Chapter 7

On Belief, Virtue and Education in the Midst of Climate Change

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Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed calls to understand our current times through such concepts as the Anthropocene, the Capitalocene and the Technocene.[290] While these (and other suggested) concepts draw attention to different reasons behind human-induced climate change and declining global biodiversity, increasing amounts of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and human imprint everywhere on this planet – even in the deepest depths of the oceans – cast a bleak forecast.

This forecast is hardly new. Even though the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) does not represent the earliest knowledge about human-induced climate change, it can be taken as a symbol of global awareness and knowledge about it. Written in 1992, the UNFCCC acknowledges climate change and its effects as 'a common concern of humankind' and that human activities are the reason for climate change.[291] In other words, already in the early 1990s, there was sufficient knowledge about climate change and its causes to warrant action to

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[290] These concepts and the phenomena and knowledge related to them suggest that there is a need to re-think the organisation of (human) life and human relations with the non-human, as I briefly argue in Peltonen, H. (2018). A prison break into the past? A comment on Justin Rosenberg's 'International Relations in the prison of Political Science'. *International Relations32*(2).https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117818774723. On the mentioned concepts, see e.g. Crutzen, P. J. and Stoermer, E. F. (2000). The "Anthropocene". *Global Change Newsletter41*, 17–18; Moore, J. W. (2017b). The Capitalocene, Part I: on the nature and origins of our ecological crisis. *The Journal of Peasant Studies, 44*(3), 594–630.https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1235036; Hornborg, A. (2015). The political ecology of the Technocene. In C. Hamilton, C. Bonneuil and F. Gemenne (Eds.). *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* (pp. 57–69). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743424-5.

[291] The UNFCCC entered into force in 1994. United Nations Framework Convention On Climate Change (UNFCCC, 1992). United Nations. Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Bonn, Germany. https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf

mitigate it, and the 166 signatures that the UNFCCC received by June 1993 show that such knowledge and concern were shared globally.[292] Yet, despite demonstrable global knowledge and awareness for at least the past three decades, the most recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase and that human activities have 'unequivocally caused global warming'.[293] Each year, we know and understand more and better human impact on this planet and life on it; yet, the forecast for the future does not seem to improve.[294]

Knowledge and awareness do not seem to be enough for there to be a genuine change in human activities causing climate change. Certainly, more and more has been done over the years,[295] but as the IPCC's latest report clearly states, it has not been enough, and it still is not enough: with the current laws and policies, global warming is likely to exceed 1.5°C, and it will be difficult to keep warming below 2°C.[296] Admittedly, many individuals are making changes in their lives to decrease their contribution to climate change, but in the big picture, the impact of such changes may be negligible due to no fault of these individuals themselves. It is a neoliberal move to put the onus on individuals, whereas it should be sovereign states (and other political communities) that ought to adopt such laws and policies that would truly honour the concern they formally acknowledged three decades ago.

In this chapter, with climate change and its effects as the backdrop, I briefly explore what might help in turning knowledge into action. My aim

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[292] Currently, there are 199 parties to the UNFCCC.

[293] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023, 4). Summary for Policymakers. In Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (Eds.) *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report of the Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC* (pp. 1–34). https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001. On the connection between the IPCC and the International Panel on Social Progress, see chapter by Lassnigg, L. in this publication.

[294] Certainly, not everyone has been educated about the details, and a large portion of the global human population remains genuinely ignorant – due to no fault of their own. Similarly, some uncertainties remain in our knowledge about climate change and its effects. Yet overall, it is hard to argue that we, the human race in general, lack the knowledge today.

[295] In relation to environmental care, for example on the role of technologization particularly in adult and vocational education, see chapter by Alam S., Heikkinen A., and Molzberger, G. in this publication.

[296] IPCC (2023).

is not to provide a full-blown theory or to 'solve' climate change.[297] Rather, I suggest that in addition to knowledge, one also needs certain beliefs and, importantly, motivation.

As to the kind of knowledge relevant to my discussion, I will assume that, for example, the latest IPCC report summarises well the general conditions on planet Earth both currently and in the future unless major action is taken. Regarding beliefs, I take it as settled that there is a need for some minimal belief so that knowledge may guide action. If nothing else, one needs to believe that the knowledge is (more or less) correct, and in the climate change case, one needs to believe that the future is not fully determined. In other words, one needs to believe that through action, the future can be different from what it seems according to our contemporary knowledge.

Interesting for my overall discussion, however, is the role political communities play in cultivating beliefs about how people ought to live in those communities. My argument is that even in the case of minimalist political communities, as imagined by libertarians, a political community 'educates' – whether coercively or otherwise – its members on how they ought to live as members of that community. If so, it makes sense to consider what kinds of beliefs about living well communities might wish to promote.

