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# The Catholic Educational Tradition between the Pinchers of the Classical and Political Liberal Educational Ideals

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# **T**he Catholic Educational Tradition between the Pinchers of the Classical and Political Liberal Educational Ideals

by Edward Papa

September 23, 2009

Feast of Pio of Pietrelcina



Presidential Seminar  
Sacred Heart University  
Fairfield, Connecticut

Dedicated to Reinhard Marx,  
Archbishop of Munich and Freising

**“But Socrates not even Hercules could fight two people.”**

**--- Plato, Phaedo (89c)**

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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What I intend with this presentation is, by no means, a comprehensive treatment of the Catholic intellectual tradition. Such a task is completely beyond my powers. Rather, I propose a brief investigation of the main questions which arise when one places this tradition in battle with its most important opponents. There are two main opponents of the Catholic educational tradition. Pressing from the one side is the classical educational ideal of the ancient Greeks. Bearing in from the other is the contemporary liberal educational ideal.

The Catholic educational tradition has long seen itself as the further development of the classical educational ideal. One sees this, for example, in Dante's presentation of the noble Pagan philosophers in Limbo in the *Divine Comedy*. The philosophers are, by no means, punished; rather they sit around in a circle around their master Aristotle and engage in what is for them, in any case, the absolutely best activity and the only one worthy of a man. They discuss philosophical themes just as they imagine heaven to be.

"Raising my eyes a little space from there, I saw the master of all that know,  
among the teachers of philosophy; All look to him, all bend in honor low;  
both Socrates and Plato I saw thus, before the others nearest him they  
go."<sup>1</sup>

Dante sees the philosophers set apart from the sufferers in Limbo. Aristotle is, naturally, in the place of honor but around him stand Plato and Socrates and, in wider circles, other great philosophers of antiquity and the middle ages.

One could hardly conceive of an expansion of this group – undoubtedly, clustered around Immanuel Kant --- but including Jean Jacques Rousseau, Hegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Benjamin Constant, Thomas Paine, John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold, Alexis de Tocqueville, Alexander Herzen, Thomas E. Green,

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<sup>1</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Hell*, translated by C.E. Wheeler (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1911).



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, William James, George Herbert Mead, John Dewey, W.E.B. DuBois, Hannah Arendt, Albert Camus, Richard Rorty, Isaiah Berlin and John Rawls. The relation of the Catholic educational tradition to the educational ideal of liberal modernity is much more strained than is its relation to antiquity. The Catholic educational tradition, generally and most conspicuously, sets itself against the liberal educational ideal.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There are, of course, prominent exceptions. I can well recall the impression which my introductory course in religion („Religion 101“) at the Jesuit University in the United States in which I completed my Undergraduate Studies. I was, first of all, very enthusiastic about the prospect of reading non-religious, i.e. non-Catholic, authors (even if, as we will see with respect to our example, also non-adherents of the standpoint of the liberal Enlightenment) and, specifically, Jean-Paul Sartre whose spiritual horizon appeared to lack any relation to transcendence. Although one may well doubt in light of his Autobiography and other evidence whether Sartre, in fact, operated in a completely secular world, the literary figure which he depicts in *Nausea*, at least, appearance to be completely Godless. In addition, Sartre was considered to be the main representative of Existentialism, a very influential cultural movement in which many of my friends and acquaintances were already participating. Second, I was relieved at not being forced to read any works of Catholic apologetics. True, at that age I could not actually name any Catholic apologists (apart from Thomas Aquinas --- but his position was not clear to me since some regarded him as a philosopher as well as an apologist) but I was confident to be able to identify an apologist should I prove unlucky enough to encounter one. Like Anytus in Plato's *Meno*, who never actually met a Sophist but who was completely convinced that they were bad, and indeed, the worst corruptors of Athens (op. cit., pp. 83-84 (91c-92d), I knew, as an undergraduate at Georgetown, that Catholic apologists were bad and, above all, to be avoided. One was proud to attend a Catholic University but did not want to be preached to by Catholic apologists! I regarded a sermon which aimed at the conversion of the „Heathen“ as nothing more than propaganda. I found the thought of such efforts terrible and abhorrent. Third, I was curious whether the Jesuit priest who was my instructor in Religion 101 would, in fact, be able to trace a (counter-historical!) path from the hopelessness (*Aporia*) and almost schopenhauerian despair and misery of Sartre's Antoine Roguentin to the profession of faith depicted in Book Eight of Augustine's *Confessions*. Although the path followed by the course designed by my Jesuit teacher, Father Thomas King, took us from Sartre to Augustine, the way was not led by *Logos* but only by a multiply dubious psychological comparison between the *s'ennuyer* of Antoine Roguentin and the self torment of the young, pre-Christian Augustine. But precisely because of the historical gap between Roguentin und Augustine and, above all, because of Historicism presupposed on all sides, the relation between the two remained, in the end, one of difference. (Thomas King, incidentally, published a book following the trajectory of his Introduction to Religion: *Sartre and the Sacred* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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In fact, I would content, the relation of the Catholic educational tradition is equally opposed to the educational ideals of the ancients and moderns. The difference, in my opinion, reduces to a certain confidence which the Catholic tradition poses in relation to the ancients. This confidence is altogether lacking in its relation to the moderns. There is no contemporary Thomas Aquinas to bring the theses of the moderns into congruity with sacred doctrine.

The liberal Educational ideal, on its part, appears overtly hostile to the Catholic educational tradition. In fact, there are countless expressions of animus directed toward the Catholic educational tradition scattered through in the pages of prominent liberal thinkers. For example, one finds the following passage in Chapter II of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*:

"The most intolerant of churches, the Roman Catholic Church, even at the canonization of a saint admits and listens patiently to a devil's advocate."<sup>3</sup>

Even the most intolerant church that the world has ever seen, , writes Mill, --- the Roman Catholic Church --- makes an exception to its usual claim to absolute certainty in matters of faith in the case of a candidate to sainthood. The Church does not regard it as self evident that someone is a saint. Rather the claim to sanctity must pass through the crucible of cross-examination.<sup>4</sup>

The hostility between liberal modernity and the Catholic tradition has a long history. At the center of this conflict is the battle in France between the Catholic Church backed Ancient Régime and the revolutionary devotees of the enlightenment which culminated in the French revolution.<sup>5</sup> The Roman church

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<sup>3</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* in *The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill*, Edited by J.B. Schneewind (New York: Modern Library, 2002), pp. 23-24 ("Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion").

<sup>4</sup> By contrast, Mill does not say but leaves the reader to infer, the Church presumes certainty in the case of heretics whom the inquisitor sentenced to death without the slightest hesitation. Cf. Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Werner Pluhar (trans.) (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> The French Revolution was, in fact, only the first of three blows which the Church suffered in the Nineteenth century. In addition to the Revolution, one must mention the failed radical revolution of

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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lost the battle in France and this defeat sent shock waves through the Catholic ranks which still reverberate today. These echoes continue to disturb the relation between the Catholic education and the liberal ideal and make any reconciliation remote. At root, the Church conceives the Enlightenment doctrine of man as a threat to its very existence.

By contrast, Catholic thinkers from Dante to the present have long forgotten any hostility that might have existed between the Catholic tradition and the educational ideal of antiquity. But, in fact, the critique put forward by some pagan philosophers of late antiquity was at least as hostile toward Christianity as are the liberal thinkers of our age. Nor was this hostility confined to philosophers. Luke in his Acts of the Apostles tells of the hostile reception which Paul received from the Athenian public.

“When they heard about the resurrection from the dead, some began to mock; but others said, ‘We want to hear you concerning this at another time.’<sup>6</sup>

When they heard Paul’s teaching concerning the Resurrection, some Athenians —, perhaps influenced by Epicureanism --- found it absurd. Others were more polite but one can, perhaps, detect some ridicule in their case as well. If one confuses the teaching concerning the resurrection which the more familiar Greek doctrine of Reincarnation, one might well image an eternal return of the same image of Paul endlessly repeating his teaching concerning the Resurrection!

