

ETHICS AND JUSTICE

AS INTEGRATING FACTORS IN A SANTA CLARA EDUCATION

Drafted by Paul Fitzgerald, S.J.

Socrates described ethics as “no small matter but how we ought to live.” For Augustine, human freedom realizes itself in our choice to do the good that God invites us to do. The Jesuit tradition, sprung from the early modern retrieval of these ancient notions, holds that persons can live the life of virtue that they ought to by discerning their own deepest desires for goodness, love, truth, beauty, etc. Jesuit spirituality has contributed much to what David Tracy calls the Catholic analogical imagination: a hopeful worldview that presumes the immanence of the Divine in every aspect of human life, all within a world that is “charged” with God’s grace. This worldview marries faith and reason, sees love and justice as mutually necessary and supportive, and sees education as *cura personalis*, an efficacious engagement of the whole person in a general movement towards integrity.

In the Jesuit tradition, Santa Clara University is a community of scholars engaged in holistic education that affords students, faculty and staff a supportive context within which to discern and to practice “how we all ought to live.” The fundamental pursuit of knowledge and wisdom affords our students myriad opportunities to develop moral imagination and to practice prudential judgment as they rigorously study past efforts to articulate and practice the true and the good, diagnose our and other societies’ present ethical challenges, and dream of ways to fashion a more just and humane world. Students gain insights into themselves and the world through research and debate, through reflection and immersion. As our graduates venture out into the public and private sectors, they often go with no little trepidation, for they have been educated to be persons of conscience, yet they know that their ideals and their moral courage will be sorely and repeatedly tested by a globalizing society wherein affronts to human dignity abound, a world rife with unethical practices and social injustices.

Santa Clara University is well resourced to prepare our students for these challenges. For 450 years, Jesuit colleges and universities have placed the development of moral imagination and ethical praxis at the center of Ignatian pedagogy because Jesuits have long known that up-to-date knowledge and intellectual curiosity are exercised in a world that is as morally bewildering as it is pregnant with scientific and social innovation. Jesuit pedagogy for conscience formation has always been built upon a humanistic education that encompasses the full sweep of human reality. To meet novel challenges, evidence must be gathered, conflicting moral claims weighed, social agents identified, fundamental norms and principles queried and applied, prudential judgments made, and brave actions engaged. This perennial obligation to educate for justice was renewed recently by Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, who charged Jesuit institutions of higher education to address new social questions and develop new methodologies so as to engage our current students and faculty¹. According to Father General, a Santa Clara graduate should know herself well and have claimed her deep desires for goodness and love, and especially, to have

¹ Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education.” Keynote Address, The Commitment to Justice in Jesuit Higher Education Conference, October 6, 2000.

entertained the invitation to be in solidarity with the neediest people of the world, as we saw in Father Ravizza's thought paper.

Happily, faculty and staff at Santa Clara University anticipated this charge by incorporating ethical reflection into the Core, many disciplines and para-curricular programs (e.g., the RLC's, Centers of Distinction, the Community Law Center, etc.). A 1998 study² showed the general diffusion of "justice" as an academic interest and as an integrating pedagogical principle among faculty and staff. Over 80% of the responding faculty supported setting educational goals for students related to justice. More than half of the faculty strongly supported the goals of developing values as part of an integrated education at SCU. Thus it seems that the need among our students is met by a desire on the part of our faculty to educate for justice and thereby to develop ethical praxis.

The Jesuit approach to teaching ethics can be defined in many ways. Here I would propose a threefold definition: right relationship, right reason, and right action.

Right Relationship

The Judeo-Christian insight into the absolute worth and dignity of every human person, created *in imago Dei*, founds an Ignatian commitment to ethics and justice. As image and likeness of God, each person enjoys inalienable rights and merits respect as a whole person. Yet to be a human person is not merely to be a biological organism; it is also, necessarily, to be a person in relation to other persons, i.e., a member of a family, a community, a culture, and of the whole human race, at a given moment and place in the flow of history. The Catholic intellectual tradition sees human interconnectedness as a reality that encompasses rather than destroys – is attentive to rather than disregards – cultural differences. The pursuit of the good of each and the good of all must therefore proceed within the complexity of humanity, seeking unity in diversity. The understanding of the human being as a "person in relation" is and ought to be a central consideration in a Santa Clara education that asks, "How ought human relationships to be structured justly?" A Santa Clara education must afford our students an abundance of opportunities and methodologies to come to a nuanced understanding of the wonderful and abiding mysteries that are self, others and God.

Right Reason

To understand "how" the world works, and to master multiple skills of investigation into reality, are necessary but insufficient goals of a Santa Clara education. Our students must also be given many complementary ways of understanding "why" the world is the way it is. In what direction are the current great social, political, economic and technical forces moving? In what ways can rigorous, scientific investigation take on the most intractable challenges to human flourishing? Intellectual acuity and moral imagination, developed during their undergraduate and graduate programs of study at SCU, drive our alumni/ae to seek to understand the interconnectedness of

² The Integration of Justice into the Life of the University: Justice as an academic subject, as a research interest, and as a communal practice at Santa Clara University. Prepared by: Marilyn Fernandez, Paul Fitzgerald, & Hersh Shefrin. <http://www.scu.edu/bannancenter/eventsandconferences/justiceconference/westernconference/selfassessment.cfm>.

reality and to ask not only, “is this the true?” but also “is this a just?” and especially, “can we do better?”

Right Action

As they assume roles of responsibility and leadership in the public and private sectors, our graduates will need to have developed habits of ethical judgment. Building upon philosophical and theological ethical investigations, students should be further exposed to rigorous, applied ethics courses that examine truly ambiguous and vexingly difficult situations, employing the highest ethical standards of their chosen disciplines. In addition to explicit courses in ethics, we should weave this search for truth, mercy and courage throughout the social fabric of the university, for justice is not a discrete task but rather a quality of all that we do. Because we teach by example as much as by word, we can only hope to impart a habit of right conduct if and to the extent that we pursue and practice these ideals here on campus. Therefore, we must be a self-reflective community that seeks always to see our own deficiencies and continually to reform ourselves in order better to do what we ought, i.e., the good that God gives us to do.

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius are designed to afford the retreatant an occasion to consider her past efforts to live a life of integrity so as better to appreciate her present situation, in order, finally, to discern and choose the best path forward towards ever greater integrity. In this spiritual worldview, integrity can be defined quite simply as that state of soul wherein what I feel in my heart corresponds with what I think in my mind, what I say with my lips and what I build with my hands. If ethics is indeed “no small matter but how we ought to live,” and if Santa Clara is dedicated to developing the ethical imagination of our students, then the lived integrity of our alumni will be the measure of our efforts. We must, therefore, judge all our present efforts at developing this sense of ethics, measure their efficacy by studying the outcomes, abandon or change that which does not work, and never cease to innovate new programs and new methodologies to fulfill this essential aspect of our mission.

Reflectors

June Carbone, David DeCosse; Dennis Moberg, Mike Meyer, Larry Nelson