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The Insights of Hannah Arendt and Virtue Ethics on Education

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Introduction

Though Arendt is clear that education must teach the young about the world they will inherit, she is unclear on how one learns to critically think, or if it is education's role to teach one this process. Without understanding how one learns to critically think, educators are at a loss for imparting such an important faculty. Arendt was concerned with preservation of the common world, but she was just as concerned with avoiding bureaucratic evil that results from being unable to think. To compensate for Arendt's lack of information on critical thinking and to give a fuller view of the purpose of education I have synthesized Arendt with Virtue Ethics.

I have incorporated Hannah Arendt's seminal piece *The Human Condition*, her political essays *Between Past and Future*, and her journalistic controversy *Eichmann in Jerusalem* to formulate Arendt's view on education. Julia Annas' book *Intelligent Virtue* gives this work a framework for how one learns a virtue. Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* provides the theory for how one grounds the virtues by continuing a version of Aristotelean virtue ethics. While this work does not directly use *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's theory of virtue ethics is used by both Annas and MacIntyre, thus Aristotle has a strong influence over this work.

When combined, one observes that critical thinking, that is, knowing right from wrong, is a process that can be learned like that of learning a practice. Though one can learn to critically think, the process cannot be taught in formal education. Because one cannot learn to critically think in formal education, the presence of the public world becomes immensely important. The public world because of its unreplaceable complexities, becomes the only arena that one can truly learn how to critically think. Education's purpose is to reveal the world to the young, but being able to critically think and choose the correct action based on one's knowledge of the world cannot be taught in formal education and can only be learned in the public world.

Section I: Hannah Arendt and Education

The Private

Hannah Arendt's theories are based on a set of vocabulary that splits the world into different realms. The first realm is the Private. The Private refers to the realm that accounts for

all things that are needed to sustain life.¹ This makes the private linked to the biological needs of humans and the development of them.² The private is the area of life to be hidden, according to Arendt, because the private is the region of life that exemplifies the mortality of a human life and the destruction of a common world.³ There is nothing noteworthy about the private, every aspect of one's private life is not new, as everyone before has needed the same things to keep themselves from death. Even seemingly extraordinary events of one's private life are replications of other's past. The Private is naturally circular because the biological needs of one's life are naturally reoccurring.⁴ This means that one does not choose their actions in the private, rather, they are pressed upon them as needs of life, requirements that must be fulfilled to live. Arendt groups aspects of life such as labor, which is the process of creating what is needed for life, or fulfilling of biological needs for life, into the private. She also groups work, which is the performance of creating products of utility for human use, into the private.⁵ Both labor and work, are meant to be hidden away, they are not noteworthy because those before and those after us will and have performed the same tasks to survive and create a world of things.⁶ Those products, created through work and labor, stabilize the earth through products that will outlast our own short mortal life and connect generations.⁷ The Private, though necessary for life, is to be hidden away, and is required for the creation of the Public Realm.

The Public

The other half of Arendt's world is the Public. The Public is the highest arena of human life, because it allows for one to distinguish themselves amongst a group of peers.⁸ The Public requires for one to be amongst their equal peers and to perform an action (the idea of action is extremely important to our discussion but will be discussed later in the paper as the idea is complex and needs to be introduced after the idea of education). The distinguishing amongst one's peers is important to Arendt because of the need one possess to be immortal or remembered for what makes them unique.⁹ Arendt believes in what she calls natality, which is

¹ Hannah Arendt, *Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 7.

² Arendt, *Human Condition*, 7.

³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 32, 33, 37.

⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 7.

⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 7, 55, 136-137, and 167.

⁶ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 32-33.

⁷ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 167-168.

⁸ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 179.

⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 19-21.

the idea that each human enters the world as new and completely novel. No one before or after them have been, or will be the same. The only way for an individual to show themselves, and to demonstrate their individuality, is to be in the arena of the public away from the needs of life or the physical circumstances that may separate and differentiate people.¹⁰ The public realm is an area for performances, performances of action, which reveal to one's equals who they are, and gives the possibility for new ideas and new events to occur in the world.¹¹ The private may be for the sustaining life and allowing for the creation of the public, but the public is where one reveals themselves, performing acts that change the world, and sets themselves apart.

Action

Hannah Arendt's world is split between the public and private, with the public being the arena for her own conception of *action*. Action are performances by an individual in the public realm, used as a way of distinguishing themselves and creating new possibilities.¹² For a performance to be an Action, it must be completely new, never performed before, and the consequences of it must not be known.¹³ As discussed earlier, the public realm is the only area that allows for one to show who they are as they are amongst individuals, devoid of physical circumstance/private worldly matters.¹⁴ The public allows one to distinguish themselves, revealing their character, through action.¹⁵ Action is how one shows who they are, and consequently, how they will be remembered.¹⁶ It is only through action that one's unique abilities come through. Arendt sees most worldly performances as repeated offences, that is, many before have performed them. This is why action must be completely novel, having never been performed by one before. It is in a new action that one distinguishes their true selves, as no one has performed this action before and no one may be able to perform it latter and call it an action. The requirement of newness is drawn from Arendt's idea of natality. No one has or will ever be like another, therefore, one must perform an action that has never been performed for it to truly represent themselves.