Setting aside the actual hostility of the Athenian public as well as Athens-influenced philosophers to the Christian doctrine of salvation, there are, in fact,

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1848 (the “spring of Nations”) and the loss of the Papal States in 1870 as a consequence of the growing power of the movement under Garibaldi to create a united Italian state. The existence of the Roman Church was more severely challenged by the Enlightenment, Communism, and the rise of the nation state than it had ever been by the Reformation. See Karl Otmar Freiherr von Aretin, *The Papacy in the Modern World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> Luke *Acts of the Apostles*, 17:32. In Haenchen, Ernst, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971).



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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deep seated antagonisms between the classical educational ideal and that associated with the Catholic intellectual tradition. Catholic thinkers commonly assume that their tradition represents the development of the ancient educational ideal. In fact, it does not. Properly seen, the educational ideal of the ancients is, in many respects, opposed to the Catholic educational ideal.

I will, first, explore the main points of opposition and, after that, contrast the Catholic educational ideal with that of liberal modernity. In this way, I hope to develop my thesis concerning the controversial character of the Catholic educational tradition.

### Tensions and Conflicts between the Classical and Catholic Educational Ideals

**W**hat, then, are the main points of opposition between the Catholic educational ideal and that of antiquity? First, the catholic educational ideal is that depicted in the lives of the saints who are themselves, in turn, seen as the realization of the free self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The activity of the saints cannot be understood as education (*Paideia*) in the Greek sense. *Paideia* is the achievement by the citizen of the mean (*meson*) in thought and action and the exercise of virtue (*Arête*). *Arête* is shown by the self-discipline which allows one to make right choices in everyday life and to find enjoyment in the successes one achieves in competitions with one's fellow citizens for the goods of social life.

The Greek educational ideal assumes a competition between citizens for honor, wealth, social standing and expensive pleasures. The Catholic educational ideal does not rest on this foundation. What is important for the Catholic is not that those prizes for which one competes with ones fellow citizens but the creation of a community in which one shares all the available goods with ones brothers and sisters and in which each is readily to sacrifice himself for the sake of the community.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Paul's *Letter to the Philippians*, 3:12-4:1 in *Paul's Letter's from Prison: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians* edited by J.H. Houlden (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1970).

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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Although self-sacrifice is part of the Greek educational ideal, it does not, unlike the Christian, take the form of a blood offering for the sake of a spiritual community. Socrates, e.g., must sacrifice himself in order to keep his promise to the Athenian state. Socrates personifies the Laws and they speak to him thus when he contemplates escaping prison:

“You are breaking the commitments and agreements that you made with us without compulsion or deceit and under no pressure of time to deliberate.”<sup>8</sup>

Socrates hears the laws saying the following: We have given you every opportunity --- almost seventy years! --- to decide whether you and I are in agreement. Do you find the life that you lead in Athens good, Socrates? Apparently, you do! You have settled in Athens and have raised your children here. If you had come to the conclusion that Athens was not good, you could have left us at any time and have taken your property with you. But you did not do this. By staying here you implicitly concluded a contract with us Socrates. You promised to obey the laws of the city --- whether they are just or not.

“Is your wisdom such as not to realize that your country is to be honored more than your mother, your father, and all your ancestors, that it is more to be revered and more sacred, and that it counts for more among the gods and sensible men, that you must worship it, yield to it, and placate its anger more than your father’.”<sup>9</sup>

The State is closer to you and holier, Socrates, say the Laws, than father, mother, and ancestors. Should you cause it anger, you must try to calm it --- even if you

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<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Crito*, in *Five Dialogues*, edited by G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), p. 55 (Stephanus 52 d-e).

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Crito*, in *Five Dialogues*, edited by G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), p. 54 (Stephanus 51 a-b).

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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intended no harm. In no case should you react in anger to its anger. The anger of the state must simply be endured.

Thus spoke the Laws to the platonic Socrates. Socrates must sacrifice himself but not for the sake of the common good. Socrates has, in fact, no intention of sacrificing himself for the good of his fellow citizens. His sacrifice is tragic in the specifically Greek sense. There was no honorable way out.

For the Christian, on the other hand, the most honorable sacrifice is precisely for the good of one's fellow man.

"Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends."<sup>10</sup>

The self-sacrifice of Christ is, for the Christian, the perfect gift of love. For the ancients, on the other hand, the self-sacrifice of Socrates is the primary example of fidelity to the laws and the long-awaited solution to the Antigone problem concerning the relative standing of state and family.<sup>11</sup> The State comes first because the State is the greater educator.

"Did we not, first, bring you to birth, and was it not through us that your father married your mother and begat you? Tell us, do you find anything to criticize in those of us who are concerned with marriage? . . . Or in those of us concerned with the nurture of babies and the education that you too

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<sup>10</sup> John 15-13, in *The New Jerusalem Bible: Standard Edition* edited by Henry Wansbrough (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *Theban Plays*, edited by Peter Meineck and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 2003), p. 126 and p. 128. Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) §451, p. 270; §457, pp. 274-275; §475, p. 288. According to Hegel, the debate which comes to expression in *Antigone* is, ultimately, between two forms of law. Antigone represents the divine, underground, unwritten, feminine law of private life. Her uncle and antagonist, Theban King Creon, stands for the earthly, worldly, expressly stated, masculine law of public life. See also, Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, translated by T.M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 328 ff. and 315 ff. (Remark § 166)



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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received? Were those assigned to that subject not right to instruct your father to educate you in the arts and in physical culture?"<sup>12</sup>

The education which Socrates received from his parents is that which the state ordered them to provide. Socrates' parents were simply carrying out the Athenian educational program; the origin of their every educational impulse was the state.

The state is, above all, according to the platonic Socrates an educator --- and the supreme one. The Laws are, similarly, and above all, institutions which socialize and the citizenry and which allow them to participate in rational life. The educational function performed by the state is the ground of our obligation to obey the laws. Of course, if the state educated us poorly, our obligation is relatively weak.

The citizen is, in fact, in a position to independently decide whether the state did a good job in educating him. One can detect one's own lack of self-command as well as be aware of one's discontent in the performance of one's state assigned duties. There are criteria for assessing the state as educator. But that the state is to fulfill this role is fundamental to the Hellenistic educational ideal. The laws not only bring about education, their supreme goal is to inspire a feeling of devotion to the laws as is illustrated by the case of Socrates.

Greek legal obedience is not of the "my country right or wrong" variety. It does, however, have affinities to the similar sounding but very different formula of the German-American politician Carl Schurz. Schurz is reported to have stated during the heat of a Senate debate:

"The Senator from Wisconsin cannot frighten me by exclaiming, "My country right or wrong." In a sense I say it, too. My country is the great American Republic. My country right or wrong. If right, to be kept right and if wrong, to be set right."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Crito*, in *Five Dialogues*, edited by G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), p. 53 (Stephanus 50 d-e).

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Hans Trefousse, *Carl Schurz: A Biography* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998).

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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To be true to country is not to be blind to the content of the commands to which the State demands one's obedience. One may certainly criticize these commands. But, in the last analysis, one must remain true to the state – even when one believes it to be in error. One has made a covenant with the state to obey its laws. The laws are expressions of the principle to which one owes not only all the good things of life, but one's very life as something which is worth living.

A Christian cannot affirm that the State is the source to which one owes every good and perfect gift. The Christian thanks God for his life.

“Every good and perfect gift comes from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, which don't change like shifting shadows.”<sup>14</sup>

Everything to which we must give thanks comes to us from God the Father. His gift giving does not waver but is always present from age to age. The Christian's first object of loyalty is, therefore, God on whom we can always rely.

“We have the power of loving, because He first had love for us.”<sup>15</sup>

Our love of God is to be understood according to the principle of reciprocity. We would never have arrived at the Idea of loving God, had God not loved us first. God sacrificed himself for the sake of the community to which we belong. The impulse from which everything good which is given us proceeds is from God. Education, for the Christian, is one such good, but not the highest.

The divine gift of education is, first and foremost, a gift of educators. Some are called to be educators; others are called to different tasks for the sake of the spiritual community.