This leads me to consider Aristotelian thoughts on virtues for two reasons.[298] For one, virtues are socially learned and exercised, which is something that political communities may encourage or discourage. Second, virtues provide a path to happiness in Aristotelian thinking: the chief good, happiness, may be achieved by living and acting according to virtues. And the pursuit of happiness ought to be a powerful motivator – who would not want to be happy? Yet, centrally, an Aristotelian understanding of happiness underlines that happiness is a life project achieved by acting and living well, which is (ultimately) what we need to consider regarding sufficiently effective action concerning climate change.

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[297] I remain sceptical that climate change can be "solved," because any "solution" is likely to bring new "problems" with it, but this should not be mistaken for simple pessimism or defeatism. Rather, a deeper kind of pessimism is required for real change, as I argue in Peltonen, H. (2019). Ole realisti, vaadi mahdotonta? Pessimismi, antroposeeni ja yhteiskuntatieteiden tulevaisuus. *Kosmopolis49*(1), 73–84.

[298] On virtues, see also chapter by Ahmad, A. F. & Asaduzzaman, M. in this publication.

Recycling the packaging of one's retail therapy will not be sufficient, and promoting sustainable development will not make the required difference if greenhouse gas concentrations continue to rise. Instead, there is a need to think seriously about how people ought to live their whole lives and what political communities need to do to enable such lives, including the kinds of laws and regulations needed to coerce industries to find environmentally better ways to operate. Yet, political communities will not introduce such laws and regulations unless their members, ultimately people, do not value the diversity of life and ecosystems. On the other hand, perhaps people need not value those things in themselves, or even believe in climate change, if people believed that materialism and consumerism do not provide a secure path to a good life. These issues are accentuated if one considers that the global human population keeps increasing – projected to be close to 10 billion around 2050 and about 11 billion in 2100 – and also becoming less poor.[299] More people with more money have historically not alleviated climate change but rather accelerated it. It is therefore imperative to explore ways in which to cultivate beliefs in a good life that are not based on materialism and consumption. We also need to find ways to motivate people to follow up on those beliefs, but importantly, also to demand that their political communities make the required changes so that a good life based not on materialism and consumption is possible.[300]

With these preliminary thoughts in mind, the next section suggests that, in order to induce action, we ought to consider knowledge, beliefs and motivation together. The second section focuses on motivation by briefly discussing the Aristotelian notion of happiness. The third section continues from the Aristotelian emphasis on happiness as being a life project of following socially learned virtues by discussing formal and inadvertent virtue education. It seems that opposition to formal virtue education may be based on myths, but there are also actual issues that ought to be considered. Yet, a brief autoethnographic examination of teaching experience suggests that those issues may not be grave, while simultaneously, all teachers might benefit from considering how virtue

[299] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022). World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results. https://population.un.org/wpp; Hasell J., Roser M., Ortiz-Ospina, E. & Arriagada, P. (2022). Poverty. OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from https://ourworldindata.org/poverty

[300] This would require re-thinking the basis for local, national, and global economies, but such issues are beyond the scope of this chapter. On rethinking society and its connection with environmental care, see also chapter by Lassnigg, L. in this publication.

education happens inadvertently.[301] The concluding section brings these different thoughts together and proposes that the future may look dire but not hopeless.

Knowledge is not enough: Beliefs and Motivation

While many value it, knowledge itself may not have intrinsic value. Knowledge can be valuable in the sense that it enables one to do something, whether to build a house, to connect with other people or to get rich.[302]Yet, knowledge itself, by itself, does not guide action. This is similar to how no rule explains its own application, or to put it in Wittgenstein's words: 'A rule stands there like a sign-post.—Does the sign-post leave no doubt open about the way I have to go? … But where is it said which way I am to follow it; whether in the direction of its finger or (e.g.) in the opposite one?'[303] In other words, knowledge by itself does not tell us how to make use of it. Something more is required.

Something is needed to translate knowledge into action. Regarding climate change and its effects, the problem is, of course, that not everyone would agree. Not everyone would agree that we ought to do anything about climate change. Some do not even believe that it is happening. Some might believe that it is too late anyway. Others might believe that whatever action we take will be insufficient. Yet, others might say that it will be a problem for future generations; we ought to focus on the issues here and now. After all, there are many other things that we ought to do today.

Yet, given the consensus on scientific knowledge as expressed by the latest IPCC report, something can and should be done about climate change before it truly is too late. Various projects around the world try to encourage people to recycle more, to burn fossil fuels less, and generally to share more and consume individually less. Incentives also exist for industry and businesses to be more efficient and less polluting. Novel technologies and such business models as the circular economy provide further tools and incentives.

At the same time, though, billions of people, quite understandably, are trying to reach an average European or North American living standard.

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[301] On ethnography and especially on duoethnography, see chapter by Jõgi, L. & Heikkinen, A. in this publication.

[302] On the link between knowledge and expertise, see chapter by Lassnigg, L. and by Wallén, B. in this publication.

[303]Wittgenstein, L. (2001). Philosophical investigations, §85. (G. E. M Anscombe, Trans.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell. (Original work published 1953).

