

The Educational Challenges of *Agape* and *Phronesis*

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Children as learners need adults who love them, even when the children are unable to give anything in return. Furthermore, adults should be able to make wise judgements concerning what is good for the children. The clarification of these principles and of their educational import has to start within our own cultural tradition. Agape (unconditional love, neighbour-love or charity) is a basic concept in the Christian tradition. Phronesis (moral wisdom, practical judgement or prudence) has a key position in the Aristotelian tradition. In his Summa Theologiae Thomas Aquinas has combined these traditions and ethical concepts, with agape (in Latin caritas) as the commanding concept. The article will explore some key challenges and productive resources revealed by this combination for today's education and upbringing.

OVERTURE ON IDEALS

You pass by a little child, you pass by, spiteful, with ugly words, with wrathful heart; you may not have noticed the child, but he has seen you, and your image, unseemly and ignoble, may remain in his defenceless heart. You don't know it, but you may have sown an evil seed in him and it may grow, and all because you were not careful before the child, because you did not foster in yourself a careful, actively benevolent love. Brothers, love is a teacher; but one must know how to acquire it, for it is hard to acquire, it is dearly bought, it is won slowly by long labour (Dostoevsky, 2000, VI 3 g, p. 298).

Children are the new generation that the old generation depend on. Children are vulnerable, and it is therefore necessary to reflect on the examples we give them, seeking continually for better examples. But what is 'better'? According to Socrates, in the dialogue *Gorgias* (Plato, 1967), the most important lesson for human beings to learn is how we ought to live. What form of life do we want to pass on to children, and is this form of life really good for the children? (Mollenhauer, 1983).

Doret J. de Ruyter maintains that children ‘should be offered moral ideals’—‘imagined excellences that are so desirable that people will try to actualise them’ (De Ruyter, 2003, p. 476 and 474). Frieda Heyting (2004) contends that ‘ideals’ should not be confused with realisable goals and thinks that we should concentrate on ‘situationally embedded choices and compromises’ instead of on ideals (Heyting, 2004, p. 244). However, she agrees with de Ruyter in understanding ideals as ‘excellences with an existential import to personal life’ (p. 246).

Ideals are like stars that help us to navigate in life. But neither de Ruyter nor Heyting formulates a vision of the substantive moral ideals that might inform the examples we present to children. Heyting maintains that educators should not pay much attention to promoting substantive ideals. We should instead encourage the children to create or ‘invent’ their own personal ideals (pp. 246–247). She admits that we cannot avoid showing them ‘our commitment’ (p. 247), but seems to ignore the possible positive significance of adult examples when children form their personal ideals.

Daniel Vokey outlines interesting principles for virtue-centred schools within all kinds of spiritual traditions ‘holding a vision of human perfectibility’ (Vokey, 2003, p. 272). I agree with Vokey that teachers first of all should cultivate ‘in their own lives the intellectual and moral virtues that are an integral part of realising the overriding human good’ (p. 273). This challenge I address to all adults who are close to children, all those who are educators in the basic sense of being responsible for presenting a form of life to the next generation—parents, teachers, football trainers, media workers, leaders, etc.

Children learn to be trustworthy, fair, honest, patient, generous, playful, inventive, humble, gentle, courageous, humorous . . . first of all by the examples they are given. No adults are perfect. In order to improve as persons, we need leading stars. A main challenge is to ‘confront and respond to vulnerability and disability’ in a rational way (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 5). It is hardly contestable that children need adults who love them, even when they are unable to give anything in return. If it is true that *agape* (unconditional love) encompasses and transcends other virtues and ideals, it may give us the highest guiding principle. And if *phronesis* (practical judgement) makes us more able to perceive the connection between the general aims and the ‘individual facts’ (NE 1146a9)¹ in the situation, it helps us to activate the relevant virtues appropriately, and to command an action that follows right reason. Said in a simple way: *Agape* guides, *phronesis* enlightens (Comte-Sponville, 2003, p. 36).

Aristotelian guiding principles include greatness of soul (*megalopsychia*),² justice and friendship as well as *phronesis*. The *megalopsychos* is ‘great in each virtue’. In justice ‘all virtue is together in one’. And friendship in the primary sense is a relation between morally good persons, ‘insofar as they are good’. (NE 1123b30, 1129b30 and 1157a31, Sachs) It seems to me, however, that all these virtues need *phronesis* for their realisation, and that none of them aspires to *agape*. *Phronesis* has received much attention within philosophy of education after Joseph Dunne’s *Back to the Rough Ground* (1993). It is mentioned as a promising

concept for 'education in character and virtue' by McLaughlin and Halstead (1999). Wilfred Carr contends that the philosophy of education as a whole has something to learn from the concept *phronesis* and the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy (Carr, 2004, p. 70). *Agape* is a basic Christian concept—formed within the biblical tradition. The combination of *phronesis* with *agape* is unusual in educational texts. There are, however, good reasons for making an attempt to combine these concepts in education. Both are oriented towards action in unique situations, and may be understood as active conditions for action. Both concepts are based in traditions and personal relations, and help parents and other educators to resist the exaggerated individualism and commercial pressures in Western culture. *Agape* is a 'rational kind of love' (Spicq, 1994, p. 11), and *phronesis* a moral kind of reasoning. The concepts are rooted in different traditions—Christian and Classical—yet they may complement and strengthen each other. *Agape* can help a *phronimos* (a practically wise person) to be altruistic, and *phronesis* can help those doing works of *agape* to be realistic.