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<sup>14</sup> Epistle of James 1:17 in *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* edited by Peter Davids (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. E. Eerdmans, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> 1 John 4:19 in *The New Jerusalem Bible: Standard Edition* edited by Henry Wansbrough (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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“And God hath set first apostles, secondarily, prophets, thirdly, teachers, after that miracles, the gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”<sup>16</sup>

Paul recognizes a diversity of divine gifts. They are all, however, purposive. They are all designed to serve the Church and the people of God. In comparison with the Greeks, we must, therefore, conclude that education is *relativized* by the Christian by being regarded as one divine gift among others as well as *instrumentalized*, i.e., associated with the purpose of creating the kingdom of God. In addition, the Christian does not – with one conspicuous exception – associate the laws with education. Education is primarily the task of the Church since the main thing that the human being must learn is the doctrine of salvation. Sacred doctrine is understood as the saving message of Jesus Christ (the “good news”) which is transmitted by the Church through countless teaching documents such as the Apostle’s Creed as well as Church encyclicals in the exercise of its teaching function.

Law itself is understood by the Christian in accordance with the well-known definition of Aquinas.

“Law is an ordinance of reason for the sake of the common good prescribed and publicized by he who has regard for the good of the human community.”<sup>17</sup>

Laws are commands. They presuppose a commander who bears responsibility for the prosperity of the community. The king is elected for that purpose by God himself. His ordinances are not instructions but concrete means of benefiting the community. Human beings are needy and the one who bears responsibility of the flourishing of the community has the task of making himself aware of what his

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:28 In *Reading the Letters of Saint Paul: Study, Reflection, and Prayer* by Thomas Carolyn (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, question 90, article 4.

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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people need. The king might, so to speak, become an expert on the needs of his people. His task is to concern himself with their needs and to use the power of the state to satisfy them.

One is obliged to obey the law, Aquinas asserts, insofar as the law in question is genuine.

“Human law has the nature of law insofar as it pertains to right reason. . . But insofar as it deviates from reason, it is called an unjust law, and has the nature not of law but of violence.”<sup>18</sup>

A genuine law is the expression of properly functioning reason and, in particular, the properly functioning reason of the lawgiver. An unjust law, by contrast, is not reasonable. It is divorced from the good of the community and the principles of the right use of practical reason. An unjust law is violent. It is a way of threatening men with harm by means of penalties which are invariably connected with their non-compliance. These penalties properly serve to create and preserve the community and to insure that individual persons do not let themselves be led by their corrupt desires. Unjust laws, by contrast, compel people to perform unjust acts. An unjust law is, therefore, a means of corrupting both men and society.

It is, by contrast, a duty to act in accordance with just laws. One should try not merely to act in accordance with just laws but to do so in conscience. One should educate oneself in the spirit of just laws. In fact, to develop oneself morally with regard the laws is a duty. The laws are, according to Christian teaching, not so much teachers as objects of education.

The main exception to general separation by Christians of Law and education, as I alluded to above, concerns the divine law. The divine Law, according to Aquinas, includes the commands of the Old Law --- the Ten Commandments --- and the New Law instituted by Jesus Christ. The old law has an educational function in as much as it makes the human being aware of his sinful condition.

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, question 93, article 3, reply to objection 2.



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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“What should we say? Is the law sin? Certainly not. Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, do not covet.”<sup>19</sup>

It was the Law and, specifically, the Old Law that makes me ware of my sinful character. Had the Law not said, “you shall not covet thy neighbor’s wife,” I would have not been aware of my own disordered desires in this area. The man learns by means of the old Law that he is not what God intended him to be. This teaching is not propositional but is a matter of self-knowledge.

The self-knowledge provided by the Old Law is not, however, identical to that commanded by the Delphic oracle: “*Gnōthi Sethon*”. The saying inscribed on a column in the forecourt of the temple of Apollo at Delphi concerns the limits and vulnerability of the human being (in contrast to the gods). Insight into the limits of the human being is, in fact, the main message of Socrates.

“What is probable, gentlemen, is that in fact the god is wise and his oracular response meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and that when he says this man, Socrates, he is using my name as an example, as if he said: ‘This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless.’”<sup>20</sup>

Socrates presents himself as a divine instrument for humbling humanity. In his pride man pursues --- whether in politics, poetry, or craftsmanship --- a superhuman wisdom. The Delphic oracle uses Socrates to make the limited character of human wisdom clear to men. Only he is wise who, like Socrates,

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<sup>19</sup> Paul, Letter to the Romans, 7:7, In *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* edited by J.C. O’Neill (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1975).

<sup>20</sup> Plato, *Apology*, in *Five Dialogues*, edited by G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis, Indiana, 2002), p. 27 (Stephanus 23 a-b).

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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knows his lack of wisdom and seeks that form of wisdom which is commensurate to man.

### The Modernist Challenge to the Catholic Educational Ideal

Self-knowledge in the context of the Christian doctrine of salvation is knowledge of the sinful nature of every impulse that proceeds from us --- save those tempered by divine grace. One's own entanglement in evil is the essence of human self-knowledge according to the Catholic educational ideal. This self-knowledge is the starting point for the doctrine of salvation which is the heart of the Catholic ideal of education. Without knowledge of the misery of a life lived alienated from God, sacred doctrine loses its point. Just as one must know that one is sick in order to commit to seek a doctor, so must the human recognize his misery in order for the rescue effected through Jesus Christ to have any validity.

But precisely this presupposition is lacking in modern liberal educational doctrine. The liberal educational ideal presupposes, to the contrary, that the human being is good by nature and that any defect in the human condition must be attributed to the social institutions which man has developed. As the founder of a persuasive teaching concerning the goodness of human, Jean Jacques Rousseau is seen to be the founder of the liberal educational ideal and his *Émile or on Education* as the programmatic work of the liberal educational tradition.

In this article I am going to concentrate on the work of a recent follower of Rousseau, John Rawls. Rawls was active in an American context closely resembling our own. Rawls' educational program is, consequently, far more recognizable to us than that of the eighteenth century thinker to whom Rawls is so deeply indebted. Rawls' main work, in my opinion, is *A Theory of Justice* which was published in 1971. Rawls' masterpiece has had vast impact on many aspects of our social life. In philosophy, Rawls represents a turn from meta-ethics to a renewal of the social contract tradition founded by John Locke and substantially modified by Rousseau. In economic theory, Rawls represents a move away from



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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utilitarianism in favor of a welfare economics which concentrates on the condition of those groups in society who receive the least advantage from their membership in society. In social theory Rawls represents a turn from individualism to an ontology of shared ends. A social form is, according to Rawls, not merely a collection of individuals but a community which recognize shared ends and which works together to achieve them.

“Human beings have in fact shared final ends and they value their common institutions and activities as good in themselves. We need one another as partners in ways of life that are engaged in for their own sake, and the successes and enjoyments of others are necessary for and complementary to our own good.”<sup>21</sup>

The human being is not divided from his fellow man as isolated individuals exclusively interested in their private interests. Rather man is a social being who needs his fellow man not just as a means of achieving his ends but as a partner in a common way of life which is valued for its own sake. The human being can have no real enjoyment of life as long as his fellow man is suffering. The failures of his fellow man as well as his successes concern him.

Our thesis, however, concerns education. Is there an ideal of education associated with this conception of social unity? By all means! The conception of oneself as a being that is connected to his fellow man in a common form of life which one values for its own sake, presupposes an educational process and a complex one at that. This process begins, as it did for Socrates, with the State. But the similarities between the classical Ideal and Rawls’ liberal ideal go no further. If one lives in a just state, one comes to recognize one’s fellow man, or, more specifically, fellow citizen, as a partner in a shared way of life. In a just society everyone regards himself as having a certain dignity and, in fact, the same dignity as every other citizen. This dignity is grounded in one’s political being. As a citizen

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<sup>21</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 522-523.

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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and as a man one is recognized as a being that has certain rights. These rights are not natural; they do not pre-exist the political condition. The rights of men and citizens are, according to Rawls, social and, at the same time, inseparable from him. They are not, in short, dependent on social vicissitudes.

