and P. ADAMS. New York,: Springer, (2013). And also in J. BERNACER y J.I MURILLO, "The Aristotelian Conception of Habit and Its Contribution to Human Neuroscience." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8/ 883 (2014).

²⁸ BOUTIN A, BLANDIN Y, MASSEN C, HEUER H, BADETS A. "Conscious awareness of action potentiates sensorimotor learning". *Cognition*. 133/1(2014):1-9.

4. INDOCTRINATION RESULTS IN RELATIVISM

“Indoctrination results in relativism” may sound strange, but we think that both the idealization of value and the fixation of behaviors end up being caught in the same trap that we wanted to avoid: relativism.

To discover that both idealized value and standard behavior end up in relativism we only need to look at the problem of “moral disengagement”²⁹. Such disengagement occurs when the person argues in an idealized way justifying their behavior. For example, one steals a bicycle in a park where there are thousands of bicycles and justifies it by arguing “well, it would be worse to rob a bank” or “I just needed it”. The underlying problem is that ideals are created by the human mind and once created they can be manipulated by imagination and discursive strategy without problems. Faced with one ideal one can always oppose another ideal specially devised for that purpose.

Some will argue that the hierarchy of ideals could solve that, but in reality it cannot. It is enough to see the current problem that exists in society where the principle of autonomy is assumed as the main reference in bioethical issues³⁰. Or even in the face of principles such as “do to others what you would like them to do to you” it can always be argued that this is what one would like to be done knowing that such a situation will not occur, or the principle can also be accepted and at the same time not to be followed because in the present situation it does not apply. That no principle is sufficient for determining behavior was already shown by Aristotelian ethics.

If nous is reduced to an inductive knowledge of the principles and logos to the discursive knowledge of the concrete with a logical character, then both principles, logos and nous could operate independently and therefore, we could freely determine what to do with the principles. But following Lee and Long such inde-

²⁹ A. BANDURA et al. “Mechanisms of moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency”. *Journal of personality and social psychology* 71/2 (1996): 364-74.

³⁰ J.C. ABELLAN, *Bioética, autonomía y libertad*. Fundación Universitaria Española, Madrid, 2007

pendence is not possible³¹. The key in Lee and Long's reading of the Aristotelian understanding of *logos* and *nous* is in the internal relationship between individuality and the universal. The two terms (*logos* and *nous*) are required, since without knowledge of the universal, no recognition of the individual exists and without knowledge of the individual the universal cannot be arrived at. There is more to the individual than reproducing the universal, because in the individual we also recognize the singularity of a particular event, that which is unique and unrepeatable. This means that although *logos* and *nous* are not the same, they are neither independent nor sequential and neither of the two can separately account for individuality.

It should also be realized that such idealized values or behaviors simply do not exist, are not so shared or so recognizable. Ideal values resemble Webber's "ideal types"³². He proposed the resource of "ideal types" for social analysis. Although these ideal types do not exist in reality 100%, they are useful for analysis. For example, talking about selfishness or generosity are idealizations that, although it is not likely to find someone 100% selfish or generous, they are conceptualizations that help in the analysis.

Also, on the content of such ideal values there is no such agreement. They are terms that as long as they are not defined, everyone agrees on the content and their importance, but as soon as an extended definition is sought, discrepancies begin because where one sees generosity another may be seeing a breach of trust.

And the fixing of behaviors has the problem that they have the authority of the person who fixes them. As soon as that authority changes, any other behavior is fixed as long as one fixes it. This is the problem of many current proposals made in the field of psychology³³

³¹ R.A. LEE, and C.P. LONG. "Noûs and lógos in Aristotle." *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 54, 3 (2007): 348-67.

³² M. WEBER. Objectivity in the theory of the social sciences and of social policy, in Weber, M. 1929. *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr. (2019)

³³ J. V. ORÓN. "Modelo antropológico subyacente a la propuesta dominante de la regulación emocional". *Quien*, 9 (2019): 9-38.

In conclusion, idealized value and standard value lead to moral disengagement. Any value can always be opposed by another value, which is a problem that cannot be solved by a hierarchy of values, as Aristotle already realized. Idealized values are not as shared as they appear to be, when particular contents are assigned to them. And fixed behaviors depend on the authority of the person fixing them. In all these cases the interiority of the person is disengaged from moral decision making.