¹⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 179.

¹¹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 199

¹² Arendt, *Human Condition*, 176.

¹³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 177.

¹⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 17.

¹⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 180.

¹⁶ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 19-21.

Unique qualities and newness are not enough for a performance to be an action. The performance must delve into the unknown of what it may cause. An action has unknown consequences that act as a spark, igniting other sparks that may never end. For Arendt "...the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation."¹⁷ Every action must have the possibility to change everything, it may not, but it is only in retrospect that one may judge an action. It is only after the consequences have begun to occur, that one may then be certain that their performance was truly an action.¹⁸ Arendt hints at a historical length of time, perhaps after the death of the performer, that an action may be known. She refers to historical tales, like that of the Illiad as the spreading and confirmation of the actions of Achilles and Hektor. Action is one of the few ways that one may convey a truth. It is only in acting that the validity of one's claim can be tested. For Action is performed in the public, for one's equals to observe and eventually judge. It is the judgment of the public that becomes the third party to which truth and validity can be tested. Without a third party, one may claim a truth, but without exterior criteria the validity of that truth cannot be tested.¹⁹

A few examples may make the idea of action more complete. Chris Higgins gives the example of Jackie Robinson's first at bat in Major League Baseball. He was the first African American to play a game in Major League Baseball. He was performing a new, never performed action. Jackie Robinson was playing on an even playing field, in front of a body of peers, in the public light. His first at bat also had a level of unknown and unpredictability involved. He, or others may have been able to guess at what his actions would cause, but no one knew. Another example may be that of a jazz musician. A Jazz musician plays new music, in the public, for a group of his peers, and what his music will cause is not known to him. He has not planned out a note, he only plays it as it comes to him. He is expressing who he is, to the public, and as he will never be exactly the same as he is in that moment, the product that he produces will be completely new and never replicable.

Educations Role

Education serves as the mediator between the public and the private realm. By mediator, Arendt means that education enables and protects the public and private from destroying each

¹⁷ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 190.

¹⁸ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 181.

¹⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 244-245.

other. Education protects and enables the public while also protecting the private from the public through the creation of a common world.²⁰ The common world is the enabling factor that allows human beings to communicate and relate to each other because it is the world that each individual shares with another, a world that despite humanities massive differences, is the same to each. Remembering that each individual is born into the world completely new and unlike any other, it becomes necessary for there to be a shared common world to allow individuals to relate to each other. Without the common world people would be at a loss to communicate or have a ground to base their claims and reasoning.²¹ One creates a common world by the works that inhabit society and endure through generations; this is education's role. Education serves to introduce the students to the world that they will inhabit.²²

Arendt warns against students being released into the world to act upon it with their relativistic ideas before they are taught what the world is.²³ Such a decision would destroy our ability to maintain a public realm through which the world is recognizable and therefore relatable. Education takes the students under its protection and says "here is our world". The world must be protected from children, for children have not been shown the world in which they are part of. Without knowing the world they are liable to destroy the common world because there is not a base of common knowledge that they share with others who inhabit the world.²⁴ The teacher's role is to slowly reveal the world to the student, teaching them about it, showing them the world that they will inherit and must preserve, it is only through educating children, that society can protect the public from the private.²⁵

Education also serves to protect the children from the world. Arendt cites examples of children of the famous who turn out badly because they are thrust into the public and are unable to retreat into the security private realm. This example seems overly qualitative and unconvincing. Yet the idea that Arendt is putting forward is worthy of examination. Education that protects children from the world seems to be needed. For children do not know what the world is and therefore are ill-equipped to be in it. They are not prepared because they will not

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future; Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 185-186.

²¹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 136-137.

²² Arendt, *Between Past and Future; Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 185-188.

²³ Arendt, *Between Past and Future; Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 187.

²⁴ Arendt, *Between Past and Future; Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 186-187.

²⁵ Arendt, *Between Past and Future; Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 195.

understand how the world works and not have common knowledge that allows individuals to communicate and understand each other. The child would learn from events that are false in what they mean or what they represent. The world is a place that will allow for a child to be manipulated and taught incorrectly about the workings of the world. The children may see everyone as untrustworthy as they have not learned about all of the instances or examples of honest and trusting individuals existing, having only lived in a world where they have been taken advantage of. Children do not have the prerequisite information to be responsible for the world, that is, to choose what must be preserved or improved on, as they do not know the world, they would be acting blindly. The public world is unforgiving. Not only would the child not know how to act reliably in the world, their actions would have severe consequences. They would not be able to learn from their actions and would then be restricted by the consequences and punishment that incurs from incorrect action. Education serves to protect the child from the world and the world from the child, while also creating a common world which enables the public and action. For action is what recreates and reinvents the world, without which, the world would be stalled. Students are needed for the continuation of the world through new and novel action.