In the following paragraphs I attempt to clarify these concepts in the context of a broad understanding of education as 'upbringing' (in Norwegian: *oppdragelse*; in German: *Erziehung*), including all kinds of informal relations between adults and children. I study the origin and possible similarities of the concepts *agape* and *phronesis*, their basis in different views on human beings and give an account of how Thomas Aquinas combines them in his work *Summa Theologiae*. I explore a combination of ideals from biblical tradition and Aristotelian philosophy, and advance a substantive position that seeks to explicate the educational import of this combination. From Hans-Georg Gadamer I have learned that we invariably have prejudices that may orient us in enabling ways as well as ones that dispose us in constricting ways, and also that one's own substantive position is 'properly brought into play through its being at risk' (Gadamer, 1979, p. 266). Alasdair MacIntyre argues in a similar way for 'a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition' (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 7), where it is necessary to understand the tradition from within in order to transcend it. He conducted his enquiry into justice and rationality as an 'Augustinian Christian' (p. 10), and his later discussion of human virtues as a 'Thomistic Aristotelian' (MacIntyre, 1999, p. xi). For my own part I have read Thomas Aquinas as a Lutheran Christian. My aim however is to argue that Thomistic philosophy provides rich resources for the philosophy of education in an age of increasing moral uncertainty, or hesitancy; more particularly, that his discussions of *agape* and *phronesis* can disclose visionary aspirations worthy of the practical efforts of all educators.

THE ORIGINS OF AGAPE AND PHRONESIS

The verb *agapan* 'makes its first appearance in Homer, and *agapesis* is used in the classical period, but the noun *agape* is unknown before its

usage in the LXX³ (Spicq, 1994, p. 14). *Agapan*, *agapesis* and *agape* are translations of Hebrew words with the root 'ahab (Hatch and Redpath, 1998, pp. 5–7), which implies establishment of strong ties to someone or something. Such ties are typically established to the Lord (Jeremiah 2:2), but may also be to idols and wrongdoings (Hosea 9:1 and 12:8).

Aristotle lived around the middle of the fourth century before Christ, before both the Septuagint and the New Testament. MacIntyre contends that 'The New Testament . . . praises virtues of which Aristotle knows nothing—faith, hope and love—and says nothing about virtues such as *phronesis* which are crucial for Aristotle' (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 182). This certainly has some truth in it, but there is more to be said. Aristotle sometimes uses the verb *agapan* as a synonym to *philein* (to love or regard with affection), for instance when he describes persons who do favours for others. Such 'benefactors love [*philein*] and like [*agapan*] their beneficiaries even if they are of no present or future use to them' (NE 1167b32, Irwin). But Aristotle does not use the substantive *agape*. Plato, Aristotle's teacher, has described the god Eros in terms that Simone Weil has interpreted as a search for Christ. Eros moves others by attraction, not by force. Even if Eros suffers, he does not submit to force. Eros is identified with the 'juste parfait', the perfectly just who always desires the reality of the good, not the appearance of it. In our world such a person may be tested, tortured and killed (Plato, *Republic*, 361b–362a). Weil concludes: 'At last, in connection with this, of course, think principally that this Love, who is God, and who nevertheless suffers, but not by force, this Love is the Christ' (Weil, 1951, p. 56, my trans.).⁴ If this concept of *eros* is close to the Christian understanding of *agape*, Aristotle has known it. But perhaps he ignored it? Or is there a connection between Eros and Aristotle's 'final cause' (*Metaphysics*, 12.1072b), which moves all by 'being an object of love'?

The writers of the Septuagint and of the New Testament may have known the Aristotelian tradition. But unlike Aristotle, they treated *sophia* (wisdom) and *phronesis* as synonyms.⁵ Aristotle accentuates the difference between these concepts in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI. *Phronesis* is here presented as an active condition for inexact practical wisdom, enabling a person in changing circumstances to see and calculate and do what is good for oneself and conducive to the good life in general. This moral wisdom is supported by *techne*, the active condition for attaining specialised 'know-how'. *Sophia* is presented as an active condition for exact theoretical wisdom about the universal and the eternal, a wisdom that is irrelevant in ordinary life, but important as religious contemplation of the perfect and unchanging—the divine. This wisdom is supported by *episteme*, the active condition for attaining specialised scientific knowledge. The difference between the biblical and the NE VI understanding of *phronesis* and *sophia* might have its root in different attitudes to change. In classical Greek thought, change was seen as threatening. For the biblical writers change was also something good. As William J. Bouwsma points out, the 'great classical histories sought to reveal the changeless principles governing all change, while the biblical

histories were concerned with change itself as God's work' (Bouwsma, 1976, pp. 82–83).