5. SOLUTION

To reject virtue reduction as a routine we can turn to Aristotle himself, but to avoid the idealization of virtue reduced to value it is worth turning to Leonardo Polo and his vision of habit.

In Aristotle, and so it shall be taken up by St. Thomas, habit is a perfection of operation. On the other hand, Leonardo Polo adopts the tradition of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and also takes a step forward. He says that habit is also an act, a non-operational act³⁴. This step taken by Polo radically avoids the idealization of virtue. Let us look into it. On the one hand, it must be said that, for Polo, sentiment does not know, but is known, and on the other hand, it must be said that values are conceptual and idealized creations that are the result of lived experience.

Let us ask ourselves: what resources does the human being have to know feelings? The answer is: habits. To know a feeling is to know the state of a faculty. It is not to know the faculty, but the actualization of the faculty. This, according to Polo's proposal, is what habits do. Specifically, the synderesis takes care of the actualization of the powers inferior to it and the habit of wisdom for the actualization of the superior personal act of being³⁵. This means that synderesis deals with the actualization of the nature of the human being, while the habit of wisdom deals with the personal character of the human being. In a summarized way, we

³⁴ L. POLO, *Teoría del conocimiento I*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1988, Lección II. This conception of the habit opens a new understanding of habit in other fields as neuroscience J.V. ORÓN. "Toward a new conception of habit and self-control in adolescent maturation". *Frontiers in human neuroscience* 8/525 (2014): 1-2.

³⁵ J. F. SELLES, *Los Filósofos y los sentimientos*. p. 77

could say that nature arises when we ask ourselves *what* the human being *has*, while the personal character is discovered when we ask ourselves *who* the human being *is*. But since feelings have to do with an actualization rather than an act, theory of knowledge, which deals with acts, is not enough to be able to know all the dynamics of feelings. Rather physiology and psychology are needed as well³⁶.

For Polo, the path that has led to focusing Ethics on values is a reaction to Kantian formalism and has led to an affective focus in ethics by making the good into an emotional appreciation of value. This train of thought ends up naturally in Nietzsche's proposal.

It is characteristic of the modern age to reduce the notion of virtue to the decision to abide by rational norms and nothing else. Goods are detached from norms and become what are usually called vital values. (Modern man does not renounce goods, but his action is trapped by his interpretation of rationality; on the other hand, his appreciation of the good is rather emotional. The notion of value appears).³⁷

Value in Polo is not so much known, but rather created. Value is a subjective formulation and therefore it is the fruit of a high personal process, the result of personal experience. In Polo access to reality has its first step in abstraction and then continues through generalization and rationality. The path of generalization forms general ideas, denying the diversity between particular ideas, and the rational path carries out a process that leads it to formulate concepts, judgments and principles³⁸. Value is the fruit of a high-level process in which personal experience is elaborated personally and results in satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This does not mean that values are inventions, but that they are subjective formulations of lived experiences. This means that the path of value and the path of virtue are two paths that do not meet:

³⁶ J.F. SELLES, *Los Filósofos y los sentimientos*. p. 110 y siguientes.

³⁷ L. POLO, *Ética. Hacia una versión moderna de los clásicos*. 2.^a edición. AEDOS: Madrid. 1997. Capítulo IV.

³⁸ J.I. MURILLO, "Distinguir lo mental de lo real. El «Curso de teoría del conocimiento» de Leonardo Polo". *Studia Poliana*, 1(1) (1998): 59-82.

The ethics of goods is a reductionist ethics that distrusts norms; there is no other option than to accept norms, not because they have an ethical value, but simply because they have a useful value. Virtues have no place here because virtues serve to structure life; but if what is important are immediate goods, structuring life is superfluous: immediate enjoyment dispenses with the organization of the time of one's life. While virtues are stable dispositions with which to face the future, pleasures are ephemeral.³⁹

For Polo the habit, being an act in itself in addition to a perfection of the operation, can know. It is not that I know values, because, as we have said, values are subjective formulations of personal experience. For the knowledge of reality, Polo proposes the path of abandonment of mental limitation⁴⁰ and knows, with the help of innate habits, what is good for a person⁴¹. When this experience is idealized value emerges. Additionally, since habit is an act that knows the operation, it also knows what happens to the operation and therefore the habit knows feelings. Feelings in Polo, contrary to Scheler, are known and do not know.