Critical Thinking and Judgment

Arendt's lone text on education, *Crisis in Education*, argued for education's position as the mediator, preserver, and creator for the new. But the idea of being able to think, whether one calls this critical thinking or judgment, is a common theme throughout much of her work. In her conclusion on Eichmann she reveals the importance of critical thinking and judgment. Arendt concluded that Eichmann, while instrumental in the killing of millions of Jews, was not special at all, he was banal.²⁶ She coined the term the banality of evil, aptly described as evil that is not wonderful in thought, or cunningness, perhaps the opposite of Machiavelli's Prince. Instead, Eichmann was so unable to think for himself, to ground his decisions in a concept of right or wrong, that his orders given from Hitler, and enforced by law, subdued him into an evil creature.²⁷ Eichmann believed himself to be innocent, for he had done nothing wrong in the eyes of the law. In fact, if he had not done his job, or tried to stop the killing of the Jews, then he

²⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann In Jerusalem; A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 136.

²⁷ Arendt, *Eichmann In Jerusalem; A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Chapters 3 and 8

would could be found guilty by the law²⁸. He was unable to imagine moral laws or a moral framework for he was a bureaucrat, only able to follow the laws and orders that were sent down to him.²⁹ The abstract notions of right and wrong, or good and bad, were beyond him. Eichmann, the banal bureaucrat, and the perfect example of one who is unable to critically think and make decisions.

For Arendt, critically thinking is a two part process, one performed in the private, with oneself, and other in the public, debating others. The first portion, we will call self-dialogue, and involves seeing an event or problem through as many lenses of others as possible.³⁰ This means "...that one trains their imagination to go visiting." (KL 43), trying on different lenses. Arendt says that critical thinking is only possible, only achievable, "...where the standpoint of all others are open to inspection." The only place where one can be examined, and also examine others, is in the public realm, amongst equals. Once one has completed a self-dialogue, and entered the public realm, giving their opinion and debating equals, their own active portion of the critical thinking process is finished, but the progression itself is not done. A final judgment is the final portion of the critical thinking process. Judgment cannot be reached on one's own. Judgment, that is the finding of truth, can only come from a public decision for it is only through public debate and the sharing of ideas that authority can be derived. Through this public authority, truth is found, and decisions are made. Critical thinking then starts as an individual act, preparing one for the revealing of themselves and ends in revealing themselves to the public through debate where authority is based and truth is found.

Now the obvious question is if education has a part in developing the faculty of critical thinking. Stacy Smith argues that education does have a role based on Arendt's call for education to create individuals who can maintain the world that they inherit. Part of inheriting a world and continuing it, is using critical thinking in the public realm to create new action. But, Smith's argument maintains that Arendt's dichotomy of the political and education should not be considered literal. In this, Smith's argument alienates Arendt's own ideas of what critical thinking is, unfaithfully portraying her ideas to make critical thinking part of formal education. First, Smith maintains that by practicing the first facet of critical thinking, a self-dialogue that considers other lenses and points of view, that education is preparing students for critical

²⁸ Arendt, *Eichmann In Jerusalem; A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Chapter 8

²⁹ Arendt, *Eichmann In Jerusalem; A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Chapter 15

³⁰ Hannah Arendt and P.R. Baehr, *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Viking Press, 2003), 241-243.

thinking in the public realm. The first step of a self-dialogue is irrelevant without a community of equals being present to create the exchange, growth, and validation of opinions. Second, the entire process of critical thinking, which includes the judgement made in the public sphere, is Arendtian Action. Arendt defines Action as unknowable and unreplaceable, and because of this unknowability and unreplaceable aspects, it can never be fully simulated outside of the act itself. Third, Arendt makes the distinction between education and the political, and because critical thinking and coming to a judgment is a political endeavor, it must be separated from education for the student's sake. If education were to take in the political, students would not have the world being revealed to them slowly, rather they would be fully part of the public. This would destroy education's task, as Arendt warns that the public may destroy children as they are not fully members, and are unable to understand its realm without first having the world revealed and taught to them. While critical thinking is stressed as a needed human faculty by Arendt, she does not suggest that formal education directly cultivates it.