Pierre Aubenque (1986, pp. 51, 63, 170) maintains that the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, in opposition to Plato's idealistic philosophical concept, was founded on a broad and popular Greek tradition. It is not the abstract ideas of the philosophical elite, but the examples of 'good persons' we know, persons we admire, which give content to the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*. 'Regarding practical wisdom we shall get at the truth by considering who are the persons we credit with it' (NE VI.5 1140a 25). We may also learn by taking the defects of others as a warning. An example is King Creon in Sophocles's *Antigone*. King Creon believes that he has absolutely correct knowledge (*episteme*) of the good. Therefore, he refuses to listen to others, to deliberate on alternatives or to seek compromise. A precise *episteme* is knowledge about something eternal, and therefore abstract from particular situations. If we base human action in a particular situation on apparently correct but in practice insufficient knowledge, the consequences may be fatal. Haimon, the son of the king, contends that it is better to try to balance against each other 'les discours vraisemblables', the different tenable propositions containing some relative truths, and then choose the least evil action, being fully aware of the uncertainty and risk in the situation (Aubenque, 1986, pp. 163–164). Creon is, however, certain of his rightness. The consequence is that most of his family dies. The play ends with these words: 'The great words of arrogant men have to make repayment with great blows, and in old age teach wisdom [*to phronein*]' (Sophocles, 1344–1347). This popular understanding of *phronesis* is a source for the Aristotelian concept. It challenges us to search for insight in our own limitations and to be open to the views of others. (Aubenque, 1986, pp. 162–163)

Aristotelian *phronesis* seems to be similar to the biblical understanding of *sophia*. Biblical wisdom is practically oriented. It can 'designate a broad approach to life practiced by wise people'; it is founded in experience and passed on by oral tradition—by Jesus in proverbial sayings, aphorisms and parables (Melchert, 1998, pp. 4, 5, 9–10, 186, 244–251). The biblical sage had a commitment to God unlike the Aristotelian, but the sage did not deliver a prophetic message from God. He or she 'appealed to the communal tradition of the people and their families' (p. 59). The female personification of *Sophia* in Proverbs 8:12 says: 'I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions'. The writer of Ecclesiastes questions the tradition and challenges the reader to do the same, using observation to discover 'the events that occur under the sun' (Ecclesiastes 8:16–17; Melchert, 1998, pp. 118, 121, 137).

DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF HUMAN BEINGS

We have seen that there are similarities in moral wisdom between biblical and Aristotelian traditions. But these traditions have very different

conceptions of what a human being is. The differences are connected to contrasting religious convictions. In Aristotelian tradition, God—the Prime Mover—is distant from human affairs (Aubenque, 1986, p. 81, 72). Things that are not eternal are not governed by God's providence. Therefore, human prudence (*phronesis*) is necessary as a substitute (p. 95). The most divine are the things that cannot be otherwise than they are, for example the repeated circular movements of the stars (p. 67, note 3). The constituent parts of the universe are 'of a far more divine nature than human beings' (NE 1141b1, Irwin). The ancient Greek society ranked male citizens highest, because they had most *scholē*, freedom from the manual work that could be used to contemplate eternal truths. Women, children and slaves did not have the same access to theoretical activity.

According to biblical tradition, human beings are created in the image of God; closer to God than the other creatures. Humans are created with special abilities and tasks. Adam talks with God, and gives names to all the animals (Genesis 2). With language, he is able to see all things in connection and make judgements concerning what ought to be done. In this tradition human beings are destined to be God's stewards—responsible towards God both in theoretical and practical affairs. God is understood as both transcendent (above all understanding) and immanent (as close as a father or mother or shepherd). God is actively intervening in human history. This intervention is the main theme of the New Testament writers who see Jesus as Christ (Messiah)—the clearest image that humans can have of God. According to John and Paul, Jesus embodies God's love, *agape*, a love that 'seeketh not her own' (1 Cor. 13:5). The most provoking interpretation of *agape* is to exemplify it with the story about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The first letter of John states: 'By this we know love [*agape*], that he laid down his life for us' (1 John 3:16, Revised Standard Version). Paul encourages the Philippians to 'be likeminded [*phronein*] having the same love [*agape*]' (Phil. 2:2), and describes the sentiments of Jesus as the model:

Have this mind [*phronein*] among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5–11, RSV).

Eternal power and glory through secular weakness, dishonour, suffering and death—the preaching of the cross' was and is 'foolishness' to wise and intelligent persons (1 Cor. 1:18–19). In Aristotelian virtue tradition, it is important for the person to become strong or virile (*virtus* in Latin is related to *vir*—a male person, and this corresponds to the Greek *arete* and

aner). Aristotelian happiness is to realise manly moral and intellectual virtues.

In the Christian tradition, however, human resources have secondary significance. The main task is not to become strong, but to serve. The Christian standard for adults is to be like Christ, the new Adam (1 Cor. 15, 22). His example sets a standard which no one achieves in this life. This relativises the difference both between children and adults, between adults of high and low standing and between different human faculties. The 'child lives on in the man, so that child and man are somehow identical', 'the last shall be first' and the intellectual faculties are not better than the bodily (Bouwsma, 1976, p. 81). Biblical Christianity (which may be unlike many historical versions dominated by classical Greek tradition) does not focus on the climbing towards perfection and mastery, but on being in a good relation with the only perfect example, Christ, like branches in the vine (John 15:5). The greatest human being is not the wise and virtuous man, but the dependent and trusting child—the little child who is open to receive the love of its parents. 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 18:1–5). This is not a recommendation of 'childishness' understood as an incoherent following of impulses. The adult is challenged to become like children who have 'fearless interest in . . . experience' and 'confident trust in life', and who ask 'simple but profound questions' (Bouwsma, 1976, p. 87).

UNCOVERING THE HEART OF THE RELATION BETWEEN AGAPE AND PHRONESIS

The differences between biblical and Aristotelian tradition seem to be insurmountable, and the attempt to combine central concepts within the traditions therefore needs careful deliberations. As far as I know, it is Thomas Aquinas who around 1270 undertakes the first explicit discussion of the relation between the concepts *agape* and *phronesis*.