“Every person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override.”<sup>22</sup>

Civil rights are not separable from individual citizens; they are not natural but rest on the social structure as such and regarded as a whole. A society is founded on strife as well as cooperative working together.

“...a society is a more or less self-sufficient association of persons who in their relations to one another recognize certain rules of conduct as binding and who for the most part act in accordance with them.”<sup>23</sup>

Rawls conceives society as a unity of human beings with diverse interests. They are unified with reference to principles of justice which provide them with the means of resolving their conflicts. The resolution of conflicts which is grounded on the principles of justice is final. It does not lead to further conflicts. Citizens do not in the resolution of their conflicts lose their separate interests. They do not subordinate their interests to the common good. But they recognize that the resolution provided by the principles of justice is fair and gives rise to a social framework in which they can profitably pursue their interests within their separate plans of life.

Unlike the Greek *polis*, Rawlsian society is not founded on competition. There is, indeed, limited competition between individuals in society. But at the founding social level – at the level of what Rawls calls the basic social structure --- there is exclusively cooperation. Moreover, competition between individuals or

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<sup>22</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 4

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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groups in society does not, for Rawls, have as its goal the promotion of the moral excellence of the citizen (*Arête*). Competition is simply the means by which one acquires what one needs to realize one's plan of life.

The foundations of society, however, presuppose cooperation between persons and not competition. The human being must learn how he is to conduct himself in relation to his fellow man in order to avoid mutually and socially destructive conflict. Every form of egoism, for example, is, according to requirements of social cooperation (or what Rawls calls social union) is excluded. I may not conduct myself as if only my interests counted. Rather, I must recognize that social cooperation is the necessary condition for any rational pursuit of self-interest.

"Now B can accept A's being better off since A's advantages have been gained in ways that improve B's prospects. If A were not allowed his better position, B would be even worse off than he is. The difficulty is to show that A has no grounds for complaint. Perhaps he is required to have less than he might since his having more would result in some loss to B. Now what can be said to the more favored man? To begin with, it is clear that the well-being of each depends on a scheme of social cooperation without which no one could have a satisfactory life. Secondly, we can ask for the willing cooperation of everyone only if the terms of the scheme are reasonable. The difference principle, then, seems to be a fair basis on which those better endowed, or more fortunate in their social circumstances, could expect others to collaborate with them when some workable arrangement is a necessary condition of the good of all."<sup>24</sup>

With regard to a social system which rests on the principle of cooperation, i.e. one in which one could, hypothetically, freely and on the basis of good reasons and ones "capable of determining the intellect" to *choose* to participate (as

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<sup>24</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 103.

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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opposed to simply resigning oneself to one's social condition as a fixed and immutable given)<sup>25</sup>, the question arises concerning the justification of a principle of justice, i.e. the difference principle, which requires the most favored members of society to renounce advantages which they might otherwise be able to a right to enjoy had the society reached an agreement to alternative principles of distributive justice.

Rawls' answer to this question is the crux of the famous Rawls-Nozick debate. It is, Rawls argues, justified for the state to deny the claim of the most favored members of society to advantages which they might be able to possess had an alternative conception of justice been adopted as the basis of social union. The stability and duration of a political society depends on the free and rationally grounded affirmation of its principles of justice. The main question, therefore, is not whether the system of social cooperation is optimal for a member of society or a group on the basis of a comparison of what he or it might have been able to obtain in an alternative arrangement. This question presupposes that the interests of the individual or the group have primacy over that of society as a whole viewed from a moral point of view. The question of social justice is concerned with the structure or composition of a social system which is optimal from the standpoint of a "suitable defined initial situation"<sup>26</sup>, i.e. with respect to a standpoint of uncertainty in which one is not in the position to determine what is (or is not) advantageous for oneself or one's group with respect to alternative social arrangements. Rawls calls this point of view the "original position." The main characteristic of this standpoint is that it is one in which one calculates "behind a veil of ignorance."<sup>27</sup>

"First of all, no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets

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<sup>25</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* in *The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill*, Edited by J.B. Schneewind (New York: Modern Library, 2002), p. 237 "General Remarks").

<sup>26</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 118.

<sup>27</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 136.



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like. Nor, again, does anyone know his conception of the good, the particulars of his rational plan of life, or even the special features of his psychology such as his aversion to risk or liability to optimism or pessimism. More than this, I assume that the parties do not know the particular circumstances of their own society. That is, they do not know its economic or political situation, or the level of civilization and culture it has been able to achieve. The persons in the original position have no information as to which generation they belong.”<sup>28</sup>

Behind the “veil of ignorance” no one knows anything which could in the least way distort their reflections. The contracting parties have the task of discovering fair principles of justice for regulating the basic structure of an industrial society possessing democratic political institutions and practices. Were they to know anything about their individual situations, they would try to design the social system in a way that would systematically advantage themselves (and their descendents). The parties do not have social consciences; they want what is best for themselves (and their descendents). As Rawls puts it: the relation between the contracting partners is one of “mutual disinterestedness” or “limited altruism.”<sup>29</sup> They are not egoists because their interests are not exclusively private. But neither are the contracting parties altruists. For they are not willing to put the achievement of their plans in the slightest jeopardy much less to sacrifice their plans (or themselves) for the sake of the common good (or any other presumed higher goal. The parties take their own purposes realized in the execution of their plans of life seriously. They regard the fulfillment of their plans as desirable and as sufficient to bestow meaningfulness on their existence.

The most important part of the educational program associated with Rawlsian liberalism consists in the development of normative structures which transcend the rules or precepts associated with given social formations and which can make a justified claim to universality. Rawls deals with the question of the

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<sup>28</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 137.

<sup>29</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 146.

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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emergence of moral norms and, specifically, norms of justice in "The Sense of Justice," the Eighth Chapter of his *A Theory of Justice*. There Rawls offers a sketch of a three-stage process of moral development. The first is an Authority-oriented morality and is similar to the general Christian account of the origin of our obligations to God.

"The child comes to love the parents only if they manifestly first love him."<sup>30</sup>

The child obeys its parents because its parents have provided it with countless benefits. The rules which the parents put forward to regulate the child's behavior are accepted by the child as ones which it ought to adopt on the basis of an implicitly acknowledged principle of reciprocity. We ought to respond to those who affect us in kind: to love those who love us and to hurt those who hurt us. The benefits showered by the parents on the child are expressions of their love. The child's adoption of the rules prescribed by the parents for the regulation of its behavior as norms is the way by which the child loves the parents in turn. Although the child, strictly speaking, lacks the resources to reciprocate for the material benefits conferred by the parents in kind, it can obey the rules which its parent's prescribe. Obedience to the rules seems, in fact, to please the parents very much in the way in which the child is delighted by toys and the like. Reciprocity is, therefore, realized by means of the child's obedience to parentally prescribed norms.

The second stage of moral develop consists, according to Rawls, in a group-oriented morality. One accepts the rules acknowledged by the other members of the group to which one wishes to belong because conformity to these rules is a condition of membership. Membership in the group consists in the recognition of the obligatory character of the rules prescribing right conduct. One shows that one accepts a behavioral norm when one, e.g., adheres to it even when doing so contradicts one's private interests. The impulse to do what the group requires

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<sup>30</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 463.



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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even when one could obtain greater benefits through non-compliance is not irrational. Persons learn to value the goods which are only obtainable through participation in group practices. These are true goods. The person who treasures the experience of playing in a well-played game has, according to the Aristotelian principle, true enjoyment one based on human nature. According to this principle, the human enjoys the development of his talents.<sup>31</sup> If participating in a complex game such as baseball counts as an activity which affords the human being opportunities to develop his talents (as it must), then playing baseball may be said to count as a true pleasure. Such pleasures are not, however, to be had unless all participants in the game resolve to abide by the rules.

The third and final stage of Rawls' scheme of moral development is called the "morality of principles." In this case, one is concerned not with the rules of existing social practices but with norms regulating the basic structure of society which would be affirmed by free and equal moral persons in an initial situation of equality.