Critical Thinking and Education

Not including critical thinking into education will certainly make others uncomfortable and cause them to ask from where students will learn to critically think. Arendt's model and theory of the world, may permit continued learning in the public sphere, not just confining learning to the classroom. Since critical thinking is a political and public action, and can only be this, it must be expected that new members to the public will not be as artful as others in their contributions. Critical thinking is an action that will be developed over time, and through experience in the public realm, through self-dialogue, public debate, and judgment. Continually learning can work in Arendt's model because there is a place for opinions to be tested. If an inexperienced actor were to perform action that were not suitable to take hold, the experienced community would debate this action and it would not be accepted. The public protects itself from incorrect action that may occur from inexperienced actors of critical thinking. In using Eichmann as a case study once again, it becomes obvious that Nazi Germany did not have any kind of public realm for ideas and opinions to be tested, leading to evil to take hold and act. Education is present to inform the actions of students once they enter the public, thus allowing correct action to be attained. Continued learning outside the classroom in the form of experience is required to

actually teach how one comes to correct action. The public realm becomes the classroom, a learning environment, where all are equal, informed about our world, and where growth occurs from debate the synthesis of ideas.

Imperfections in Arendt

Though Arendt hints at a model for critical thinking, more guidance is needed to complete the idea of what critical thinking is and how it learned. To compensate I will use the normative ethics theory virtue ethics as the basis of critical thinking. Virtue Ethics are critical thinking under another name. Ethics informs one on the correct action and reasoning. Virtue Ethics then is a suitable substitute for critical thinking. Beyond Virtue Ethics being a suitable replacement for critical thinking, it solves a problem that appears in Arendt's idea of critical thinking and truth finding.

Though Arendt gives a framework for critical thinking, her framework runs into Alasdair MacIntyre's modern ethics problem. For MacIntyre, the concept of ethics, the right action, is impossible without a grounding in teleology. For dialogue is impossible without an understanding of what the teleology of beings and practices. Through Arendt individuals may enter into the public realm and reveal themselves, making arguments and taking stances, but those arguments are impossible if the two sides do not discuss a teleology to ground their discussions. The modern day abortion argument may make this point clearer. One side is pro-life, arguing that one cannot violate the right to life. The other side is pro-choice, arguing that every woman has a right to make decisions regarding their bodies. The two sides are not even arguing the same thing! The root of the argument is boiled down to questions about what is a human and what rights do humans have. To have this discussion the two sides must come to a conclusion on the teleology of a human to determine if that includes living or choices. As one can see, even with a public realm for one to present arguments and for the public to choose the merit of each, there is insufficient grounds for the process to work. Virtue Ethics grounded in MacIntyre's framework for a modern teleology provides a model for students to learn and perform critical thinking.

Section II: Virtue Ethics

Definition of Virtue

To understand the insights that virtue ethics offers one into education, one must first understand the virtues. Virtues are character traits, dispositions, or the lasting features of a person.³¹ That is, the virtues are how one acts on a regular basis.³² If virtues are lasting character traits, they cannot be performed rarely, or once, for them to be possessed. One would not be honest if they only told the truth on occasion, or if they were to act with honesty in mind only rarely. Virtues are lasting and reliable, one can be said to reliably act honest if they possess the virtue of honesty. This is why the virtuosity of a person cannot be gauged by the observation of a single event, instead it can only be gauged as a whole or at the end of one's life.

The virtues are not just a reliable character trait, they are goods, not dependent on their value in society or to an individual. They are not relative to an individual's whims and the changing of their mind. Virtues that one strives to learn and install in their children are valued because they are good, not good because they are valued. One is not able change the virtues because they do not like them. They are exterior to oneself. To put in in another context, a basketball could be said to be good because of the enjoyment that it brings to the owner when dribbled and shot into a basket. The basketball's good is derived from those things that it adds to the owner's life. If the basketball failed to give the owner those things, then its value would be lost, it would no longer be a good. Therefore, a basketball's good is dependent and derived from its value. Virtues are the opposite, virtues are not good because they add enjoyment, or because they aid in the attaining a goal. These feature may be by products of a virtue, but virtues are goods without those things that they add to one's life. In fact, a virtue may result in pain, yet still be considered a good. This means that we will perform the virtues for their own sake, because they are goods in themselves. We may be honest, not because being honest makes us feel good. We will be honest because being honesty is good and all of our enjoyment comes from the fact that it is good. The virtues are used and valued for no other reason than they are good.

Correct Action, Reasoning and Emotions

The virtues are the correct action, or how one should act in a given situation. The correct action involves the correct physical action or choice, reasoning and emotions. First, a virtue must be active for it to be possessed. One may not be considered an owner of a virtue if they do not

³¹Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8-10.

³²Julia Annas, *Very Short Introduction of Ancient Philosophy*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), 53.

use it, or only use it some of the time. A virtue must be used by a person, in action, for one to be considered in possession of that virtue. Aristotle claimed that a virtue was not a passive part of a person, but rather that it is an active part of an individual, used regularly.³³ A virtue cannot be said to be possessed, or a part of a person's being, if they do not use it.³⁴ Virtues are ubiquitous in every action an individual may perform, even if it is unknown to themselves that they are using a virtue.³⁵ The obstacle to overcome in this discussion is the idea that we may have of overt physical action. We must realize that a virtuous action is not always overtly recognizable by onlookers. An example may help to clarify this point. An individual may exhibit trust by maintaining confidentiality regarding a friend's drug addiction. This person has unbeknown to others around, practiced the virtue of trust without any outward display of action. Thus, exhibiting the idea that virtues must be expressed through action for them to come to life. Virtues cannot exist without the action to express them.

