

# THE CONCEPTION OF A PERSON'S EDUCATION AND HIS OR HER DEVELOPMENT

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## 1. WHO IS A PERSON AND WHAT IS HE OR SHE LIKE?

### 1.1. *Personhood and concepts of person*

The debate about the concept of person is not reduced to a speculative discussion. This situation corresponds to a certain discrepancy in ordinary language in which three different subjective theories on the concept of person can be juggled (Marsal 2002, 155-157):

1. Every human being is a person: His or her individuality is biogenetic, but is also cultural (material and personal predicates are consubstantial to the concept).
2. A person is a conscious human being (personal predicates are central and material ones are functional). Individuality consists of a conglomerate of material, personal and environmental variables, in which the correspondence between sense and intelligence is decisive.
3. A person is any entity with personal predicates: emotionality, instrumental intelligence, social competence and the competence for action and individuality. This concept, through analogical applications, recognizes personality in developed animals.

In reality, the second and third statements are not different, from a foundational theoretical standpoint, and they stand opposed to the first one which can be labelled “speciesist”. However, their origin is associated with the idea of self consciousness (Locke), which responds to a common objective in the philosophy of enlightenment (Kant, Hegel): a concept of person as the centre of imputation and therefore, as a free subject, thereby dismissing the idea of substance.

### 1.2. *Persons are formed without a teacher?*

Once this question has been clarified, what should be sought is the answer to the following question: Are persons formed – educated – in an integral sense or are their personal predicates formed? Rousseau, specifically in his *Emile*, believes that a person's predicates are formed and not the person in an integral sense as the person him or herself: “*un être vraiment heureux est un être solitaire*”; “*c’est la faiblesse de l’homme qui le rend sociable.*” (Rousseau 239). What Rousseau attempts to do is show how life in society has corrupted man's heart, moving him to pity as far as he can perceive, as an impartial observer, seeing how men and women err, depraved and perverted by society. If this is the vision that Rousseau has of man, it is clear that what people are taught forms their attributes of personhood, and when he explains the method for the study of man, this appears quite clearly: Rousseau denies the teacher the capacity to evaluate because he considers this to be illegitimate meddling that supplants the experience and progress of the pupil's very reason.

### 1.3. *Personhood and virtue: the teacher*

Formation and education cannot be conceived as an exclusive relationship between subject and object learned. Education (“*instructio*”) is, to St. Thomas Aquinas, the nourishing of the soul. If virtue is a “second nature”, and if virtue is the object of education, it would seem correct to affirm that education is a “second generation” (Millán Puelles, 32) and that education is actually a second intellectual generation in which divine intellectual generation tends to be imitated (Martínez, 75, et seq). That is how it has always been understood in the Christian tradition, in the *paideia Christi*, as “cultural osmosis, in which something is received and something is projected”, in which “the welcoming and receiving of elements that are foreign to Christianity” also occur, and which was capable of changing the course of the West (Lobato, 33). Insofar as education is formation of virtue, it unequivocally implies accompaniment, a relational dimension that ties the master and the disciple. Guardini states that it deals with “linking growing men, still susceptible to being formed (...), the youth with the master; the follower with his or her example” (Guardini, 149).

## 2. *FORMATION WITHOUT PERSONS?*

Faced with this vision supported by the concept of personhood and virtue but also faced with the vision of modernity, postmodern criticism would advocate an “education without men.” The theory of Luhmann's systems explains society self-referentially: each system is self-referential insofar as it is a closed system of communication (not one of subjects), and education is yet another social system, albeit fundamental, that conceives society self-referentially (Luhmann, 170 et seq.). The education system cannot be considered as the formation of persons: neither the systems nor education itself can ease communication through operations of individual conscience or nerve impulses. These are conscious system operations, but not communication systems. Luhmann's formulation is presented as a challenge from the start: It intends to modify assumptions that it considers in effect since Plato, with his approach to teachings in the Allegory of the Cave. In effect, in the Allegory of the Cave, there is without a doubt an absolute affirmation of what knowledge and learning would aspire to: “in the region of the knowable the last thing to be seen, and that with considerable effort, is the idea of good; but once seen, it must be concluded that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful.” However, this is not possible for Luhmann, for whom the educational social system only codifies the career, and therefore, social selection. In no case does it codify “values in accordance with a medieval representation of a world of absolute, axiomatic and immutable perfections.” Also in the words of Luhmann: “values are not what is being discussed but rather preferences” (Luhmann, 121).

However, it would be erroneous to deny Luhmann's reflections all relevance. Before all else, the critical reflection on the educational action's pre-eminence without prior theoretical reflection is a decisive aspect which I believe is usable. It is precisely in this aspect where the discrepancy may be grounded: insofar as, in the theoretical reflection I am defending, education and formation of virtue may be maintained, it must be affirmed that this conditions options and teaching experience. And the – probable – accusation that this theoretical reflection is previously contaminated by a prejudice – the belief in virtue – disavows a fact that Spaemann has formulated very clearly in his criticism of hypothetical thought, which he equates in his practical development to functionalist thought. Insofar as a person is considered exclusively in his or her function (this is the falsifiable hypothesis), radical functionalism represents hypertrophy of the “being in the world” that is essential in the world: the sphere of interpersonality, the sphere of morals, and the sphere of religiousness are dissolved in the

functional-hypothetical structure (Spaemann, 243). This – and not just the system's theoretical construction – explains the disappearance of virtue, but also simultaneously, the dissolution of interpersonal relationships in education.

### 3. *BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: WHAT PEOPLE ARE FORMED AT CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES AND SCHOOLS?*

“*Homo autem ratione vivit, quam per longi temporis experimentum ad prudentia pervenire oportet*” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III, c. 122, n. 8). A person's formation lasts a lifetime – for everyone. However, the present goal is to mark off when and how we can speak of periods dedicated exclusively or fundamentally to formation. In that regard, we should not leave out the sense that we have wanted to assign to formation from the very beginning: formation of virtue.

In that regard a first fact should be underlined: all Latin words used in the first centuries of Christianity and in the Middle Ages to designate formation and education (*informatio, disciplina, educatio, scientia, sapientia*) are concepts with an unequivocal ethical dimension. This circumstance makes it possible to confirm the utility of the criterion which from the outset has been attempted to be defended: what explains the need for formation for a lifetime is not limited to the knowledge to be attained, but also fundamentally to a person's aspiration to be perfect in virtue. The object is not only about morals – what is taught, what people are educated with – but rather that education itself has that nature.

This is what the Catholic University itself aspires to: fidelity to the professors' doctrine is without a doubt an essential factor. However, it is an assumption of Catholic university education. The basis of university teaching comes into play between disciple and master in the disciple's generation beginning with the master. That second generation, mentioned above, is not a transfer of knowledge alone: in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “The university professor has the duty not only to investigate the truth and to arouse perennial wonder from it, but also to foster its knowledge in every facet and to defend it from reductive and distorted interpretations.” But this vision also falls short of the Catholic University's aspirations in its task of integrally forming students. Pope Benedict has also emphasized it: “The life of faith needs to be the driving force behind every activity in the school, so that the Church's mission may be served effectively, and the young people may discover the joy of entering into Christ's 'being for others'.” This vision, which leads students to feel the need to be close to professors, on the model of Christian *paidea*, implies an ulterior reflection on the professor's roles as the person who accompanies students in their formation, the person who stimulates curiosity in the presence of knowledge, but also in the presence of virtue.

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