"[The original position is designed so that] the principles that would be chosen, whatever they turn out to be, are acceptable from a moral point of view. The original position is defined in such a way that it is a status quo in which any agreements reached are fair. It is a state of affairs in which the parties are equally represented as moral persons and the outcome is not conditioned by arbitrary contingencies or the relative balance of forces."<sup>32</sup>

The principles of justice are those which would be chosen in a suitable original position, i.e. as one which can be taken to represent the moral point of view. The fundamental idea of Rawlsian ethics is "pure procedural justice."

"...pure procedural justice obtains when there is no independent criterion for the right result: instead there is a correct or fair procedure such that the

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<sup>31</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 424-433 ("The Aristotelian Principle").

<sup>32</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 120.

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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outcome is likewise correct or fair, whatever it is, provided that the procedure has been correctly followed.”<sup>33</sup>

Pure procedural justice obtains whenever we are prepared to say that any outcome generated by a procedure is *ipso facto* right and just – regardless of its precise character and, specifically, regardless of the way in which it impacts affected parties. The outcome is right, we want to argue in cases of pure procedural justice – just because it arises from *this* procedure. The procedure, one might say, lends its “rightness” to the outcome.

Rawls owes his concept of pure procedural justice to his reflections on price theory. Just as, according to neoclassical price theorists, any determination of the price of commodities generated by a well-regulated market will be just regardless of its utility function,<sup>34</sup> so Rawls puts forward a theory of justice in which any principle which can be agreed upon by suitably described rational subjects of choice to regulate the basis of their association will count as the basic principles of social justice. Although the relation between Rawls’ theory of justice and Jevons’s neoclassical price theory is merely one of resemblance, it does allow us to see the origins of Rawls’ way of thinking about justice in the history of ideas. In fact, Rawls was very influenced by neo-classical economic theory and, indeed, expresses gratitude to the founder of the neoclassical Chicago school, Frank H. Knight, for the decisive impetus which led him to develop his idea of the original position.<sup>35</sup> Knight provided the definitive statement of the neoclassical theory of competition. According to the doctrine of Chicago school of economic science, “competition” designates the pursuit by at least two agents (or economic subjects) of a single goal whereby the success of one party is inverse to the failure of the other and *vice versa*. Similarly, in cases where one party achieves the goal only in part, the other party is excluded from achieving success to exactly the

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<sup>33</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 86.

<sup>34</sup> William Stanley Jevons, *The Theory of Political Economy* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing Company, 2008) This is a facsimile reprint of the 1911 revised edition published by Macmillan and Company, London. The original edition of Jevons’s *Theory* appeared 1871.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas W. Pogge, *John Rawls* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1994), p. 23.

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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same degree and *vice versa*.<sup>36</sup> The ethics of competition, according to Knight and the Chicago school rests on a distinction between two objects of moral judgment. One can assess the moral character of the acts of individual competing agents or one can assess the system of competition on which theses acts are founded. The principle of assessment is not, according to Knight, the same. The assessment of individual actions and social systems rests on diverse norms.<sup>37</sup> Rawls expresses the relevant meta-ethical principle as follows:

“The correct regulative principle for anything depends on the nature of that thing.”<sup>38</sup>

The principle or norm according to which one judges the rightness of a thing depends on its mode of being. Since individual agents and social systems constitute two distinct modes of being, the principles for assessing them must also be different. It follows that although there may, according to our rules for assessing individual agents, be “winners” and “losers,” it is, nonetheless possible, given the essentially distinct rules for assessing the basic social structure that everyone be a winner. Rawls’ definition of society as a “cooperative venture for mutual benefit” is not --- from the standpoint of the rules for assessing the social system --- unrealistic, unlikely --- much less, given the existence of capitalist society, absurd.<sup>39</sup> A well-ordered system of cooperation which is advantageous for all of its members is completely realistic. We can arrive at principles for regulating a social order in which membership would be advantageous for all. If the institutional formations of such an order are realizable given our inherited institutions and practices and when these latter are, in turn, deeply rooted in our moral sensibilities, then a well-ordered, mutually advantageous society would

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<sup>36</sup> Frank H. Knight, *The Ethics of Competition and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935, pp. 345-359.

<sup>37</sup> Frank H. Knight, *The Ethics of Competition and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935, pp. 345-347 (footnote).

<sup>38</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 84.



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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constitute a social ideal to which a given, historically conditioned people could orient itself.

Rawls, as we have seen, appropriates the neoclassical distinction between the qualities of individual actions within a social system and the qualities of the system as such in his theory of social justice. Although there may be vast differences between the levels of wealth, income, chances of gainful employment, marketable skills between some citizens of an economic liberal democratic state and others, these differences are not, Rawls will argue, necessarily unjust. Considered from the standpoint of Rawls calls "ideal theory" and with regard the basic structure of society such a society may, nonetheless, be advantageous for all.<sup>40</sup> Unlike Hobbes and Locke, Rawls does not justify inequalities by introducing the idea of a state of nature. Rawls, in fact, dismisses the concept of a non-political human condition as a fiction. The human being is, for Rawls, political --- not in the sense of a being who finds its completion in the collective life of the *polis* as one finds in antiquity, but as a being which always finds itself in one political order or another. How one finds oneself in society, according to Rawls, affects one's existence and identity. Society can hurt a man very deeply --- not just by denying him goods which makes it impossible for him to realize his dreams but by injuring his self-esteem so completely that he no longer dreams. The worst fate of a man, for Rawls, is not to believe that one's goals are worth realizing. Massive inequalities between the advantages which diverse citizens receive from society are, for Rawls (as for Marx) the origin of this self-alienation.

"[The basic structure of society] contains various social positions and . . . men born into different positions have different expectations of life determined, in part, by the political system as well as by economic and social circumstances. In this way the institutions of society favor certain starting places over others. These are especially deep inequalities. Not only

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<sup>40</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 8f and Cf. 245f, 351.

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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are they pervasive, but they affect men's initial chances in life; yet they cannot possibly be justified by an appeal to the notions of merit or desert."<sup>41</sup>

The basic structure of a complex, industrialized, modern democratic society must be assumed to authorize massive inequalities between its citizens. Some citizens are found to enjoy great advantages from social union as measured by the index of primary social goods; others receive significantly fewer advantages from their participation in civil life. To the contrary, modern industrial society expects its least advantaged members to bear the heaviest burdens of social life. The relatively disadvantaged must, so to speak, pay the costs of social union but receive little or no remuneration. Inequalities in the basic social structure have far reaching consequences. They do not merely affect one's share of the primary social goods but one's self-conception. The self-image of the least advantaged members of society is essentially that of a slave. The least well-off believe that their lives are less valuable than those of the better-off members of society. They believe, moreover, that their plans of life --- to the extent that they even construct such plans are not merely led like animals by the impulses of the moment --- have no particular urgency. The least well-off are quite prepared to set their plans aside in order, for example, to serve the more advantaged. In a word, the least well-off members of modern industrial democratic society lack self-esteem. They don't believe that the execution of their plans of life is justified with reference to their own existence but see themselves as means by which the plans of the well-to-do or, even, society as a whole, are realized.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 7. In opposition to Marx, however, Rawls does not root the self-alienation of man --- which he, moreover, explains as a loss of self-esteem --- in the class character of society. Cf. *A Theory of Justice*, § 67 ("Self-Respect, Excellences, and Shame").