The virtues must consist of the RIGHT actions. For Aristotle, the correct actions were epitomized by the Golden Mean. The Golden Mean is the idea of using the median amount of any virtue, the middle of the two extremes; too little and too much. Being completely devoid of generosity, like that of a Scrooge, may be more unwanted than being too generous. Yet the two alternatives are both undesirable. Instead, it is required that an individual uses the Golden Mean of generosity, not too much, and not too little. This rule holds true for every virtue.

The correct action, the Golden Mean, is only found through the correct reasoning, also known as Practical Reasoning. Practical Reasoning is acting properly informed by and in the use of a virtue.³⁶ An example where practical reasoning is absent may make this idea clearer. An individual may possess the virtue of generosity, but if that individual does not possess practical reasoning, they may use the virtue incorrectly and not find the golden mean.³⁷ Perhaps they are too generous and give a younger child large quantities of cookies on a regular basis, causing the child to become morbidly obese. This example shows that the individual did not possess practical reasoning and used the virtue incorrectly. They were unable to find the golden mean through their reason. The example also brings to light the complexity of practical reasoning. For practical reasoning in this example, the individual would need to be proficient in other virtues on

³⁴ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 2.

³⁶ Daniel C. Russell, *Virtue Ethics Happiness, and the Good Life*

how to use generosity correctly. The individual in the example lacks responsibility for how their actions may affect others.³⁸ One must be able to choose the correct virtue, in the right amount, and used in a true way. Practical reasoning is how one finds and uses the golden mean, or rather, how they get to the end that they want.

When virtues are used they must be accompanied by the correct feelings. The virtuous person will enjoy using the virtue and will feel good about using it. The correct feelings may seem unneeded, for if one uses a virtue, why does it matter if they enjoy using it or not. The answer lies in the nature of the virtues. If the virtues are goods, then their use is joyous, for goods are valued, and nothing that is good and valued can be unenjoyable. A truly virtuous person does not have emotional regrets about being virtuous and enjoys the acts that go along with being virtuous. For if one were to have regrets about being generous then they would not have been generous. Their self-indulgence would cause them to regret their generosity, and the motivation behind that generosity could be external pressure, not internal choice. The act of generosity must be accompanied by the correct feelings of enjoyment and happiness. Not only does a virtuous person have the correct emotions while performing a virtue, they also do not struggle against being unvirtuous.

How Virtues are Informed

The virtues are the correct action, but for them to be correct there must be an exterior format or criteria for them to be judged against. The virtues must be informed by what it means to be virtuous. Alasdair Macintyre rejects Aristotle in basing the virtues in a biological teleology, but insists that the virtues need a set of teleological criteria.³⁹ Macintyre creates a teleological grounding for the virtues in practices.⁴⁰ The virtues are created, through practices, and specifically through the internal goods of those practices.⁴¹ As actors we become parts of practices, and in becoming members into these institutions, we inherit a long history of virtues.⁴² The virtues from these practices, are what is valued by the practice, and what it means to be great at that practice. These internal goods are rooted deeply in the practices past, one must then be

³⁸ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 5.

³⁹ Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 51.

⁴⁰ Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 187.

⁴¹ Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 187

⁴² Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 187-191

knowledgeable of the past of that practice to be a part of it and to perform it. Once one has learned those relevant internal goods, they are able to take in another form of internal goods, one that is only known to those who are actors in that practice. An example may make this clearer. Fly fishing is a practice, it has a long history that has established what it means to be great at it. Fly fishing has the internal goods of patience and attention to detail. If one is great at fly fishing they will possess these internal goods. As anyone who has ever been part of a practice knows, there is a deeper internal good, one that is only known through being a part of that practice for an extended amount of time. It drives fly fishermen to spend years of their lives attempting to catch not trophy sword fish, but small brook trout. It is an internal good to the practice that is only known by those who are part of it, yet this internal good, while impossible to define, informs one on what is beautiful and right.

Perquisites of Learning a Virtue

If one can learn a virtue, then it can also be taught. The process of learning a virtue is identical to that of learning the many skills that humans perform throughout their lives. As described by Julia Annas, who expanded the idea from Aristotle, a virtue, like a skill, can be learned if the correct prerequisite conditions are met.⁴³ For a learner to master a virtue, or a skill, they must have a desire to learn the skill/virtue, have a teacher who they aspire to be like, aim to perform the skill/virtue well and have these conditions met over the extended amount of time during which the learning takes place.

