

# Practicing the Common Good: The Pedagogical Implications of Catholic Social Teaching

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**Abstract.** *A persistent question for pedagogy is that of whether and how the content of a course ought to shape the teaching method. Both the understanding of practical reason and the substantive concepts of modern Catholic social teaching support a classroom dynamic of a relatively egalitarian dialectic. The author grounds the case for this pedagogy in the understanding of practical reason as found in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, and shows that such an understanding is continued in modern Catholic social teaching. He then shows how the social teaching's substantive move to a more egalitarian social theory reinforces the egalitarian mode of reasoning. The author and others are attempting to practice this pedagogy in the context of the University of Notre Dame's new Program in Catholic Social Tradition. The investigation as a whole raises the question of whether colleges and universities that have actively maintained religious affiliations have a decided advantage in sustaining an academic culture where faculty and students can practice practical reason.*

An ongoing question for pedagogy is whether and how the substantive content of a course should shape the teaching method. Regardless of how one answers this question in a general way, I will argue that the specific content of Catholic social teaching indicates that the substance ought to inform and form the pedagogy. By content, here, I mean both the mode of reasoning and the specific concepts found in Catholic social teaching. What we will find is that the understanding of practical reason and the concepts that go to make up the social theory are mutually reinforcing. I will argue that in the case of modern Catholic social teaching, both support a classroom dynamic of a relatively egalitarian dialectic

that seeks to guide students in the consideration of the activity of their anticipated professional vocations. I will make the case in four main steps. First, I will show how the documents of the social teaching present a genre of practical reason indebted to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and addressed to persons in the full range of social locations, including professional vocations. Then I will set out the initial pedagogical implications of the competing interpretations of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition of practical reason. One interpretation that emphasizes demonstrative knowledge displayed through deduction as the ideal mode of reasoning implies a more hierarchical classroom structure where lectures best convey and exams best assess knowledge. I will argue that in a class setting where the aim is to bring the students to intellectual maturity, the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition favors a more egalitarian dialectic that emphasizes faculty-guided exchange between the students. In the third part of this article, I will show how the social theory of Catholic social teaching reinforces the presumption in favor of egalitarianism. Fourth and finally, I will set out the details of this interpretation of the pedagogical implications of Catholic social teaching as they are instantiated in the Program in Catholic Social Tradition at the University of Notre Dame.

## **Practice: Catholic Social Teaching as a Genre of Practical Reason**

Modern Catholic social teaching consists of a canon of texts consciously written as such dating from Leo XIII's 1891 document, *Rerum Novarum* (RN, Leo XIII 1992), through John Paul II's 1991 encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* (CA, John Paul II 1992a). The

genre as a whole is one of practical reason exercised by ecclesiastical authorities, and reference to the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition of practical reason helps one to understand the aim and communal function of the texts. The distinction between theoretical or speculative reason and practical reason (NE 6.5.1140a24–b12 [*Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle 1986]) is fundamental to Aristotle's thought. The former aims at demonstrative knowledge of things that do not change (or whose principle of change lies within themselves) through analysis of first principles or causes and deduction from such principles. The latter aims to guide variable human practice or action (*praxis*) through a mode of analysis in which truths can be demonstrated in a syllogism, but which is more dialectical in form when engaged and does not have the same precision (*akribeia*, NE 1.3, 2.2.1103b26–1104a11) as theoretical reason. While one addresses theoretical reason to philosophers, the more proper audience of practical reason is the ordinary educated citizen, one who will be exercising some authority and power in society (NE 10.9). Here, the mode of reasoning follows the aim of the writing. Aristotle's understanding of practical or political science (*politike*) is not anti-theoretical, but rather is suited to engaging the practitioners in the various fields of civil society. In David Wiggins's words, "Aristotle's account is informed by a consciousness of the lived actuality of practical reasoning and its background. This is an actuality which present-day studies of rationality, morality, and public rationality ignore, and ignore at their cost" (Wiggins 1980, 222).