<sup>42</sup> There are many sociological studies of the psychological effects of the inequalities permitted by the basic structure of a modern, industrial democracy and, specifically, the United States. One might recommend: Christopher Jenks, *Inequality: an Reassessment of the Effects of Family and Schooling in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1972); Jonathan Cobb and Richard Sennett, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993); James Lardner, David A. Smith, and Bill Moyers, *Inequality Matters: The Growing Economic Divide in America and its Poisonous Consequences* (New York: The New Press, 2007);

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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But although Rawls recognizes the extent of the injury which social inequality causes the members of society which who receive the lowest share of those benefits made possible by virtue of the existence of a system of social cooperation, he, nonetheless, argues that a society with massive inequality in the distribution of social and economic goods --- although admittedly not perfectly just --- can be pronounced just in the sense of “nearly just.”<sup>43</sup> Rawls contends that a society with massive inequalities is, in spite of that fact, just if and only if it possesses a social structure which rests on principles of justice which would be rationally preferred to any alternative principles by free, equal and moral persons in an initial situation would could plausibly be said to offer an interpretation of the moral point of view. Such a “reasonably just” (Rawls should have said “reasonably unjust”) society is, therefore, to be rationally preferred to alternative social structures which perhaps offer greater equality in the distribution of basic goods but are not derivable from the original position, i.e. from the standpoint of Rawlsian social justice.<sup>44</sup>

The question of whether Rawls’ fiction of the original position is itself to be rationally preferred to the fiction of the state of nature will not be explored here.<sup>45</sup> It suffices to note that Rawls has developed a theory of justice that justifies economic competition between rationally self interested agents. Unlike utilitarian thinkers such as Adam Smith and his followers, Rawls does not directly justify such competition by appeal to the principle of social prosperity but with reference to moral principles and, specifically, principles of justice.<sup>46</sup> The internalization of these principles presupposes a process of moral development

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D. Stanley Eitzen and Janis E. Johnson, *Inequality: Social Class and its Consequences* (New York: Paradigm Publishers, 2009); and Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in American Society* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 351.

<sup>44</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p.351.

<sup>45</sup> Nor will I explore the question of whether the foundations of social justice should rest on fictions of whatever form. Cf. Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of As If: A System of the Theoretical, Practical, and Religious Fictions of Mankind on the Basis of an Idealistic Positivism* (London: Routledge, 2008). This is C.K. Ogden’s translation of the sixth German edition of 1920. The text first appeared in 1911.

<sup>46</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, edited by Edwin Canon (New York, The Modern Library, 1937). Smith’s *magnum opus* was originally published by the firm of W. Strahan and T. Cadell in London in 1776.



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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which will be similar to yet, nonetheless, distinct from the educational model associated with utilitarianism. The utilitarian model of moral education aimed at repressing every tendency in the human being to pursue mere caprices of private interest in order that one might emerge as an economic agent capable of pursuing one's "enlightened self-interest" as a member of a free and democratic social order.<sup>47</sup> Rawls' ideal of moral education, as we have already seen, culminates, by contrast, in a "morality of principles." Principles, according to Rawls, do not have reference to a final good --- even that of the common social good --- but to an initial problem situation or *aporia* in which they function --- much as marijuana, nicotine, LSD, alcohol, or anaerobic exercise --- as tension relievers.<sup>48</sup>

A morally mature person, according to Rawls, conforms to principles, i.e. he acts in accordance with rules of conduct which can make a claim to be valid for any other person who finds himself in similar circumstances. Since any claim to universalizability presupposes reflection on whether the proposed act is, in fact, not merely internally or logically consistent but, for Rawls, following Kant, expresses respect for moral personality, i.e., acknowledges the fact that every person as a rational being is properly an object of respect, and, finally, tends to bring about an agreement of wills (*volonté général*) in a possible kingdom of ends considered as a "realm of nature,"<sup>49</sup> a "morality of principles" will be the basis of

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<sup>47</sup> Adam Smith, *A Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, edited by Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Smith's account of the psychological foundations of a general system of morals was first published by the firm of A. Millar in London in 1759. Cf. also John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* in *The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill*, Edited by J.B. Schneewind (New York: Modern Library, 2002), Chapter IV ("Of the Limits to the Authority of Society over the Individual").

<sup>48</sup> It should be noted that relaxants create dependencies. They do not, moreover, get rid of tensions but merely relieve the associated symptoms. One who employs such devices creates, thereby, an obstacle to any knowledge of the underlying conflict. If Rawlsian principles operate like relaxants, then they also obviate self-knowledge. See Ann Hartle, *Self-Knowledge in the Age of Theory* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996)

<sup>49</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 251-257. Kant proposes to use the idea of a "realm of nature" as a regulative idea to "bring about that which is not actually real but which could become real through our actions." Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited by Robert Paul Wolff and translated by Lewis White Beck (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1969), p. 33.

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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a reflective or critical ethics. A moral person, moreover, acts autonomously; his decision to act from universalizable principles is not founded on any necessary end.

“Kant held, I believe, that a person is acting autonomously when the principles of his action are chosen by him as the most adequate possible expression of his nature as a free and equal rational being. The principles he acts upon are not adopted because of his social position or natural endowments, or in view of the particular kind of society in which he lives or the specific things he happens to want. To act on such principles is to act heteronomously.”<sup>50</sup>

One acts autonomously when the rules of conduct on the basis on which one reaches a decision can be regarded as expressions of one's moral nature. To determine oneself with respect to one's moral personality is, for Rawls, incompatible with any identification of oneself with a purpose associated with a given social institution or one grounded in a merely given natural property or capacity which one happens to possess. Every non-moral determination of the personality which conditions the choice of a rule of action can only be regarded as heteronymous. When one acts heteronomously, one acts as if one could not estrange oneself from one's merely given condition. But an autonomous person knows better. He knows that every quality which a person possesses apart from those associated with moral personality can be severed from a man without distorting his nature in any respect. By contrast, any subordinate of a man to a final end always implies an injury to human nature. A moral education is, therefore, one in which one detaches oneself from natural and social contingencies concerning, e.g., one's god-given talents and abilities or bodily characteristics as well as one's social station and role.

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<sup>50</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 252.

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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“Moral education is an education in autonomy.”<sup>51</sup>

A moral education --- which, for Rawls, is only a part of the complete education of the person (although that part of greatest importance from a political viewpoint) --- aims at the formation of autonomous persons. Autonomy implies emancipating oneself from any purpose, social relation, friendship, or bodily characteristic or capacity whose injury or loss might be regarded as an injury or loss to oneself. As Hegel points on in his discussion of negative freedom, an education in autonomy in the Rawlsian sense is an alienation of oneself from every concrete determination.<sup>52</sup> With respect either the ancient or the Catholic educational ideals, the goal of freeing oneself from one's own contingencies is nothing short of abhorrent. The liberal educational ideal would, e.g., allow Socrates to walk out of prison, after his friend and rich patron Crito had bribed the guards, without the slightest demur of his *Daimon*. Socrates' relation to Athens is, from the standpoint of the liberal ideal of autonomy, a mere contingency of his Thrownness. From the standpoint of the Catholic educational ideal, liberal autonomy negates the relation between the believer and God. The believer must put his profession of faith in brackets in order to assent in good faith with his fellow citizens to the principles of justice which form the basis of the liberal social order. According to the Catholic educational ideal, the realization of human nature moves beyond the achievement of moral personality toward the ultimate re-unification with God.

“You have made us, o Lord, for thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 516.

<sup>52</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, translated by T.M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), §5. For Hegel, negative freedom is actuated by a mere solitary idea whose realization is nothing but the fury of desolation. Hegel's notion of negative freedom looms large in Michael J. Sandel's critique of Rawls. Cf. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Book One, In Augustine, *Confessions: Books I-XIII*, Francis J. Sheed (trans.) (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993) (ca. 397-398).



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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God, according to the Catholic doctrine of salvation, made man for himself. He made man so that man might dwell in God's proximity. Not that God was lonely and had no friends but because it suited the perfection of God to create a creature in which He would be united with material creation. Every human impulse considered with respect to its God-created nature is drawn to the vision of God (*Visio beatifica*). This pursuit has, indeed, has been damaged by original sin and every sin which precedes from the individual human being, moreover, forms an additional obstacle to the fulfillment of this God-given purpose. But through the grace of God the innate desire for God becomes ever stronger. Whether one consciously pursues the goal which God intends for the individual agent or not, human life is, collectively and individually, led, as if by an invisible hand, to God.