Summa Theologiae is a big work, but its basic idea is as simple as the flow and the ebb of the tide: All creatures come from God and should return to God (Aertsen, 1993, p. 16 and 31). It has three main parts. The first is about God and the creation. The second describes the movement back to God through morality and virtues. And the third (unfinished) part is about Christ as the way to God (I 2 Pr.).⁶ This sounds very theological, and it is indeed a *summa theologiae*. The audience he addressed comprised members of the Dominican order, Christians devoted to the service of God who should learn to preach and teach and give moral guidance (Boyle, 2002, p. 1; MacIntyre, 1998, p. 105). So, can this be relevant to all—agnostics and atheists included? Today we are used to drawing a sharp line between theology and philosophy. Thomas challenges this division (MacIntyre, 1998, p. 98). Theology and philosophy ask different questions, but one question is common to both of them. Both are concerned about how we ought to live. In 'questions about human nature

and the ends of human life . . . there is a single truth to be discovered and asserted', but this truth has to be 'made intelligible in terms of an account of human powers, reasoning, will and choice and of the relationship of human beings to their ultimate good' (pp. 98–99).

Thomas studied Aristotelian and Platonian traditions, but he studied even more the Bible and the Church Fathers. His hermeneutics are directed towards clarification of the true meaning of what he is reading. He approaches a text with his own preconceptions, and is open to be corrected by the text (Aertsen, 1993, p. 17; Pinckaers, 2002, p. 27). According to MacIntyre his achievement was 'an integration of Aristotelianism into Christianity' complementing and correcting Aristotle on important points (MacIntyre, 1998, p. 99 and 102). An example is his understanding of 'virtue' and discussion of the concepts *agape* and *phronesis* (Jordan, 1993, p. 236–241). His main questions are: what characterises the good life, and what is conducive to the good life?

By definition the good life is something attractive. For Aristotle this is a life where we realise our natural abilities. The good life requires co-operation between our ability to strive for the attainment of the good, and our reasoning ability to judge what is good—a judgement that is improved through the use of memory, experience and our language abilities. When our desire and our thinking co-operate in the best way, we have moral excellence or virtue. Here the thinking is neither opposed to our bodily desires (as in Platonian and Kantian traditions), nor is the thinking an instrument for our desires (as in Utilitarian traditions and Dewey). Virtue demands a well-balanced co-operation between desire and thinking: 'every virtue causes its possessors to be in a good state [*hexis*] and to perform their functions well' (NE 1106a16, Irwin). This is the situation when human beings are in balance. We feel and do neither too much nor too little (according to individual inclinations). Thereby we are able to attend to the unique nuances of each situation, and to follow the reason that persons with *phronesis*, persons we admire, give or would have given (NE 1107a1). *Phronesis* (in Latin *prudentia*) directs our actions towards 'the common end of all human life' (II-II 47,2 ad 1, Benziger Bros.)—the good both for ourselves and our community. It is defined as *recta ratio agibilium*—'right reason in actions to be done' (II-II 55,3 co.). It is an intellectual virtue, which presupposes moral virtue. Stated more strongly, 'It is at once a virtue of mind and a virtue of character' (Gilby, 1974, p. xiv, with reference to I-II 57,4 and 65,1 and 66,3 and 4). *Phronesis* binds all the virtues together. Joseph Dunne contends that *phronesis* 'is not just one virtue among others but is rather a necessary ingredient in all the others' (Dunne, 1999, p. 49). This integrative function of *phronesis* is important. Without it we run the risk of acting inconsistently (Jordan, 1993, p. 240) and thus give children a confusing example. *Phronesis* 'is "seeing" in the here and now where the noble (*kalon*)⁷ actually lies and so also where the mean [between excess and deficiency] lies, whether this be the mean in one's own affairs, one's family's, or the city's' (Simpson, 1997). It is a key virtue to happiness for the individual, and for the life together with children and others in the community to which one belongs.

So far Thomas follows Aristotle, but he also searches for reasons why humans seek a happiness that transcends the relative happiness that a life led by *phronesis* and the moral virtues can give us. We have all a 'natural desire for survival', and 'whereas the senses are aware only of here-and-now existence, minds grasp existence as such . . . and as a result . . . desire to live for ever' (Aquinas, 1989, pp. 110–111). Human beings strive towards the divine. This was the teaching of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Even Aristotle seems to think that complete happiness would be to live a contemplative life like the gods. We 'must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal' (NE 1177b35).

Thomas transforms this thinking within a Christian context. He sees God as the ultimate end of human beings and all other things. Rational creatures attain the ultimate end 'in knowing and loving God' (I-II 1,8 co.). This is not achieved through our natural resources. 'The partial happiness we can hold in this life a man can secure for himself', but 'neither man nor any creature can attain final happiness through their natural resources' (I-II 5,5 co.). This view, challenging the view that human reason is the only standard for judging human action, may be understood through an analogy: The movement of the ocean is influenced by the properties of water and wind, but also by the position of the oceans under the moon; human action, similarly, is influenced by our own capacities and surroundings, but also by our position in the universe under God (Aquinas, 1989, pp. 326, 331). God does not force us. 'God moves all things according to the mode proper to each'. And the human being is by nature 'a being of free choice' (I-II 113,3 co.). We have a free will. However, some options are closed. By the exercise of our free choice we have lost 'the original subjection of will to God' (Aquinas, 1989, p. 266), and thereby we have lost 'freedom from guilt and unhappiness' (p. 129). That is our situation as human beings.