In the developed world, many, but certainly not a sufficient number of people, follow an eco-friendly life simply out of their own volition. Whether this makes any real difference in the big picture is questionable. Certainly, their actions may encourage others to act similarly, but in all likelihood, the combined voluntary eco-friendly acts will not halt the warming of planet Earth.[304] Therefore, it seems necessary to consider the collective level, namely the communities in which these people live and what kind of living the communities encourage.

To side-step for a moment, for my purposes in this chapter, with communities, I refer to *political* communities. By that, I mainly mean sovereign states, which are one of the most relevant actors due to their national legislative and coercive authority and their ability to make treaties with other sovereign states. Yet, I am referring, for instance, also to the United Nations, an international organisation, as well as for example to the European Union, a somewhat supranational organisation. Moreover, there are examples of political communities at the sub-national level, including provinces, federal states, such as the German *Länder*, cities and counties. We may find examples of transnational political communities. Rather than providing a list of all relevant types of political communities, it may be best to consider a community to be political if it engages in deciding 'who gets what, when, and how'[305] as well as on what grounds, or to put it differently, 'who can do what to whom and on what basis and for what purposes?'[306]

To return to my main discussion, due to their nature, political communities cultivate and guide *beliefs* about how people in those communities ought to live and how they ought not to live.[307]Already Platodiscussed the role political communities play in raising their citizens and guiding their lives as members of those communities. For example, in *Crito*, Plato underlines how the laws of Athens have raised Socrates as well as its other citizens: 'For we gave birth to you, brought you up, educated you, and gave you and all the other citizens everything we could

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[304] Despite good intentions, making such efforts can be quite difficult in practice due to various greenwashing practices.

[305] Lasswell, H. D. (1936). *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How*. New York: Whittlesey House.

[306] Kratochwil, F. & Peltonen, H. (2022). Constructivism. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press. 18. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.120

[307] On digital membership in political communities, see chapter by Wallén, B. in this publication.

that's good'.[308] The point here is that political communities, through their laws, rules, norms and practices, set a general framework for 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' life within that community. Certainly, political communities do more than that, but for the present discussion, the relevant aspect is that through their political nature, communities encourage and discourage certain ways of living as well as what kinds of actors and in what ways those actors may legitimately influence directly or indirectly people's perceptions of how to live. To explain briefly with some examples, political communities decide who educates the community's children and how. They also decide what kinds of advertisements may be shown to which audiences, in what media, and what kinds of claims may be made in them. Political communities even decide how their members should dress in public, as is aptly highlighted by the recent demonstrations in Iran and by the recent French ban on abayas in schools.[309]

One should ask to what extent the stereotypical Western way of life, centred on individualism and consumption, is something that our political communities ought to cultivate and encourage, given the knowledge we have about its impact on this planet and life on it. This should by no means be interpreted as questioning the Western liberal democratic way of organising political communities. Despite its flaws, it seems to be the best option among the alternatives. Rather, the question is what kinds of ways of life our political communities should cultivate, independent of how that political community is structurally organised, given the reality of climate change and its effects on both human and nonhuman life.

A minimalist interpretation would argue that political communities should be kept far away from such issues. If anything at all, such a libertarian interpretation would say that political communities should focus on providing the very basic public goods, such as the military, the police and the courts, but otherwise leave its members alone to live as they wish. Yet, even in such a minimalist case, the political community would cultivate at least some particular understandings of how to live well in that community. The simple presence of courts implies a need for adjudication and there would be rules or laws that can be broken. In turn, these attest to Plato's argument that political communities raise their members, and even a minimalist, libertarian state aimed at maximising individual freedom

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[308] Plato (2020). Crito, §51c-d. (B. Jowett, Trans.). https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1657/pg1657-images.html. (Original work published 360 BCE).

[309] On the role of technology in shaping (political) communities, see chapter by Alam, S., Heikkinen, A. and Molzberger, G. in this publication.

would draw lines between acceptable and unacceptable action and behaviour – and have ways to deal with people and other actors who deviate too far from the accepted ways.

If it is indeed the case that even minimalist political communities would 'educate' their members on how they ought to live, it would seem sensible for that political community to do so intentionally. Here, the discussion turns to what formal role our political communities should play in educating its members. Even though this question can be asked regarding any political community, for brevity and clarity, I shift my focus to concern national formal education. It seems, at least to me, that national formal education is usually mainly concerned with teaching knowledge and particular skills required to be a productive member of that community. As my argument has been, such education also concerns how to live in a community – to be a productive member – but formal education regarding how to live *well* usually seems to be restricted to courses on religion, ethics and philosophy.

The question of how to live well is most often answered by different religions.[310] Yet, each religion and different denominations and sects provide their own differing answers, thus leading to conflict. The historical European experience illustrates how bloody religious disagreements over the right way to live can become. Put differently, the historical Western liberal 'solution' to such religious disagreements has been 'live and let live' and 'just as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else'. Or, at least, these have been liberalism's calls in principle, while the reality seems to have been different.[311] To give brief examples of the problematic or impartial implementation of such principles, one needs only to remember the historical criminalisation of homosexuality, even in the most liberal countries, or to look at the contemporary debates on trans-rights.