It is, therefore, obvious that the liberal educational ideal sets itself in opposition to the Catholic educational ideal. Even in the work of a rather serene liberal thinker like Rawls one finds expressions of a deep hostility to the Catholic educational ideal. Rawls, for example, describes the Thomistic, and, in fact, the Christian, conception of the final end of human life, or happiness, as consisting in the vision of God as "irrational" and "crazy."

"Although to subordinate all our aims to one end does not strictly speaking violate the principles of rational choice . . . , it still strikes us as irrational, or more likely as mad. The self is disfigured and put in the service of one of its ends for the sake of system."<sup>54</sup>

Rawls concedes that, in accordance with his own conception of reason, a teleological ethic of the Thomistic variety cannot be called irrational. But the appeal to his own principles is not, in this case, sufficient for this system-aspiring thinker and he goes on to assert on purely intuitive grounds that Thomistic ethics is, nevertheless, irrational in the sense of being crazy. Anyone who acts (or seeks to act) for the sake of a highest goal damages his own moral personality since moral personality must always conceive itself as free to pursue something other

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<sup>54</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 554.



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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than a fixed final goal --- something that presumably spontaneously reveals itself in the course of experience.

### The Response of Catholic Thinkers to the Liberal Educational Ideal

The “openness” of liberal autonomy which, in fact, references an emptiness in the soul is discussed from the standpoint of the classical educational ideal by Allan Bloom in his best-seller from the late 1980s *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1987). There are, similarly, numerous critics of the liberal ideal of autonomy who proceed from the standpoint of the Catholic educational ideal although these have scarcely enjoyed the market success of Bloom. *The Trojan Horse in the City of God: The Catholic Crisis Explained* written by the German Catholic philosopher and theologian Dietrich von Hildebrand may be regarded as exemplary with respect to the Catholic critique of liberalism. Many writings of the current Pope, Benedict XVI, who as a young priest, incidentally, knew von Hildebrandt personally at the University of Munich might also be recommended for this same purpose.<sup>55</sup> Pope Benedict XVI engaged in a face-to-face conversation with one of the most important contemporary liberal thinker, Jürgen Habermas published in English as *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 2006). In my opinion, confrontations between representatives of the contemporary liberal educational ideal and those of the Catholic educational tradition are most desirable. Although the Church powerfully set itself in opposition to Communism, its relation to the liberal educational ideal is anything but clear. In fact, some Catholics are of the opinion that many of the pronouncements of the second Vatican Council, and, specifically, its Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitas Humanae*), the Roman Church

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<sup>55</sup> For example, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Glaube—Wahrheit---Toleranz*, Fourth Edition (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2004).

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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appropriate important aspects of the liberal educational ideal.<sup>56</sup> According to this self-criticism in the contemporary Catholic Church, the Roman Church has already taken many steps in the liberal direction which, if taken further, could lead to the end of the Catholic education tradition and its assimilation into liberalism.<sup>57</sup> With regard this critique of an alleged liberalizing trend in the contemporary Church, I have in mind some prominent spokesmen of the Society of St. Pius X. and, specifically, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre.

Pope Benedict XVI recently lifted the excommunication of several Bishops ordained by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre but, at the same time, ordered them to acknowledge the consistency of the second Vatican Council's declaration of religious liberty with the Catholic educational tradition.<sup>58</sup> One could, of course, ask whether an obligation --- and, in fact, a Holy obligation as required by piety --- to affirm a dubious notion of religious freedom on the part of obviously uncertain Lefebvrists is itself compatible with the idea of religious freedom. If religious freedom is understood in the manner of the liberal education ideal, one must conclude that Pope Benedict's action contradicted the idea of religious freedom and, so, if the teaching of Vatican II concerning religious liberty represents an accommodation of the liberal educational ideal, one would have to conclude that the Pope in demanding the assent of the Lefebvrist Bishops to the principle of religious freedom as betokening their acceptance of the authority of the Papal office on matters of faith and morals had fallen into a practical contradiction. For the liberal understanding of freedom of conscience precisely excludes the use of force to compel acquiescence to a proposition which do not reflect the sincere convictions of the individual human being. Freedom of conscience is, according to the liberal educational ideal, an indefeasible right; persons may not be required to give an account of their religious creed to other human beings, to representatives

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<sup>56</sup> For example, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, *I Accuse the Council*, Second Edition (Kansas City, Missouri: Angelus Press, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> Rama P. Coomaraswamy, *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition* (London: Perennial Books, 1981).

<sup>58</sup> *Catholic News Agency*, January 24, 2009, "Pope Benedict lifts excommunication of Bishops ordained by Lefebvre."

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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of the church, or to society as such.<sup>59</sup> The question posed by Pope Benedict's XVI demand for assent on the part of the Lefebvrist Bishops is not, however, one of freedom of conscience (which *Dignita Humanae*, of course, explicitly affirms). It concerns, rather, the Bishop's special vow of unconditional obedience to the Pope. The Bishops made a solemn vow to always be obedient to the Holy Office and this pledge is not, according to the Catholic doctrine of salvation and the explicit language of the Declaration on Religious Liberty, lower-ranking than the general human right to religious freedom. The subject of religious freedom, according to the Declaration, is the inviolability of the religious practice of the individual believer --- whether Catholic or not. Its range of application does not transcend political society where it implies a strict prohibition of the use of violence by civil authorities to compel professions of allegiance to religious orthodoxy in a confessional states. Religious freedom does not, according to *Dignita Humanae* negate the sacred duty of men and civil societies to affirm the doctrine of salvation announced by Jesus Christ and amplified by the Roman Catholic Church in its teaching function and the one Church of Christ as the presence of the kingdom of God amidst the various communities and associations established by sinful man.<sup>60</sup> There is no freedom of conscience within the Church to reject sacred doctrine on the basis of one's sincere convictions. The Church's teaching concerning salvation is the gift of God which alone frees us from our entanglement in sin. Respect for the decision of the individual believer to accept or reject the Catholic educational doctrine properly concerns the deliberations which lead to the profession of faith. But once one has affirmed this teaching and thanked God for its effects in one's soul any disavowal of Holy teaching amounts

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<sup>59</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* in *The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill*, Edited by J.B. Schneewind (New York: Modern Library, 2002), pp. 10 ("Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion"). Mill refers in the above to "the great writers to whom the world owes what religious liberty it possesses." The architects of the liberal ideal of religious freedom and freedom of conscience include: Erasmus, *Enchiridion militis Christiani* (1503); Montaigne, *Essays* (1575) Bodin, *Colloquium of the Seven about the Secrets of the Sublime* (1588); Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670); Locke, *Letter on Toleration* (1689); Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters on the English* (1733); Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Lessing, *Nathan the Wise* (1779); and Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections* (1829)

<sup>60</sup> Austin Flannery, Ed., *Vatican II, Volume I: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents* (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 799-812.



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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to apostasy. There is, in fact, freedom within the Church to discuss the legacy of the second Vatican Council --- particularly with regards the relation between the liberal and Catholic educational ideals but this freedom always presupposes the reflective assent to sacred doctrine and a steadfast allegiance to the law of life it authorizes, renews, and sustains.

Were the Roman Church to understand freedom of religion and conscience in Rawls' manner, it would signify, on the one hand, a determinate highest-order interest that persons must protect above all else and upon which their self-preservation entirely depends but whose specific content, on the other hand, is blanked out insofar as one is capable of adopting the moral point of view.

"The question of equal liberty of conscience is settled. It is one of the fixed points of our considered judgments of justice. . . it seems evident that the parties must choose principles that secure the integrity of their religious and moral freedom. They do not know, of course, what their religious or moral convictions are, or what is the particular content of their moral or religious obligations as they interpret them. Indeed, they do not know that they think of themselves as having such obligations. The possibility that they do suffices for the argument, although I will make the stronger assumption."<sup>61</sup>

The principle of equal liberty of conscience is, for Rawls, infeasible; it stands beyond the realm of what may be legitimately discussed in a liberal legal order founded on principles of justice. The very existence of the person depends on his capacity to engage in free, rational deliberation with himself when he is of "two minds" in order that he may reach his *own* decisions. It is on the basis of one's *own* thoughtful judgments --- one's considered judgments of right, justice, value, and virtue --- that one forms one's identity. The person must have freedom of conscience, i.e. the right to be able to convince *himself* of the soundness of a

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 206 and passim § 33 ("Equal Liberty of Conscience").