Thomas Aquinas locates *agape* (*caritas*) in our will together with the other moral virtues. But while reason is the rule for the ordinary virtues, *caritas* 'goes beyond reason' (II-II 24,1 ad 2), it 'is beyond the resource of nature' (II-II 24,2 co.). We naturally tend to love the good things we see. In order to love God above all things, it is necessary that *caritas* is 'infused into our hearts' (II-II 24,2 ad 2). If this happens, all the virtues are guided by unconditional love. Even practical judgement (*phronesis*) is seen as 'caused by an activity of God within us' (Aquinas, 1989, p. 241).

This understanding of the concepts *agape* and *phronesis* is based on the worldview of a Christian tradition where God is the centre of the universe and of all that happens in it. The basic criterion for judgement of any action is here: does it unite me with God or not? All other criteria come in addition. Unconditional love 'directs the acts of all the other virtues to our final end' (II-II 23,8 co.)—it 'supports and nourishes all the other virtues' (II-II 23,8 ad 2) and 'is called the mother of the other virtues, because, by commanding them, it conceives the acts of the other virtues, by the desire of the last end' (II-II 23,8 ad 3, Benziger Bros.). A person filled with unconditional love 'habitually directs his whole heart to God, so that he neither thinks nor wills anything contrary to and incompatible with divine

love' (II-II 24,8 co.). Directed towards the final end, ultimate happiness—all the moral virtues integrated by *phronesis* on a lower level, are further integrated by *agape* into a consistent, ordered unity. Here unconditional love is seen as the main condition for a good life. What distinguishes this love from the Aristotelian understanding of love?

Aristotle differentiates between a love of desire and a love of friendship. With the love of desire we love 'good things so willed to ourselves'. With the love of friendship 'we love those we will good things to' (Aquinas, 1989, p. 349). Friendship is not a virtue when it is sought primarily for pleasure or profit. Friendship is only a virtue when it is based on the virtue and worth of the friends. Such friendship Thomas calls *amicitia honesti*, 'a friendship of true worth' (II-II 23,1 arg. 3). Friends have a mutual appreciation of each other and are good-willed towards each other—they love the 'loveable' (*to phileton*) (NE 1155b18-39) in the other person: 'it is only with a friend that a friend is friendly'—*amicus est amico amicus* (II-II 23,1 co.). Friendship is a preferential and reciprocal love.

Unconditional love, however, on the understanding embraced by Christian tradition and articulated by Aquinas, 'is not based principally on human virtue, but on the divine goodness' (II-II 23,3 ad 1). God also loves those who are not 'loveable'. This general and unconditional love is clearly distinct from the Aristotelian understanding of friendship. But then, is *agape* (*caritas*) a kind of friendship? Here Thomas Aquinas expands the concept of friendship to 'anyone connected with' the friend: 'when a man has friendship for a certain person, for his sake he loves all belonging to him, be they children, servants, or connected with him in any way' (II-II 23,3 ad 2, Benziger Bros.). This is an important move. Thereby *amicitia caritatis*, defined as friendship with God, extends both to 'enemies' and 'sinners' (II-II 23,1 ad 2 and 3), whom we ordinarily would not choose as our friends, but who are loved by God. 'God is the principal object of charity [*agape*], while our neighbor is loved out of charity for God's sake' (II-II 23,5 ad 1, Benziger Bros.). If you love God, you should also love yourself, love your own body, and love those who live close to you—even the troublesome ones—with the same love as God has for all (II-II 25, 4–6 and 8). When this love is active, it 'rules out every motive for sinning' (II-II 24, 11 ad 4). *Agape*, on this Thomistic account, is not primarily a feeling, but something we do and are prepared for doing. It is to include all, also enemies, in prayers; 'being ready in our minds, for instance to come to their assistance in a case of urgency' (II-II 25,9 co., Benziger Bros.). We cannot help all, but we should be ready to do well to anyone 'if the occasion arises' (II-II 31,2 ad 1). The main criterion is that someone close to us really needs our help. This may have many unexpected but beneficial consequences. According to Thomas, the fruits of *agape* are inner and outer harmony—joy, peace, compassion, kindness, caring for others and education of others. Peace is twofold (II-II 29,3 co.): Internal harmony (integrity) is 'a bringing of all one's own desires to an ordered unity'. External harmony is similar, 'for loving our neighbour as ourselves makes us want to do his will even as our own.' *Agape* manifests itself outwardly in compassion and kindness. Kindness is to do good

things to others, being beneficent and hospitable (II-II 31). Compassion is especially called for when misfortune afflicts someone 'who has not deserved it', but also when a fault (deserving punishment) brings with it bad unforeseen consequences (II-II 30,1). Then we should regard the distress of the other 'as our own' (II-II 30,2 co.). The Latin word *misericordia* comes from 'one's heart being miserable (*miserum cor*)' (II-II 30,1 co.). Giving alms is an act of compassion. We feel miserable too, when others lack what they need. 'Almsgiving' was a wider concept earlier than it is today. There is a language connection between 'alms' and the Greek word *eleos*. *Eleos* means compassion or mercy (in German: *Barmherzigkeit*). It was *eleos* that the Good Samaritan practised when he helped the man who had been robbed (Luke 10:37). Bodily needs are met by 'feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, giving hospitality to strangers, visiting the sick, ransoming prisoners, and burying the dead'. Spiritual needs are met by 'instructing the ignorant, giving advice to those in doubt, consoling the sorrowful, reproving sinners, forgiving offences, putting up with people who are burdensome and hard to get on with, and finally praying for all' (II-II 32,2 arg. 1). Many of these actions are of crucial importance in any education that is adequately conceived. Adults guided by *agape* are attentive to children as persons. They participate in the joys and sorrows of children, and see their bodily and spiritual needs as a whole. Formal education is just a part of this, and is not sufficient for attaining happiness. In Western societies many youths start binge drinking. Without compassion and patience, adults will probably not be able to help them, however excellently they give them instructions. In other societies where AIDS kills parents, many children lack both elementary parental protection and possibilities for learning to read and write. Adults guided by *agape* cannot close their eyes and hearts and just let this information pass by.