Rather than continue by reviewing different contemporary religious and secular notions of living well, in the next section, I focus on an ancient Greek tradition advocated by Aristotle. The reason for this is not to dig up some forgotten list of rules to follow. Instead, Aristotle's connection between beliefs about how to live well is tied to virtues that, in turn, are connected with happiness.

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[310] An estimated 84% of the world's population is religiously affiliated. Pew Research Center. (2012, December 18). The Global Religious Landscape: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Major Religious Groups as of 2010. https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.4573.8884

[311] Kalb J. (2002). Liberalism: Ideal and Reality. *Telos, 2002*(122), 111–119.

To explain my turn to Aristotle, so far my argument has been that in order to mitigate climate change and its effects, something more than knowledge is required for sufficiently many people to make changes in their lives and activities and to demand their political communities to act correspondingly. Beliefs play an important role both in terms of believing scientific knowledge and that it is not too late to act but also in terms of the nature of political communities. Yet, neither knowledge nor belief is sufficient to ensure a change in action and behaviour. I may know that by eating healthier, I am also helping to reduce my carbon footprint, and I may genuinely believe that I ought to do so. Without the right *motivation*,[312]however, such knowledge and beliefs are unlikely to turn into action. Happiness ought to be a powerful motivator.

Aristotelian Connection between Virtue and Happiness

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle considers that 'every art and every inquiry … every action and choice' aims at some good.[313] For instance, the end of medicine is health and that of economic wealth. Yet, both health and wealth may be desired for some other reason, not simply for their own sake. Thus, the question turns to what might be the 'chief good', for which sake everything else is desired. The answer seems clear: happiness (*eudaimonia*) and living well (*euzên*) are the highest goods for humans, according to Aristotle.[314] Unfortunately, neither is self-evident.

Happiness is 'the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing',[315] and it 'is the end of action'.[316] Yet, 'one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy'.[317] In other words, although happiness may be achieved through action, one needs to act well over time, not just here and there.

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[312] In this example, one also needs an opportunity to eat healthier, something which not everyone might have. The issue of opportunity does not alter my general argument.

[313]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1094a1-2. (J. Barnes, Trans.).Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 2: The Revised Oxford Translation. Princeton: Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400835850 (Original work published 350 BCE).

[314] For a contrasting position suggesting that wisdom should be the ideal goal, see chapter by Kallio E. K. in this publication.

[315]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1099a24.

[316]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1097b21.

[317]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1098a18-19.

Happiness can be attained by living and acting well over an extended period of time, maybe only over a lifetime. Happiness is a life project.

Happiness, however, may not depend only on oneself, says Aristotle. Luck and circumstances also play a role: 'the man who is very ugly in appearance or ill-born or solitary and childless is hardly happy, and perhaps a man would be still less so if he had thoroughly bad children or friends or had lost good children or friends by death'.[318] Moreover, because many changes, fortunes and misfortunes happen during a lifetime, and even 'the most prosperous may fall into great misfortunes in old age',[319] whether one has attained a happy life may only be known afterwards.[320]

While there are things beyond one's control and influence that may result in one's unhappiness, one's activities determine to a large extent the character of one's life, and 'the man who is truly good and wise, we think, bears all the chances of life becomingly and always makes the best of circumstances'.[321] The importance of how one behaves and acts becomes even clearer when one considers that for 'half their lives', the happy are not better off than the wretched – both the happy and the wretched sleep.[322]

How should one then act and live to be happy? For Aristotle, the answer lies in pursuing excellence, or to put it differently, in acting according to virtues.[323] Some excellences are intellectual and others moral. Intellectual excellence requires experience and time, while moral excellence results from habit. Importantly, neither intellectual nor moral excellence arises by nature.[324] Rather, 'we are adapted by nature to receive them',[325] but both

[318]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1099b3-6.

[319]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1100a5-6.

[320] For Aristotle, though, even death may not be a strict adjudicator of one's happiness, because *post mortem* the fortunes and misfortunes of one's descendants may also have some effect, to some degree and for some time. Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1100a10-31.

[321]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1100b33-1101a2.

[322]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1102b5-6.

[323] On Plato's, on Kautilya's, and especially on Confucius's thoughts on virtues, see chapter by Ahmad A. F. & Asaduzzaman M. in this publication.

[324]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1103a14-20.