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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given conclusion on the basis of *his own* intuitions and through *his own* use of rational principles of choice if he is to develop a moral personality. To be forced to draw a conclusion from fear of the consequences of dissent from authoritative teachings, by contrast, injures the person in his depth. Affirmations of authoritative teachings (as well as repudiations of heterodox doctrines) founded on fear of sanctions make the person incapable of self-determination. Coerced decisions can never expression one's personality. Since self-determination is based on utterances and deeds which bring one's inner convictions to self expression in a rational and freely chosen plan of life (on the basis of which one forms a life history), and since the dignity of persons is based on the acknowledge of their right to self-determination, it follows that respect for persons implies the renunciation by persons generally and by political societies in particular of the use of force in the interests of religion or public morality by persons.

Although Rawls' explanation of the grounds of the right of equal freedom of conscience appears to be consistent with and, indeed, as it understands itself, a continuation and revision (*aggiornamento*) of the declarations of a human right to tolerance in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries by the founders of the liberal educational tradition,<sup>62</sup> it cannot be brought into agreement with the Catholic educational tradition.<sup>63</sup> As Rawls astutely saw, the principle of tolerance as it emerged in the aftermath of the Reformation and the subsequent Wars of Religion of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries signified the renunciation the search for a religious solution --- with reference to the big institutional religious communities (Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, among others) claiming jurisdiction in one or more of the spheres of social life in association with the emerging political structures --- to the questions of social, political, and, finally, personal

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<sup>62</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1993), Introduction. ("The historical origins of political liberalism (and liberalism in general) are, therefore, the Reformation and its consequences such as the prolonged battles concerning religious tolerance in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.")

<sup>63</sup> Nor can Rawls' account of the grounds of the grounds of religious freedom be made compatible with the moral philosophy of Kant --- as Rawls claims throughout *A Theory of Justice*. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 11 and passim § 40 ("The Kantian Interpretation of Justice as Fairness").

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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unity. The separation of religion from political life regarded as a condition for the possibility of cultural unities would, in fact, be disputed by adherents of the Catholic educational tradition. The privatization of religion implies a division in the mind (*Gemüt; animus*) between its representations of its divine destiny and its representations of its destiny as a member of the civil order. Both kinds of representations, however, belong together, according to Catholic moral doctrine, as aspects of our faculty of desire.<sup>64</sup>

Every self-aware American Catholic is familiar with the strain of the polarity of worldly and an otherworldly orientations (*Bestimmungen*) and every American Catholic who takes responsibility for his mistakes, character, weaknesses, strengths, and other moral characteristics tries somehow, however unsatisfactorily, to cope with it.<sup>65</sup> In fact, from the standpoint of the Catholic educational tradition, the tension between the eternal and temporal callings is a wound which can only be healed through the grace.<sup>66</sup> The separation of religion and politics --- as well as the polarities of human and divine law -- is not,

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<sup>64</sup> With regard its rejection of the restriction of religion to the private sphere, the Catholic educational can appeal to the authority of Kant. Cf. *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Königlich-Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1900), Volume 12, Brief Nr. 671: Brief an Sömmering, 10 August, 1796, p. 30.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969).

<sup>66</sup> With respect to the question of the dependence of any release from the entanglements of sin on the grace of God, the Catholic educational tradition parts company, after taking a brief walk together, with the teaching of Kant and his followers. According to Kant, moral action must form the starting point for any liberation of the human being from the bondage of sin. Grace, for Kant, is something that a moral person --- i.e., one who has strived to conform the maxim of one's act to the demands of universal legislation --- has a right to think that he deserves. For Kant, grace belongs to the realm of hope. The person who wills to be moral has a good will and has a right to wish to be happy. If reason ruled the world, moral virtue would always be crowned by happiness. Since we must represent God as the ruler of an order of reason, we must think of Him as striving to reward moral virtue with happiness. The moral person must believe that God finds morally virtuous actions pleasing and, therefore, as appropriate objects of divine grace. Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Religion and other Writings*, translated by Allen Wood, George Di Giovanni, and Robert Merrihew Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Kant's moral doctrine is often thought by Catholic moral thinkers to resemble the pelagian heresy of the Fifth Century challenged, most memorably, by Augustine in his *Contra Iulianum* (421 or 422). See Augustine, *Contra Iulianum* in *Answers to the Pelagians III*, Roland J. Teske (trans.) (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2003)(421 or 422). Emil Hoehne, *Kants Pelagianismus und Nominalismus: Darstellung und Kritik* (Leipzig: Doerffling und Franke, 1881)

## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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according to Catholic salvation doctrine, something which should simply be allowed to stand as an inescapable feature of human life. The human being cannot, it is true, escape this dilemma by the exercise of his own powers. He can, it is true, deny the polarity, but it does not, thereby, go away. He can, equally, narcotize himself but in doing so he merely denies himself the experience of the symptoms of the tension --- puts them, so to speak, behind a veil --- but the underlying causes remain as before. Nor is the dilemma solved by repressing one or the other poles since both belong to his being. Finally, the tension is not resolved by raising it up to a higher level by means of a Hegelian synthesis. As characteristics of the original sin, the division of politics and religion is so deeply rooted in human nature that the human being cannot sufficiently free himself from its effects --- not even in the mental realm (*Geist*) --- to bring about such a synthesis. Man is only undamaged from original sin to the extent that he can know in a purely intellectual way that he is fallen and not what he was created to be. But this knowledge does not suffice to free himself from his admittedly deficient stage. Even if he uses his understanding to conceive a plan for transforming his social or natural environments, his efforts will fall short of the goal he seeks. If he tries --- as he is commanded by natural law --- to improve his world (and himself), his efforts will miscarry due to the inadequacies of those he is trying to help to profit from his measures or his own inadequacy to exercise the virtue necessary to carry it out. From a religious point of view, the tension between religion and politics is a consequence of human sinfulness and, by no means, a principle of right. From a political view point, by contrast, the survival of religion is itself somewhat mysterious. Despite the numerous attempts to determine the social and psychological functions of religion and to produce substitutes for traditional religions founded on a sense of the sacred, there remains a longing for something which the human creations are unable to make present.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Max Horkheimer, *Die Sehnsucht nach den ganz Anderen: Ein Interview mit Kommentator von Hellmut Gumbior* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1970).



## The Catholic Educational Tradition

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I hope I have convinced you to see the Catholic educational tradition as one which is under attack from two sides. The opponents, however different in other respects, have, nonetheless, a certain similarity. Both demand something which flatly contradicts the Catholic profession of faith and, specifically, sacred doctrine. Both set an idol in the place which the Catholic education tradition reserves for God. The ancients called this idol "my city" (*tō polis*). The Greek citizen was required by virtue of its sacred tie to the state to subordinate and, if necessary sacrifice, all other human bonds --- whether of family, religious community, private association, or to their own bodies. The liberal educational ideal proposes different idol that that of the state, but its conception of an entirely harmonious social order in which all citizens can preserve an image of themselves as free and equal and, at the same time, as unique individuals pursuing their separate plans of life and, thereby writing their own life stories, nonetheless, seen from the standpoint of the Catholic educational tradition, is, in fact, an idol as well. The mode of collective social life demanded by a liberal political order as depicted in John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* requires the citizen to subordinate and, if necessary, to sacrifice all other affiliations which might prevent them from participating in the political order of a democratic society in that it requires the citizen to internally free himself from all concrete attachments --- including those associated with his self-interest -- as is required by the adoption of an initial situation of choice which can be interpreted as the moral point of view. The Catholic educational tradition puts itself in opposition to its opponents not as idolaters but as men who have erred in one respect or another but who, in virtue of their God given reason, are capable of correcting themselves. Apart from the grace of God, all men err. The human way is a meandering path filled with seeming detours and blind alleys. But human error --- just as well-ordered human acts and products --- leads to God.



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