For Aristotle, *politike* – which is further divided into politics, economics, and ethics – is the authoritative science because it attends to the most comprehensive good (NE 1.2.1094a28–b7). That good is happiness (*eudaimonia*, NE 1.4), understood not simply as a mental state, but, importantly, as well-living (*euzoia*) and well-acting (*eupraxia*). The role of the city (*polis*) as the most comprehensive association or community is to enable persons in their specific activities to live lives of goodness (*arete*, also translated as "virtue" or "excellence," Pol. 3.9.1280a24–81a6 [*Politics*, Aristotle 1987]). Cities are identified by their regimes, and the large part of Aristotle's *Politics* is a study of how the various regimes do or do not enable the practice of virtue. When Aristotle identifies aristocracy as the best regime, he does so in light of a judgment that such a political order has the best chance of facilitating good activity, not because aristocracy is best in some abstract sense. This is most evident in his warning, "But while we must look to wealth too, for the sake of the leisure it gives, it is a bad thing that the highest offices, of King and General, should be for sale. Where this practice is legal, wealth becomes of more esteem than virtue and causes the

whole state to become bent on making money. . . . And wherever virtue is not the most highly esteemed thing, there a securely aristocratic constitution is an impossibility" (Pol. 2.11.1273a33–b1).

Like Aristotle, Thomas distinguishes between theoretical or speculative reason and practical reason. The former concerns "necessary things, which cannot be otherwise than they are"; its conclusions "like the universal principles, contain truth without fail." The latter "is busied with contingent matters, about which human actions are concerned." In "matters of action, truth or practical rectitude is not the same for all, as to matters of detail, but only as to the general principles" (ST I–II, qu. 94, a. 4 [*Summa Theologica*, Aquinas 1981]). Also like "the Philosopher," Thomas brings practical reason to bear on the various types of regimes with the question of whether a regime fosters or inhibits the practice of virtue (*De Regno*, II.3; II.4 [1949]; *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, I, Lect. 1, n. 4 [1964]).

While Thomas draws heavily from Aristotle for his understanding of practical reason and its implications for life in society, he alters the context by setting consideration of the moral life within the broad neo-platonic theological sweep of all things being created by and destined to return to God. This *exitus et redivus* dynamic provides the structure for the *Summa*, with the first, second, and third parts addressing the movement from God the Creator, the return to God, and the condition of that return, Christ the mediator, respectively. The effect of so contextualizing practical reason is to shift its aim from directing human flourishing *per se* to directing the human person to God. Marie-Dominique Chenu comments, "The plan of the *Summa* is truly a theological plan, that is, a plan in which God's science is formally and spiritually the principle of man's science, supplying that latter at once with its object, its light, and its character of necessity." So that the force of any tendency to place humanity at the center even of theology does not lead to a misreading of Thomas, Chenu continues, "Indeed, the object of theology is properly and primarily not the economy by which man is the recipient of faith and of grace through Christ but rather it is God in His very reality. All that He has brought to pass in the course of history, all that He has done by way of creation and recreation . . . is formally treated and judged *sub ratione Dei* [under the formality of God]. 'All things are treated in sacred doctrine under the formality of God: either because they are of God Himself, or because they have an order to God as their principle and end' (ST, I, q.1, a.7)" (Chenu 1964, 307–08).

In *Aeterni Patris* (1879), Leo XIII made Thomas' thought the official theology of the Catholic Church, and the *exitus et redivus* dynamic is evident, for instance, in *Immortale Dei* [ID] (1885), "We belong to

Him and must return to Him, since from Him we came" (1981a, 6). Pius XII's "1957 Christmas Address" (1961c) continues the theme in eloquent fashion. "The history of the human race in the world is not a procession of blind forces. It is a marvelous and vital working out of the actual history of the Divine Word. From Him came its first movements and through him it will reach fulfillment on the day when all things will return to their first beginning" (240). More recently, John Paul II reminds us that we are all called to ongoing conversion because we are all "*in statu viatoris*" – on "pilgrimage" towards God (DM 13 [*Dives in Misericordia*, John Paul II 1980]). Within this *exitus et reditus* context, the social teaching has all of the earmarks of practical reason: (1) its aim is to direct human activity or *praxis*, (2) regarding areas of life that are subject to change, (3) with less precision than with theoretical reason, (4) and with a particular focus on which social arrangements facilitate and which hinder the practice of virtue. I will address each of these points in turn.