[325]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1103a24-25.

need to be learned and exercised: 'we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts'.[326]

The problem is, of course, that excellence and virtuousliving are not easy:

> it is no easy task to be good … anyone can get angry—that is easy—or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right aim, and in the right way, that is not for every one, nor is it easy; that is why goodness is both rare and laudable and noble.[327]

Moreover, one may pursue virtuous habits too much. Excess, whether in never standing one's ground or always confronting danger, in always indulging or abstaining from pleasure,can lead to becoming a coward or rash, or self-indulgent or insensible: 'temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and defect, and preserved by the mean'. And so it is with other excellences, too.[328]

Importantly, though, the responsibility for forming good habits and cultivating virtues does not fall only on individuals. Given that both intellectual and moral excellences are learned and require time and experience, political communities may seek to cultivate and strengthen their formation and habituation in their members. Aristotle recognises the power of 'legislators to make the citizens good by forming habits in them', although he is somewhat naïve about this being the wish of every legislator. Yet, different laws and even different constitutions may promote or discourage the learning and habituation of different excellences.[329] Of course, political communities cannot fully determine how people act and live their lives or make their decisions for them – 'the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation'[330] – but as I pointed out in the previous section, political communities have different means to encourage or discourage certain kinds of behaviour.

Moreover, it makes a great difference whether one forms one or another kind of habit at a young age,[331] and this is, again, something that a political

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[326]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1103b1-2.

[327]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1109a24-29. Original emphasis.

[328]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1104a18-26.

[329]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1103b2-6.

[330]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1104a8-9.

[331]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics,1103b24-25.

community may encourage or not. For example, it makes a long-term difference both for the individuals and for the community in which she lives, whether and what kind of preschool education programme a child may attend.[332] It also makes a difference whether such opportunities exist for all children independent of their guardians' income or only for those whose guardians can afford to pay for it.

Putting these things together, it seems that an Aristotelian approach to happiness emphasises doing the right thing at the right time and to the right amount, while any excess of even the good thing is undesirable. Moreover, this approach connects individual and different collective levels.

To explain, I start by recounting one of Aristotle's analogies: 'food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health'.[333] The background theme of this paper, climate change, relates, for example, to the global consumption of meat. Per capita, average meat consumption has increased by approximately 20 kilograms since the early 1960s,[334] while meat protein consumption is projected to grow 14% by 2030 compared to 2018–2020.[335] This is highly relevant because the greenhouse gas emissions from animal-based foods are twice the emissions from plant-based foods.[336] While some meat protein might be good for human health, especially if its absence is not compensated for in the diet, eating more (especially red and processed) meat than before does not contribute to increased human health; on the contrary, increased livestock production has major negative environmental effects.[337] Following a path of

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[332] See e.g. Lunenburg, F.C. (2000). Early Childhood Education Programs Can Make a Difference in Academic, Economic, and Social Arenas. *Education 120*(3); Pianta, R. C., Barnett, W. S., Burchinal, M., & Thornburg, K. R. (2009). The Effects of Preschool Education: What We Know, How Public Policy Is or Is Not Aligned With the Evidence Base, and What We Need to Know. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 10*(2), 49–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100610381908

[333]Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1104a15-16.

[334] Ritchie H., Rosado P. & Roser M. (2017). Meat and Dairy Production. OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from https://ourworldindata.org/meat-production

[335] OECD & Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (2021). *OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2021-2030*, 164. https://doi.org/10.1787/19428846-en

[336]Xu, X., Sharma P., Shu, S, Lin, T-S., Ciais, P., Tubiello, F. N., Smith, P., Campbell, N. & Jain, A. K. (2021). Global greenhouse gas emissions from animal-based foods are twice those of plant-based foods. *Nat Food*, 2, 724–732. https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00358-x

[337] Godfray, H. C. J., Garnett T., Hall J. W., Key T. K., Lorimer J., Pierrehumbert R. T., Scarborough P., Springman M. & Jebb S. A. (2018). Meat consumption, health,

moderation, of having some meat, but perhaps not even weekly, should sustain personal health but also environmental and planetary health.

Yet, the choice of diet does not depend on an individual but on the collective decisions of a political community. For instance, because meat is a good source of energy and some essential nutrients, nutritionally or financially, many cannot afford to switch to a fully plant-based diet, even though there is evidence to suggest that a vegan diet is less expensive than an omnivorous diet.[338] The unaffordability of a plant-based diet for an individual may be due to laws and regulations concerning wages and welfare, farming subsidies, and taxation, to name three examples. While other factors may be relevant, these three aspects of collective decision-making in a political community are examples of how the community may either promote or discourage the affordability and availability of a nutritionally diverse enough plant-based diet for individuals.

It would be easy to provide other examples of how political communities can promote healthy eating habits already to young children (e.g. collectively provided kindergarten and school meals that follow health guidelines), but the more general point is the one Aristotle made millennia ago: whether an individual can become virtuous, and thereby live a happy life, does not depend only on him or her exactly because we are not born with excellences but they must be learned and practised. Political communities are in a key position to enable such learning and opportunities to practise. As my brief example of different diets suggests, the promise of better health and therefore happiness could be a motivator for individuals to follow a path of moderation. It would seem to be a better path for the environment and the planet than the one on which we currently seem to be. Yet, such paths may be encouraged, discouraged or made available or unavailable by political decisions in communities.