Polo discerns multiple ways of knowing. Certainly, one knows through operations, each operation has its object, and the operation is perfected through habit, but in Polo the habit is a non-operational act of knowledge. Therefore, the habit can know the operation and its actualization and with that it knows the feelings. But there are also innate habits that know. Knowing is a multifaceted reality⁴². In consequence, thanks to Polo's discovery of a new meaning of habit, virtue is protected from being idealized and behavioralized, independent of the inner process that is involved in a particular way of being. Thanks to Polo it is no longer necessary to say that feelings know; therefore, values are not at the beginning of the act of knowing. Values are not known; they are created because they are formulations of personal experience.

³⁹ L. POLO, *Ética* cit, capítulo IV

⁴⁰ L. POLO, *Teoría del conocimiento III*, EUNSA, Pamplona, (1988) and L. POLO, *Teoría del conocimiento IV*, EUNSA, Pamplona, (1994)

⁴¹ L. POLO, *Antropología Op. cit.*,

⁴² J.I. MURILLO, "Conocimiento personal y conocimiento racional en la antropología trascendental de Leonardo Polo", *Studia Poliana*, 13(2011): 69-84 and also J.F., SELLES, "El hábito de sabiduría según Leonardo Polo". *Studia Poliana*, 3/1 (2001): 73-102.

rience and therefore virtue cannot be a mere ideal. This is why it can be interesting to discuss values in order to know what the other person thinks about what they have lived, but this cannot be the foundation of any ethics. It is not necessary to agree on values, but rather on life and on what makes people grow.

The starting point of virtue is none other than that taught by Aristotle: an inner dynamic, a way of being. Such a way of being can obviously not be confined to a merely internal experience. For example, it also starts from the realization all human beings have things in common, such as their rational nature. Developing this rationality so that we for example become prudent is good for everyone. Still, such a process needs to have its origin inside the person, and the person needs to express herself from her intimacy.

6. A PROPOSAL THAT PREVENTS INDOCTRINATION AND RELATIVISM AT THE SAME TIME

If human action starts from interiority and interiority is actualized and expressed in our behavior and in our way of speaking, there is no room for indoctrination. This ethical growth is a global personal act⁴³. But it opens the question of relativism because: Who justified the act? If one justifies the act oneself, every act is possible. Leonardo Polo's anthropology solves that question. He speaks about four transcendentals when referring to the person.

We think that the personal transcendentals co-existence and personal love prevent relativism because they can be used for evaluating human growth without referring to a value, norm, ideal or behavior.

Co-existing is not simply existing with the other, but rather it is an expanded way of being that shows the open character in intimacy and outwards of the person. It implies that a person alone is an absurdity. The idealistic subject is usually thought of as isolated, but Polo shows that an isolated person is not possible, since the person is by necessity a being in a co-existing relation-

⁴³ J.V. ORÓN. "El acto global-personal". *Colloquia*. (2017)

ship with others⁴⁴ and with the world. Polo judges that "nothing human is real without personal co-existence."⁴⁵ The dynamics of co-existence implies that the perfection of the human being occurs thanks to personal relationships. There is no growth outside of relationships. Co-existence, by belonging to the act of being personal, prevents the relationship from being understood as something secondary, but rather it is constitutive of the person. It is not a static reality because "coexistence needs always to be achieved"⁴⁶.

Personal love shows what the path of improvement of the human being is that happens by living the dynamics of giving and welcoming. But Polo points out that there is order to this love, since nothing can happen if one does not welcome oneself first. Welcoming or accepting is more than giving because in order to accept it is necessary to give. One needs to give the willingness to let yourself be configured by what you receive. Any person finds her existence as given to herself, but she can accept it or not. Welcoming ourselves is equivalent to the human recognition that we are creatures and not creators, that is to say, by receiving we recognize ourselves and accept our reality of being children. If the gift of being a person was not accepted, we cannot give ourselves as persons, because we cannot give what we haven't received.