The desire to learn the skill is essential because without the desire to learn, the learner will never take the newly acquired virtue and advance it for themselves. The desire to learn is needed because the learner is doing more than copying the actions of the virtue. Like learning a skill, the first, and most basic step of learning is copying. This step can be done by a disinterested individual. But, furthering the learning, requires that one understands and uses that virtue or skill. For that the learner must have a desire to learn the skill. The desire to learn the skill comes from the learner seeing the virtue as good, and therefore wanting to be like their teacher. There must be something that the learner sees as valuable, or wants, for them to desire to learn a skill or virtue. The want can be external to begin with, it can be because of what learning the skill or virtue will bring to the individual, or because the society that one finds themselves in

⁴³ Aristotle used this analogy in *Nicomachean Ethics*, and it has been expanded on in Julia Annas' *Intelligent Virtue*

values the skill or virtue. The learner must also aspire to perform the newly learned skill well. If they are satisfied with mediocre performances, then they will never fully learn the skill. For to learn a skill fully one must acquire all of the facets involved in that said skill, and also add to that practice, becoming a master and a pioneer in it. Without the desire to perform the skill well, and beyond the level of what others have done before, they will never fully learn the skill. The last needed condition for the learning of a virtue is time. One cannot expect to become a master welder overnight, or even over a decade. Part of what makes one a master, is the ability to add to skill. The process of learning, and perfecting a complex task such as welding will take a prolonged amount of time. In many cases an individual will not have enough time, as their life may be much too short to fully master a skill or virtue.

Stages of Learning/Teaching a Virtue

The first stage of learning a virtue is acquiring the skill/virtue from one who is a master of the virtue/skill⁴⁴. The second stage is understanding the virtue, this includes the reasoning, the feelings, and the correct action. The third stage is using the virtues on one's own, this may include becoming proficient in the use of the virtues. The fourth stage, is becoming a master, which is irrevocably tied to the furthering of the virtue or skill learned.

The first stage of learning a virtue is observing a master use the skill. A true beginner would observe their teacher/master using the virtue/skill in situations that require it. The learner would not understand the concepts of the virtue, only how to imitate how the master used it. They would acquire the ability to use the skill in perhaps the exact same situation that they had witnessed it used in, but they would be unable to apply it to a new situation. By copying a role model it is clear that an individual does not understand what the virtue is for they would be unable to use it on their own.

The second step is understanding the use of the skill.⁴⁵ The learner must grasp the concepts needed for the skill. They need to understand the reasons why a master uses the virtue in a certain way. In this stage the learner will grasp the central tenets of the virtue to make it universally applicable. This means that they must understand how to use the virtue regardless of the situation, being confident in the theory of the virtue. Julia Annas gives the example of someone who wants to learn to play the piano like Alfred Brendal. At first the learner may

⁴⁴ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 16-17.

⁴⁵ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 3.

simply copy how Brendal plays certain pieces. Eventually however, the learner would discover the concepts that ground Brendal as a player and apply them to other pieces or their own pieces of music. The piano player would eventually be able to play like Brendal, though never playing a piece he played. The goal is for the virtue to become universally applicable, imitation only allows for the use of the virtue in the exact situation it was witnessed in.⁴⁶ True understanding of why a virtue was used in a certain way, the correct feelings associated with it, and what the correct action is, will allow the virtue to be used in any situation.

The learner must understand the virtue completely because the virtue can be applied to any situation. A virtue can be used in every situation because it is not dependent on a uniform situation or circumstance dictating itself. The virtues possess universal applicability, that is, the virtues can guide everyone in every action. This is because the virtues guide one in the living of their life.⁴⁷ Virtues guide one in how they live their life with those situations and circumstances they find themselves in.⁴⁸ Circumstances are those parts of a person's life into which they are born. One cannot change the year they were born, their genetics, or their heritage. The circumstances of one's life are inherited, not chosen.⁴⁹ Situations are the setting of one's life that the virtues works within. An example of the setting of one's life is the amount of money one has, the people around the actor, and the place in which it may occur. The situations of a life may have been chosen to an extent by the actor, but the setting does not affect how a virtue is used in a situation. One is able to use the guidance of courage throughout their life, and that same virtue can be used as guidance in another's life. The settings and circumstances only affect how a virtue may be used, not if a virtue can be used, because a virtue is the living of the life, living with the situations and circumstances that one finds themselves in. The universal applicability of the virtues is only possible with the understanding of a virtue, the second step of learning a virtue.

The third step of learning a virtue is to use the skill on one's own.⁵⁰ Once a learner has grasped the tenets of the virtue, they may be able to use it self-directed on their own. This step demonstrates the importance of the learners desire to acquire the virtue.⁵¹ A learner must attempt to grasp the virtue for themselves, to understand the concepts in their own way, a step that a

⁴⁶ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 3.

⁴⁸ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 7.

⁴⁹ Annas lecture to Pennsylvania University.

⁵⁰ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 6.