On Formal and Inadvertent Virtue Education

Despite the idea of cultivating virtues in young people going back, at least to Aristotle, formal virtue education in schools seems to be somewhat

and the environment. *Science, 361*(6399). https://doi.org/doi:10.1126/science.aam5324

[338] Pais, D. F., Marques, A. C. &Fuinhas, J. A. (2022). The cost of healthier and more sustainable food choices: Do plant-based consumers spend more on food? *Agric Food Econ10*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40100-022-00224-9.

controversial, or at least the topic provokes sceptical responses.[339] Kristjánsson argues, however, that such responses arise mainly due to 10 *myths*, namely that virtue education is unclear, redundant, old-fashioned, religious, paternalistic, anti-intellectual, conservative, individualistic, relative and situation dependent.[340] Yet, none of these seem to be 'real' issues, as Kristjánsson shows.

The first two myths are conceptual, and at least the first myth seems to be based on a misunderstanding of language and meaning in general. It is somewhat misplaced to criticise virtues (or 'excellences' in Aristotle's parlance in the previous section) to be unclear in their meaning, namely that a precise, universal definition cannot be found because the same is true for all concepts. Wittgenstein's example of games illustrates why meaning is not tied to some precise, universal definition. One might be tempted to think that all games need to share at least one thing in common for them to be classified as games. Instead, 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail'.[341] Thus, Wittgenstein prefers to talk about 'family resemblances',[342] and providing examples of games is more useful for understanding what games are than providing a definition of a game in an abstract, universal fashion. Put differently, what counts as a virtue of a particular kind can be understood through examples of virtues and virtuous actions and behaviours, even if there is no universally accepted definition.

Moreover, this also relates to the last criticism of virtues being situation dependent; examples of virtues should be provided within their contexts because meaning is understandable only within its context, as is argued by social constructivists.[343] Whether something is 'big' or 'small' depends on the context. Consider whether 1mm deviation from the plans is 'big' or 'small' for a road builder or a computer chip manufacturer. Similarly,

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[339] On some of the issues in formal education in general between the Global North and the Global South, see chapter by Jinia, N., Makrooni, G., Saeed, S. in this publication.

[340]Kristjánsson K. (2013). Ten Myths About Character, Virtue and Virtue Education – Plus Three Well-Founded Misgivings. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 61*(3), 269–287. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2013.778386

[341]Wittgenstein L. (2001, §66).

[342]Wittgenstein L. (2001, §67).

[343] See e.g. Kratochwil F. & Peltonen H. (2022, 10-11).

'acting well' may mean quite different things to a priest and a drug lord.[344] My point is not to endorse behaviour akin to a drug lord; rather, due to the contextual differences, we can understand why acting in a certain way counts as 'acting well' for one actor but not for another. The more general point here is that in relation to, for instance, climate change, one can and should expect there to be differences in what counts as 'acting well' between individuals (of different means), corporations and political communities.

Regarding the other criticisms (or myths), while it may be that newer vocabularies have at least partially replaced the language of virtues, and that in that sense there may be some conceptual redundancy, this is hardly a convincing argument against the practice or importance of virtue education. Similarly, the language of virtues may sound old-fashioned, but virtue ethics is a vibrant alternative to modern theologies of deontology and consequentialism. Both of the other two also deal with virtues, just in a different way and with a different emphasis.[345] Moreover, Aristotle's thinking is an example of secular virtue ethics, while much of contemporary virtue ethics is post-religious,[346] thus demonstrating that virtue education need not have any connection with today's religions, even if they also have something to say about acting well. Virtue education might be paternalistic – much depends on how it is taught – but importantly, 'no teachers can either logically or psychologically dissociate themselves from the practice of character education'.[347] Moreover, teaching about virtues and how to act well does not force anyone to act in that manner.

An emphasis on habituation seems to lead to the paradox that virtue education is supposed to develop rational, moral people, but the prescribed method seems to be the formation of habits. Yet, the prescription of habits is a pedagogical tool. Whether it is the best tool can be debated, but the purpose of habit formation is to provide a way to develop one's critical

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[344] Curiously, Aristotle makes a brief mention of something similar: "For a carpenter and a geometer look for right angles in different ways; the former does so in so far as the right angle is useful for his work, while the latter inquires what it is or what sort of thing it is". Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1098a29-31.

[345]Hursthouse. R. & Pettigrove. G. (Winter 2022 edition). Virtue Ethics. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/ethics-virtue/.

[346]Kristjánsson K. (2013, 275).

[347] Kristjánsson K. (2013, 276).

thinking and understanding.[348] Much like all musicians have needed to start by forming certain habits regarding how they can play their instrument. Similarly, a truly virtuous person has needed to begin somewhere and with some things before she has come to realise not just the right things to do but also the reasons behind it – not to mention the reasons why in two fairly similar, but not identical, situations somewhat differing actions were 'correct'. As Aristotle emphasised, it is not easy to be or to do good[349]; one needs practice.