But in all the works of *agape*, the *Summa Theologiae* maintains, we have to consider carefully our way of doing them. A 'virtuous act needs to be moderated by due circumstances' (II-II 33,4 co., Benziger Bros.). In deciding who we should help, different degrees of need of help and closeness to us have to be considered. There is no general rule that applies here, so this requires *phronesis*, 'the judgement of a prudent man' (II-II 31,3 ad 1) involving deliberation. *Agape* demands that we help those who have the greatest needs, if those who are closest to us already have what they need (II-II 31,3). If our own children get a fairly good informal and formal education, it is those who are almost without any upbringing that most need our help. *Phronesis* demands that we see the realities in the situation. Our aim must be good and our judgement of the occasion and the circumstances must be correct. *Agape* guides and *phronesis* enlightens (Comte-Sponville, 2003, p. 36). Though *phronesis* here has a secondary position, it is nevertheless very important. *Phronesis* and the moral virtues are adequate for rational judgement of unique situations and spontaneous action in them. Thomas Aquinas says: 'in so far as they [the moral virtues] produce good deeds that are directed to an end which does not surpass the natural resources of man, and as acquired thus, they can be without charity

[*caritas*], even as they were in many of the pagans' (I-II 65,2 co.). According to Thomas it is for the attaining of friendship with God and ultimate happiness that we need *agape*.

So much for an elucidation of *agape* in the light of Thomistic philosophy. But can *agape*, thus elucidated, provide meaningful goals and challenges for those educators who do not accept the *telos* of 'knowing and loving God'?

CHALLENGES FOR ALL EDUCATORS

The resources of Christian tradition—specifically *agape*—have found resonance in persons who are not adherents of this tradition, but who see real moral challenges in *agape*. Comte-Sponville (2003, pp. 283–286), for instance, develops 'a nonreligious reading' of the metaphor of the seed which has to die if it shall bear fruit (John 12:24). In other words, my egoistic self has to die if I am to be free from the tyranny of my egoism and injustice. *Agape* is 'a love that is freed of the ego and that frees us from it'. It is 'a universal love, without preference or choice, a dilection without predilection, a love without limits and even devoid of egoistical or affective justifications' (Comte-Sponville, 2003, p. 284 and 286). This seems an admirable aim for educators—adults who have a role in upbringing. The problem, of course, is that having the highest ideals is not the same as living by them. Comte-Sponville's intention is 'to try to understand what we should do, what we should be, and how we should live, and thereby gauge, at least intellectually, the distance that separates us from these ideals' (p. 1). However, when we become more aware of the gulf between our ideals and our doing, we risk being even less able to live a good life.

Here the neglected *educational* potential of some imaginative artworks, especially in literature and drama, may be crucial. In Henrik Ibsen's play *The Wild Duck*, it is the child, Hedvig, who represents *agape*, a love which 'covers a multitude of sins' (1. Peter, 4:8). When her father, a sentimental egoist, comes to know some cold truths about his own life, he rejects Hedvig's love and contributes to the destruction of his family. 'Rob the average man of his life-illusion, and you rob him of his happiness at the same stroke' (Ibsen, 1999, 5th act). The play exemplifies that 'situationally embedded choices and compromises' (Heyting, 2004, p. 244) may have better consequences than enlightenment based on abstract ideals. Intellectual discussions of how we ought to live might thus be confronted with life experiences—our own and those of others. Moral insights in plays like *Antigone* and *The Wild Duck* might be experienced not just intellectually or analytically. More importantly, they might be experienced as imaginative enactments of human predicaments and possibilities, engage hearts and minds holistically, kindle good emotions and strengthen the will to live a better life.

There are intimations here of how we might approach Comte-Sponville's ideal. Is it possible by such means to free ourselves from

our egoism and injustice? If Thomas is right, we have a disordered disposition that also affects our will (II-II 82 and 83). A strengthening of our will to practice universal love devoid of egoistical justifications may therefore paradoxically reinforce our egoism. The egoism may instead become more hidden. Thomas maintains the Christian view that human beings cannot become perfect by their own effort. *Agape* is possible only as a gift from God, accessible to all by following Jesus Christ. Thus it seems that *agape* is only for Christians. However, Jesus challenged individuals and accepted individuals irrespective of their belonging to existing groups. The story about *The Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:25–37) contains a critique of religious people and does not focus on the religion or conviction of its hero. The Levite and the priest belonged to the religious elite of Israel. The Samaritans knew the Biblical tradition, but the audience listening to Jesus viewed them as outcasts. Jesus neither comments on the religion of the Samaritan nor on how he had acquired his good personal qualities. It is his compassion and good action that matter! The moral of the story is a challenge to each listener (and reader): ‘Go and do thou likewise’ (Luke 10:37). In this story it is not difficult to see who is doing the works of *agape*. This challenges all people, irrespective of what groups they belong to. If an atheist or a Hindu does works of *agape*, we should follow their example as well. Lonely striving under an abstract and cold ideal may then be replaced by relationship with good persons. Studying their examples of *agape*, we may be ‘warmed’ to do things that are even better than the works of *phronesis*, although we continue to be egoistic in our general disposition.