In consequence, the criterion for to evaluating personal growth becomes the care one takes to foster interpersonal relationships. The intrinsic and constitutively relational character of the human being leads us to the fact that the criterium for all evaluation of personal growth is the care taken of interpersonal relationship. There is no relativism in this evaluation because there is always a "you" in front of any person, and with whom that person is connected. This means that all growth can only be growth of the relationship, only in this way the growth of each individual person appears. Some might say that this is already an idealized principle, but Polo would reply that this is not idealization but rather

⁴⁴ Others are other person. It means human person and divine person. In any case person.

⁴⁵ L. POLO. *Antropología transcendental. Tomo I. La persona humana*. Pamplona: EUNSA (1998): 178

⁴⁶ L. POLO. *Antropología transcendental. Tomo I. Op. Cit.*. p. 90

an axiomatic proposition. Polo assumes an axiomatic understanding of the human being and his proposal is to be intensely what one already is. That is why he rethinks the classic "do good and avoid evil."

It is sometimes said that the principle known by *synderesis* is "do good and avoid evil." I prefer to formulate that principle simply like this: "do good, act"; act all you can and improve your performance.⁴⁷

Expressions such as "act as much as you can and improve your performance" recall other positions from very different philosophical proposals such as that of Whitehead who proposes that every organism should seek the maximization of experience and experience is the fact of being relationally constituted⁴⁸.

The axiomatic character would be that his proposal is to be deeply what one already is. It is not about aspiring to anything external to oneself. We could say that in Polo, axiology is understood from ontology (it is good to be what one is) and ontology, in this case, is understood as anthropology (we are persons).

The axiom does not enter into the discourse of argumentation, but rather it allows for argumentation. No system of reasoning justifies itself, but always assumes extra-systemic assumptions of an axiomatic nature⁴⁹. We could postulate that Polo's transcendental anthropology is the extra-systemic presupposition that allows anthropological and ethical reasoning.

7. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The practical conclusion is evident, it is essential to promote the inner process of personal growth, which will obviously have its clear implication both in the way people behave and in the way they express themselves. When we speak about one reality that is made up out of parts it is usually not relevant from where to start

⁴⁷ L. POLO. *Ética, Op. Cit.*. p.160

⁴⁸ A.N. WHITEHEAD. *Process and reality. An essay of cosmology*. New York: The free press. (1978)

⁴⁹ J.V. ORÓN and SANCHEZ-CAÑIZARES J. "¿Es posible la reducción epistemológica? Todo sistema necesita presupuestos extra-sistémicos". *Anuario filosófico* 50(3) (2017): 601-17.

working on it. For instance: a room can be painted starting from one wall or from another wall, it does not matter as long as all the walls are painted in the end. But a human being is not made up out of parts and therefore it is very relevant what the starting point of human action and human education is. Only when the starting point lies on the inside, when we start from interiority, will all that being human implies be actualized. Only in this way can theoretical talks or behavioral suggestions be fully integrated in a process of personal growth. If this is done well, the human being fully develops one's authorship. This philosophy of character education is present in current educational programs like UpToYou.⁵⁰

In such programs it is proposed that personal growth begins by recognizing the student's lived reality with all its emotional load. The emotional reality then becomes a starting point for discovering the relational complexity of the person's life. In this way, the program directs attention to the interior of the person, and from that starting point the possibility of acting from within is opened, while avoiding indoctrination. There is always something good to be found in every situation because in every situation "traces of humanity" can be discovered. These traces of humanity are what these programs propose to develop by remembering the words of Polo that "Ethics does not repress tendencies but maximizes them."⁵¹ Relativism is avoided because this growth is made concrete through being intensely what one is. Through personal co-existence and personal love, it is discovered that this growth cannot be more than the intensification of personal relationships. And it will be students themselves who being the person they are, take charge of reality and making decisions that affect their own personal identity. They will decide how to improve their relationships.

⁵⁰ www.uptoyoueducacion.com and J.V. ORON, "Nueva propuesta de educación emocional en clave de integración y al servicio del crecimiento". *Metafísica y Persona. Filosofía, conocimiento y vida* 16 (2017): 91-152

⁵¹ L. POLO, *¿Quién es el hombre? Un espíritu en el tiempo*. Madrid: RIALP. 6^a ed. (2007) cap. VI

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