The claim that virtue education is conservative hinges on the meaning of that term. Yet, whether one takes it as a claim that virtue education supports the status quo, or whether the reference is to conservatism supported by certain kinds of political parties, Kristjánsson argues that virtue education would actually be anti-status quo and that at least in the UK, both New Labour and Tories have supported virtue education.[350]

Finally, virtue education has been accused of individualism and of being relative. While Kristjánsson gives a pragmatic reason for starting with the individual, even if the aim is societal change,[351] I see nothing to criticise in the general idea of pursuing one's individual happiness by acting well in a society – happiness comes from socially good actions, not narcissistic behaviour. As my example in the previous section regarding eating well shows, there can be a positive connection between what is good for the individual and what is good for the collective. By eating well, one contributes to one's individual happiness (health), but one also contributes to the collective goal of reducing greenhouse gases. Similarly, the accusation of relativism does not seem quite correct. One might argue that, for example, a Kantian categorical imperative would be preferable to virtue ethics, but then again it is easy to provide examples, where following a categorical imperative would seem to result in immoral acts in practice.[352] Put differently, ethics and morality have many theoretical hard

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[348] On advanced thinking, on understanding, and especially on wisdom, see chapter by Kallio E. K. in this publication.

[349] Aristotle (1984). Nicomachean Ethics, 1109a24-29.

[350] Kristjánsson K. (2013, 278-79).

[351] Kristjánsson K. (2013, 279).

[352] For instance, while it is debatable whether for Kant, lying was always wrong, the killer at the door example shows how always telling the truth would seem immoral to many. On Kant and lying, see e.g. Carson, T. L. (2010, Chapter 3: Kant and the Absolute Prohibition against Lying). Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice. Oxford: Oxford Academic.
https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199577415.003.0004

cases and dilemmas for a reason – some situations simply do not have that one right answer – while in the practical world, people still need to make decisions and act under time pressure.

There are, however, at least three concerns about virtue education, according to Kristjánsson: past examples do not give much confidence about the success of future efforts, there is no clear methodology, and it is unclear what impact formal virtue education might have.[353] While all three are noteworthy issues that ought to be discussed further, none of them seem to be a reason not to contemplate virtue education in formal education.

Rather than continue with a focus on the formal education of virtues, I shall briefly and self-critically reflect on my own university teaching experience. There is, of course, a significant difference between formal virtue education programmes, the focus of Kristjánsson's discussion, and a single educator teaching virtues 'inadvertently'. Yet, given that a teacher may be cultivating virtues without explicitly trying to do so, it does not seem *prima facie* unfruitful to engage in a moment of autoethnography, particularly when the three issues listed above also fit my personal experience. Rather than them being problems or causes for concern, they seem only to be expected.

If I consider my own teaching career, despite my experience growing over time, past examples of pedagogical success do not guarantee success in the future. This is because even a repeated course is different each time. To give two reasons, I, the teacher, am somewhat different than the last time – not just in the philosophical sense, but meanwhile my pedagogical and substantive expertise has grown – and the participants are different each time the course repeats. Not only are the participants actually different people, but they were born and grew up in a (slightly) different world than the previous participants. In other words, despite my experience and expertise growing, as a teacher, I am always faced with a somewhat new situation. To that extent, past success cannot guarantee future success, but this is nothing new, at least since David Hume who pointed out the problem with inductive reasoning.

In terms of methodology, it would be possible to follow a clear pedagogical methodology of one kind or another, but I have little confidence that following a set methodology will always provide the best

[353] Kristjánsson K. (2013, 282-84).

results.[354] Here, I understand by a clear methodology something predetermined, for instance, that lectures are held in the same fashion, topics follow, for example, constructive alignment, and the course ends with an essay exam with a few choices for questions. While there may be nothing wrong with doing things this way, some room for spontaneity might be a good idea. Because the course participants change each time, and each participant is an individual with their individual needs, it might be better to remain attentive to signals from the participants and to be prepared to make some changes, even 'on the fly'. Clearly, structural changes during a course cannot be recommended unless there is a very good reason for them, but a relatively likely scenario is a need to go back to a past topic instead of going ahead with the original plan. Similarly, it might be a good idea to diverge from a lecture's original path, for example, to expand on a participant's question or to refresh some knowledge from a preliminary course that the teacher should have been able to assume in the current course. Also, during a course, it might be necessary to change one's teaching style, for example, from something akin to a Socratic dialogue to a more traditional lecture style. More broadly put, a methodology that is too clearly set might sometimes be too restrictive.

The impact of one's teaching is probably always unclear. Certainly, from examinations or from other coursework, a teacher can estimate what students have learned. Yet, to equate what students hand in with teaching impact is to confuse two different things. What a student might remember in an exam, or how she might argue in an essay, probably has very little to do with the impact of (good) teaching. Moreover, as I am reasonably certain is the case with everyone, no one really remembers what was 'taught' in a particular course once sufficient time has passed. In some cases, especially in cultures where rote learning is common, the students might not remember much even soon after the exam. But people remember good (and poor) teachers, and people rememberif a teacher evoked new ideas or thoughts. I have argued elsewhere that a good teacher is like an interpreter, both in the sense of someone who translates orally from one language to another – here, languages understood in a broad sense – and in the sense of a guide, someone who introduces materials, interprets their meaning, and thereby helps others to understand them.[355] What is the impact of that kind of teaching is understandably not fully predictable,

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[354] On (somewhat open) methodology, see chapter by Jõgi, L. & Heikkinen, A. in this publication.