The focus here on personal relationship and actions does not imply that convictions are irrelevant. By getting to know persons who do good things, we become interested also in the convictions that motivate their actions, the sources which inspire them and give them courage to risk and endure even what may be harmful to themselves. In the Christian tradition there are several examples on how the vision of another world has motivated educators to try and make this world ‘a place where it is easier to love’ (Freire, 1972, p. 19; Comenius, 1901, chapter LIII).

What characterises educators who are guided by *agape*? What will be their attitudes, outlooks and practices? As we have seen, Thomas understands *agape* as ‘friendship with God’. The importance of the concept may be clarified by an analogy: Some ‘people who were once in the cold, freezing to death, . . . have been transferred into a warm room’. It takes time to become completely warm, and damage from the freezing condition may persist, but a ‘decisive event has occurred’ (Thiselton, 2000, p. 99). Friendship with God means that the ordinary ‘living together’ is supplied with a new dimension. Thomas describes it as a life with two sides. ‘One is outward according to the world of body and senses . . . The other is inward, according to the life of mind and spirit; it is here that we have intercourse [*conversatio*] with God and the angels, though imperfectly in our present state’ (II-II 23,1 ad 1). Being warm in the ‘inner room’ ordinary people may receive energy and strength to do well in the cold ‘outside’. Adults who are always in ‘the cold’ will easily be too

occupied with their own needs and problems. If they have strong passions without order, their life may be a restless striving for mastery and popularity involving actions that are harmful both to themselves and to the children who are close to them. If they practice strict order without vitality, their life may be outwardly moral, but with bitter undertones of resentment (Nouwen, 1992), restricting and intimidating the children. Adults who receive the blessings of the 'warm room' may still have problems, but the internal harmony may reduce their stress and fears and gradually transform them as persons. Thus they become more free to learn from the children's example of trust, confidence and exploration, free to take part in their play and joy, free from rivalry and competition, free from the fear of not mastering the situation or not being good enough, free to pass on freely the gifts they have received themselves, free from the need of being thanked, free to act without security net. Loving persons want to do the will of the other as if it was his or her own will (II-II 29,3 co.). *Agape* opens one up for creativity and inventiveness in doing well towards the other, and it transcends the calculation of benefits and disadvantages that is basic to *phronesis*. Where one's own good is concerned, *agape* 'will foster a riskier strategy ... than a stipulation about proportionate convenience mandates' (Outka, 1992, p. 19).

Usually education is seen as a process of production where one tries to calculate the outcome. Education guided by *agape* may transcend this model and open for an understanding of education as a free encounter, a venture. In his book *Existenzphilosophie und Pädagogik*, Otto Friedrich Bollnow does not explicitly discuss the relation between *phronesis* and *agape*, but he argues for an understanding of education that implies a combination of calculation and non-calculation. Certain aspects of education can be understood as steady processes of instruction and growth, which may be calculated—as can other mechanic and organic processes. Basically, however, education is neither building nor growth, but 'Wagnis' (venture), and the outcomes cannot and should not be calculated. The models of education as organic and mechanic processes 'mistake already in their premises the real core of education, because in education a free being is approaching another free being in a challenging way' (Bollnow, 1984, p. 133, 134, my trans.).⁸

Bollnow gives three illuminating examples of education as a non-calculative venture—the venture of authority, of trust and of openness. If you give a command when you do not have any external power to force the other, you put your personal authority at risk and appeal to freely chosen obedience. If you are a real authority, the command will be founded on sound judgement, and lack of obedience will imply a failure both in the education of the child and in the relation between you and the child (Bollnow, 1984, p. 142). Trust is fundamental in a relationship. If someone trusts us and has faith in us, we become better human beings (p. 143). An educator trusting a child who has failed and will try again, needs 'sein ganzes skeptisch-realistisches Wissen' (p. 146), in other words, you need *phronesis*. When you decide to trust the child in spite of sound scepticism, you have to risk also a personal failure. Finally, if you

share with the children your dearest ideas and a content that is 'holy' to you, this venture of openness makes you vulnerable to irony and laughter (p. 147).