⁵¹ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 3.

disinterested learner would not take. Such disinterestedness would cause one to become stuck in the stage of imitation and “lapse into repetition of the routine.”⁵² Once one is able to use the virtue on their own they learn from their experiences of using the virtue.⁵³ Notice how the use of a virtue is not the final step. It is for two reasons, one, there is more to learning a virtue than being able to confidently use on one’s own, and two, just because one can use a virtue on their own does not mean they are going to use it correctly. Since virtues can be used, and must be used, in every situation, the pure quantity of nuances and moral conflicts cannot be imparted through being told or observation. One must go out and use the virtue to fully experience all of these small, but needed characteristics of a virtue or skill.

The number of experiences of watching the teacher and seeing the virtue practiced may not compare to the complexity that one experiences when they use the virtue themselves. Learning from experience is explained in Matthew Crawford’s book, *Shopclass as Soulcraft*. He describes the mushroom like appearance of a piston arm in a certain year Volkswagen Beetle when timely oil changes have been neglected. This information is not too specific for a book, and is only known through a mechanics daily experience. Another example appears in *A River Runs Through It* when Norman Maclean describes fishing with his expert brother. Norman followed the rules of fly fishing for large fish, repeatedly sending his fly into the fast moving water where only a large fish will live. After coming up empty his brother returns with three large trout. His brother, the expert, exclaimed that for this river, which he has fished before, the water moves too fast for a large fish to get enough insects to stay large. Instead, the large fish are found by the bank because they feed on field mice and frogs that fall into the water. “That’s one trouble with hanging around a master – you pick up some of his stuff, like how to cast into a bush, but you use it just when the master is doing the opposite.”⁵⁴

The fourth stage of the learning of a virtue and skill is striving to improve and adding to the practice⁵⁵. By striving to improve, the master is like the learner in many ways. They are always attempting to refine and improve their craft. This may occur through the mastery of fine details of the virtue or in its application to new situations. By adding to a practice, a learner is becoming part of the practice of that virtue. What the learner acquires a virtue, they are receiving

⁵² Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 18.

⁵³ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 3.

⁵⁴ Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 45.

⁵⁵ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 3.

the virtue as it has been developed thus far, full of accomplishments and flaws. The learner must then add to the practice to further it and to become a part of the practice.⁵⁶ This grounds the learner in the practice forever and in what it means to perform a certain practice. This final stage indicates the importance of the master to never stop learning, as the virtue must always be in action and must always be growing more advanced. Our virtues create communities that inform us on what it means to be a part of this virtue, and adding to a work of virtue that may ground us in the world long after we are gone.⁵⁷ Mastering a virtue creates a community, like the community of the brave described by Annas.⁵⁸ This community may transcend ethnic and language barriers that have long defined different societies, thus creating larger and more diverse groups of people. Virtue communities allow one to be connected to those who came before and will come after.⁵⁹

Improvement upon the Virtues

The last step of learning a virtue, improving and adding to it, may be the most important because developing a virtue perfects that which guides our lives. A virtue is good, the highest good attainable. Yet, a virtue can be admittedly flawed or underdeveloped. The only way to avoid this, is to continually advance that virtue, adding new facets, or ways of seeing that virtue in use. A skill has this in common with a virtue. A good example may be painting. Throughout history new and different painting styles have emerged. When these painting styles emerged those who founded and advanced them were alone, fully informed of the past, yet attempting to expand what was known as art. Without the attempt to advance or further a skill, the world would be static, without Monet, Dali, or Picasso. Like painting, a virtue must continually be pushed to new unknown boundaries.

Without developing a virtue an individual, or a community, would be forever stuck and unable to break free of the status quo. Every individual is bound to their culture and time.⁶⁰ By only learning what the virtue is from the masters who come before us, we are stunting the virtues' growth, our own growth as learners, and societies' moral growth. To be a proficient master and to truly understand the virtue, one must be able to critically understand its flaws and

⁵⁶ Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Chapter 14.

⁵⁸ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 4.

⁵⁹ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 4.

⁶⁰ Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Chapter 2, 3,4, and 15.

application.⁶¹ Part of mastering a virtue is being able to cultivate the virtue which involves thinking critically and asking why the virtue is as it is and then acting upon these observations, furthering closer to perfection.⁶²

An excellent example of both the need for advancement in virtues and cultural embeddedness is in the abolition of slavery. Today we would never say that a virtuous person would own slaves. But, two hundred years ago, the owning of slaves would not have conflicted with the living of a virtuous life.⁶³ The improvement of a virtue leads to understanding the virtue in different contexts and vice versa. This also answers the common critique of one being unable to break out of the contextual embeddedness that they claim a virtue is in.⁶⁴ To allow the learning process to stop at stage three, only in proficient use of the understood concepts of the virtue transmitted from the master, would be to accept culture-virtue contradictions like that of slavery and justice to exist.⁶⁵ Also stunting the virtues growth, frozen in time, unable to move forward, only backward, as the only process that could advance it has not been embodied by those who have learned it. Through continually pushing the virtue into new dimensions and further refining its definition or relation to the world, the master is able to advance the world and create new possibilities and precedents.