[355] Peltonen H. (2016, January 15). Opettajan roolista yliopistossa. *Politiikasta.fi*. Retrieved from https://politiikasta.fi/opettajan-roolista-yliopistossa/.

especially because it is less about transferring knowledge and more about how to think, how to approach problems, and how to learn. In other words, if the aim of good teaching is to provide transferable skills, for lack of a better term, how and when they are useful cannot be known in advance, and in that sense, the impact of teaching is uncertain. Yet, one can say with fair confidence that having helped someone learn such skills will most likely have a positive impact on that person's life.

If I reflect on one of my current university courses, 'Introduction to Planet Politics', this is clearly not a course on virtue ethics; the course is not about virtues, and before writing this chapter I never thought about virtues in relation to this course. In substance, the course is a novel look at my field of International Relations, and it deals with such issues as climate change and the Anthropocene, how humans have modified this planet for a long time, and how humans are now also modifying outer space and other planets. Yet, such questions as how we should live necessarily come up either explicitly or implicitly. For instance, pondering whether we live in the Anthropocene, the Capitalocene, or the Technocene involves an explicit discussion on the causes of anthropogenic climate change, and thereby there is a link to how we should live in the future. Similarly, the topic of deep sea mining engages with the question of whether we should cause possibly irreparable harm to life under the sea in order to harvest precious metals needed in the green transformation above the sea. A third example relates the projected population growth during this century and the question of what it would mean for life on this planet if everyone were to reach the same living standard as the average person in the Global North. A fourth example concerns the probable rise in mental health issues due to climate change effects (but also due to other reasons). In general, how is one to live when the future looks bleak?

I do not have an answer for the course participants. But I try to show that not all hope is lost, and I try to show certain techniques for how one can approach issues and problems. One central theme in the course is how things look very different, depending on the perspective or on where one begins to tell the story. Particularly, the latter is perhaps Aristotelian in the sense I discussed earlier: we may not know whether we have lived a happy, good life until it is over. And with that, I try to communicate to the participants that we can nevertheless act and try to do the right thing, even if it is not always easy to even know what the right thing to do is. Yet, more often than not, we knowwhat the wrong to do thing is.

To some extent, then, this course, which does not directly focus on virtues, ends up being a kind of inadvertent virtue education. Whether it will have an impact on the participants is unclear. My best evidence of the

possible impact is the weekly reflections I have asked the participants to write on the course's themes and anonymous course feedback. From these, it can be seen that the course has helped or improved the participants' critical thinking. At least for me, critical thinking is one of the virtues and a good enough impact of teaching. With that, the future looks less bleak.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of climate change and its effects, in general the Anthropocene, I have discussed how knowledge itself does not seem to have been enough to make the kinds of changes that would be needed to properly slow down the warming of planet Earth. Beliefs play an important role in encouraging particular kinds of acts and how people live, and the role that different political communities play in cultivating such beliefs should not be undervalued. Yet, neither knowledge nor beliefs or these two combined are sufficient because one also needs motivation to turn beliefs and knowledge into action.

In this chapter, I have suggested that the pursuit of happiness might be a good candidate to motivate the action needed to mitigate climate change. By the pursuit of happiness, however, I am not referring to consumerism and materialism, that one can attain happiness with material possessions. Rather, I turned to Aristotle and his notion of happiness as living and acting well over a lifetime. Virtues provide guidance on how one lives and acts well, but, importantly, virtues are socially learned and exercised. We become virtuous by acting in that manner.

Given that virtues are socially learned and that political communities play an important role in encouraging or discouraging certain kinds of behaviour, it seemed important to briefly discuss formal virtue education. It seems that formal virtue education faces opposition for a number of reasons, but those reasons do not pass a careful examination. In Kristjánsson's terms, they are myths, not real problems, and this should encourage further discussion on formal virtue education.

Moreover, virtue education also happens inadvertently, something which I discussed with the help of autoethnography on my own experience as a university teacher in general and particularly in relation to a current course that I am teaching. It seems that the kinds of actual issues Kristjánsson identifies in relation to formal education are also present for individual teachers. For good reasons, past pedagogical success does not guarantee future success; actually, not having a very precise and clearly set teaching methodology might be a good thing, and the impact of good teaching is necessarily uncertain because good teaching focuses on transferable skills.

Furthermore, despite not having even considered virtues or virtue education as part of my current course introducing Planet Politics, my reflection showed that there are many examples in the course themes that concern the question of living and acting well over a long period of time – even if they are not necessarily discussed in those terms. More importantly, to the extent that any teaching at any level helps students to improve their critical thinking – as good teaching should be independent of the substance – I remain hopeful that the future may turn out to be less bleak than it now seems.