Motivation to risk such ventures may arise in relation to our own children, who somehow are extensions of our own life; and perhaps also when the children are especially 'lovable', i.e. they obviously deserve that we do good things for them. It is more difficult however with children who are strangers and children who have adversarial or hostile feelings towards us. Then we tend to stick to rights and duties upheld by deserts and punishments, and thus withdraw from the free educational encounter. A difficult, disruptive, dangerous child needs my help. *Agape* challenges me to acknowledge that God loves this child—absolutely without conditions. If I understand myself as God's friend, I receive God's love myself and am prepared to share it with all persons that God loves—including 'enemies' and 'sinners'—even when it is risky to myself. This is to follow the example of Jesus. Seeing the needs of foreign children, adults with compassion (*eleos*) cannot continue to set off resources to education only for their own children or support an educational policy which only strengthens the chances of profit for their own nation. What one ought to do should be determined by 'right reason in action to be done' (II-II 55,3 co.), and is therefore also a matter of *phronesis*, justice and all the other virtues as a whole. *Agape* as compassion may help an adult to continue giving necessary learning challenges to a child, such as when the child (for certain unknown causes, for instance very bad experiences with adults) reacts with ingratitude, harsh words or even complaints about the adult to others. *Agape* as kindness makes it easier to see and use unique opportunities for doing well. In thousands of small episodes where we are close to children—also children we meet accidentally, children for whom we have no formal responsibility—it could be possible to give them just a little of our attention and time: a smile, an encouraging word, a helping hand. This is how the youngest of the brothers Karamazov, Alyosha, met twelve boys and became their friend. One of them dies, and after the funeral Alyosha makes a speech to the boys, challenging them to remember: 'there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory, especially a memory of childhood, of home. People talk to you a great deal about your education, but some good, sacred memory, preserved from childhood, is perhaps the best education' (Dostoevsky, 2000, XII 3, p. 731). The educational importance of attention and kindness is probably not difficult for anyone to accept in principle. The real problem is to see the child and feel its vulnerability there and then, when we are busy with many important things, or troubled or irritated. *Agape* can make us more able do what we really want to do in our relation with children, but which we too easily forget or ignore. *Phronesis* can help us to find the most appropriate time, place and way of doing it.

FINALE

A central story in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is about the relation between Oberon and Titania, king and queen of the fairies, and a

foster child. The couple quarrel over the child. Titania loves the child. Oberon wants to get rid of it, and have Titania's full attention for himself. This is the beginning of a series of wrongdoings by Oberon, involving his servant Puck and several others. After a while Oberon realises that everything is going wrong, so he tries to 'make amends' (Shakespeare, V.1, 423)—tries to correct the faults and to make improvements. This not only transforms his relationship with the child. It also changes positively the relations between all the other characters. All ends well. In the finale of the opera version of this play (Britten, 1960), Oberon and Titania walk out of the scene together, leading the child between them.⁹

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NOTES

1. I use the translation by W. D. Ross, 1908 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE) if no other translator is indicated after the approximate line number referring to the Bekker edition.
2. *Megalopsychia* has been interpreted as standing in direct opposition to the tradition of Thomas Aquinas, for instance by MacIntyre (1999, p. xi and 127). A more nuanced presentation is given by Kristján Kristjánsson (2001, chapter 3).
3. LXX is the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (according to the tradition made by around 70 scholars), beginning around the middle of the third century before Christ.
4. 'Enfin, ce à quoi, bien entendu, fait penser principalement cet Amour, qui est Dieu, et qui néanmoins souffre, mais non pas par force, c'est le Christ.' In the English translation the paragraph preceding this conclusion is omitted (without notice). The conclusion is thereby without correct reference, and the meaning is weakened: 'Finally, of course, one is led by this Love, who is God, and who nevertheless suffers, but not by force, to think of the Christ' (Weil, 1957, p. 118). The original does not say that one is led by Eros to think of Christ, but that Plato's description of the perfectly just leads us to think in principle that this Eros *is* the Christ.
5. See for instance Proverbs 3:19, Luke 1:17 and Eph. 1:8
6. T. Aquinas (1964) *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2. Existence and Nature of God, First part, Introduction to Question 2 (London, Blackfriars). See also Thomas Gilby (ed.), Appendix 1. Structure of the *Summa* (pp. 43–44), in: T. Aquinas (1964) *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 1. Christian Theology (London, Blackfriars). The 61 volumes of the Blackfriars edition were issued 1964–1981. If not otherwise indicated, I have used this edition. The main parts of *Summa Theologiae* are referred to in parenthesis by Roman numbers. The second part is divided in two: I-II and II-II. The subsequent Arabic numeral refers to a Question number. In the text, (I 2) means First part of *Summa Theologiae*, Question 2. Each Question has a short introduction, a *Prooemium* (Pr.), with an overview of the subquestions or Articles that it contains. Each Article starts with some arguments (for example: arg. 1), why something seems or seems not to be so and so. Then comes a short counter-argument, *sed contra* (s. c.), and the *corpus* (co.) of Thomas Aquinas's own opinion, his Reply. At last he gives specific answers (for example: ad 1) to the opening arguments. So the reference (II-II 47,1 ad 3) is to the second part of the Second Part, Question 47, Article 1 *ad* the third argument. I have used the 'concise translation' by Timothy McDermott (Aquinas, 1989) to get an overview of and a first understanding of the work. The Latin text is easily available online at: www.unav.es/filosofia/alarcon/amicis/ctopera.html (scroll down in Opera majores to *Summa Theologiae*).
7. *to kalon* may also be translated as 'the beautiful'. Joe Sachs (Aristotle, 2002, pp. xxi–xxv) gives good arguments for this translation.

8. '[B]eide Auffassungen verkennen schon in ihrem ersten Ansatz den eigentlichen Kern der Erziehung, der darauf beruht, daß hier ein freies Wesen einem andern freien Wesen fordernd entgegentritt.' Bollnow's *Existenzphilosophie und Pädagogik* is not available at the university libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, and is not translated to English.
9. The main work on this paper was carried out during a sabbatical in Cambridge 2003-04. The memories of Terry McLaughlin's critical questions and encouragements fill me with gratitude. Warm thanks also to several others for feedback and help.

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