Arendt, Virtue Ethics, and Education (Synthesis)

Virtue Ethics does not entirely replace Arendt's idea of critical thinking. While critical thinking provides one guidance in the use of the virtues, Arendt's idea of critical thinking provides a well-developed framework for the advancement of ideas and the virtues. Together, Virtue Ethics informs one on the correct action, reasoning and emotions. Julia Annas has also laid out a four step process for learning a virtue. This allows for one to understand the correct action to perform. Arendt's framework for critical thinking gives a safe environment for new ideas and the development of the virtues to occur. Arendt's public world gives a place for individuals to perform action. That action is then judged by the public realm. Allowing for new ideas and action to occur but also giving a format for adoption or condemnation of the new action.

⁶¹ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 4.

⁶³ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 4.

⁶⁴ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 4.

⁶⁵ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 4.

The revealing and passing on of the common world can be interpreted as knowledge about the world. It can also be interpreted to include those common virtues that people and communities share. As we have seen Virtues are not meant to be cover all of the world's inhabitants under one umbrella. Instead, as MacIntyre has shown, the virtues are rooted in individual communities and the practices that make up those communities. If this is so, then a significant part of one's world are those virtues that make up their community. Arendt can be interpreted to include the passing on the values and practices that make up communities. For example, American communities may need to pass on the different sport practices that ground virtues like patience and perseverance.

Together Arendt and Virtue Ethics creates a strong theory for education. This theory has a few differences from modern popular education. First, this conception of education begins the process of learning but does not finish it. That is, education informs one of the world, the past, or a practice. Education does not teach one how to act in the public world or what the correct action for a virtue is. Education's role is to give one the prerequisite information to begin to learn and master a virtue or to enter into the public world. Education than is necessary for entering the public realm and acting within it. For Arendt, education allows one to recognize the common world that is the public realm. Virtue Ethics requires one to be well versed in what a virtue is and the history of that virtue. Together one can see that without education the actor would be unable to act. Education's role is to inform students on the world and practices they will enter and share with others in the public, but not to create students who can fully flourish within it.

Second, Arendt and Virtue Ethics both see learning as not ending with formal education. Learning continues through experience and living. One learns the specifics of the virtues through using the virtues, just as one learns the entire process of critical thinking through using critical thinking in the public realm. Learning does not stop after schooling ends. In fact, learning must continue for the process that began in schools to finish. Education's role is to inform the students about the world and practices they will enter. But not to make them masters of action for both Arendtian and Virtue Ethic action can only occur in the public world. The process of using, therefore learning, occurs outside of formal education in the public world.

Third, Arendt and Virtue Ethics are only possible through one's immersion in the public and their society. That is, the public realm is the only teacher of many facets because it cannot be replicated. Arendt requires one to be part of a public realm because it allows for the judgment

process of critical thinking to occur. While the public is also needed for revealing oneself and the creation of a new world. Virtue Ethics requires a public realm and practices to inform, validate, the correct actions. One only knows what the correct virtues are because of their immersion in practices that informs them on what it means to be great at that practice. The public is the teleological grounding of action in Virtue Ethics and for Arendt. Without the public realm, one would be unable to communicate with others for the basis of communication are the truths found in the public realm. Hannah Arendt and Virtue Ethics vary greatly in most aspects of their theories, but they converge in their interpretation of the purpose of education.

A synthesis of Hannah Arendt and Virtue Ethics reveals that education's role is reveal the world to the young. This world is not limited to that which is found in history books. Instead, this education includes the learning of the virtues. The virtues are necessary for a society to have political discussions which have resolutions. The virtues also answer's Arendt's need for individuals to be able to critically think. The virtues guide one in how to act and to know right from wrong. Once formal education has revealed and taught students of the world they will inherit, they must enter this world and begin to act within to continue learning. For one cannot practice a virtue or critical thinking in a classroom. To fully use a virtue or critical thinking they must enter into the public world and use which they have learned. The students must learn from their use, and become proficient masters.

Conclusion

Educations purpose is to prepare students to enter a public world, but not as finished projects. Students will be prepared to enter the public world and not be liable to destroy it or the traditions that ground one's actions. But for one to truly flourish, they must continue to learn to critically think and become masters of the virtues, two process that can only occur in the public world after one has left formal education. The comparison of Arendt and virtues ethics has been informed from the following monographs, *The Human Condition*, *Between Past and Future*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, *Intelligent Virtue*, and *After Virtue*. These works have shown that Hannah Arendt requires education to be a preserver, mediator, and creator of new action for the world that humans inhabit. Education must teach students of the world they inherit in order to both protect and renew that world, while also protecting those students from the public world. Virtue Ethics needs education for one to learn a virtue, thus allowing one to receive a history and

community of that virtue. The public realm is the source for grounding the virtues teleologically and is the basis for how one becomes a master of the virtues. Education is closely tied the public world, as the public is how one finds truth and finishes their education in their attempt to become a master.

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