The first indication that the documents are intended to direct human activity is the popes' own words that this is the case. For instance, in reference to Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* [PP] (1992c), John Paul II writes, "The social doctrine has once more demonstrated its character as an application of the word of God to people's lives and the life of society, as well as to the earthly realities connected to them, offering 'principles of reflection,' 'criteria of judgment,' and 'directives for action'" (SRS 8 [*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, John Paul II 1991]).<sup>1</sup> Perhaps even more importantly, the directives for action have indeed guided concrete *praxis*. This is evident first of all in Pius XI's discussion in *Quadragesimo Anno* (QA, Pius XI 1992) of the "benefits deriving from *Rerum Novarum*" including study circles and formal courses which in turn give rise to "new institutions, by which working men, craftsmen, farmers, wage earners of every kind could give and receive mutual assistance and support" (QA 20 and 23–24). Pius XI himself is responsible for considerable organized activity guided by the reasoning of the social encyclicals. *Quadragesimo Anno* gave strong impetus to the nascent Catholic Action, a lay movement that worked to reform society through institutional reconstruction and legislation. More recently, the social teaching has been drawn upon by liberation and solidarity movements in, for instance, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

The documents of the social tradition also indicate an awareness that their focus is on matters that are subject to change. This is first of all evident in the very title of the "Magna Charta" text: *Rerum Novarum* translates "New Things." Leo issued the encyclical in response to the rise of the industrial economy and its

impact on workers. An extended section of Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (101–125) discusses the changes in capitalism and socialism since *Rerum Novarum*. John XXIII cites the "pronounced dynamism" of human history to make the point that "the problem of bringing social reality into line with the objective requirements of justice is a problem which will never admit of a definitive solution" (PT 155 [*Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII 1992b]).

The process of bringing the social teaching to bear on the exigencies of the times has also made the magisterium increasingly aware of the fact that in order to address changing circumstances, it is also necessary to develop the teaching or doctrine itself. Earlier documents in the canon insist that the teaching is "unchanging and unchangeable" (ID 22; QA 11, 18, and 19). Differences between texts are only apparent, in this view, and are explainable in terms of the changed situation. However, the magnitude of the social changes and the alterations necessary in the teaching made the simple dichotomy between "unchanging principles" and the "application" of such principles to diverse situations unsustainable. For instance, when the Second Vatican Council changed church teaching from an insistence on a Catholic state to an affirmation of constitutionally protected religious freedom, its opening paragraph stated that, "in taking up the matter of religious freedom this sacred Synod intends to develop the doctrine of recent popes on the inviolable rights of the human person and on the constitutional order of society" (DH 1 [*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1966]). By 1991, John Paul II describes his method in *Centesimus Annus* as a "rereading" of *Rerum Novarum*, where he takes a "look back" at Leo and his times, a "look around" at the "new things" that present themselves to us now, and a "look to the future." John Paul is straightforward about the implications of such an approach for the social teaching. "Today, at a distance of a hundred years, this approach affords me the opportunity to contribute to the development of Christian social doctrine" (CA 3 and 5).

The authors of the documents are also aware that their topics are subject to less precision than is possible with theoretical reason. This is first of all evident in the acknowledgment, in both the earlier and later documents, that there is a legitimate diversity in the application of the teaching's "directives for action." Paul VI's 1971 *Octogesima Adveniens* (OA, Paul VI 1992b) is perhaps the most forceful on this point. "There is of course a wide diversity among situations in which Christians – willingly and unwillingly – find themselves according to regions, socio-political systems, or cultures. In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal

validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church" (OA 3 and 4).<sup>2</sup> Increased responsibility for discernment is placed with the persons in the specific locale in question because the precise implications of the directives for action are not everywhere the same.

In keeping with the move, discussed above, from a strict principles/application distinction to an awareness that the principles themselves can develop, the discussion of the fact that practical reason is less precise than speculative reason extends, in the later documents, beyond an acknowledgment of diverse applications to a recognition that the formulations of the principles are also never fully adequate. This is first found in John XXIII's "Message to Humanity" (1966) that opened the Second Vatican Council. "The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character" (715).<sup>3</sup> This substance/presentation distinction is similar to that between truth and justified belief made in contemporary moral philosophy and Christian ethics (Stout 1988).

John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor* (VS, 1993), an encyclical on the foundations of the moral life, is helpful in that it sets the substance/presentation distinction in its proper theological context. It may seem odd that a document often interpreted (Selling and Jans 1994) – and not incorrectly so – as being in large part an attempt to set definite limits on the practice of moral theology would evidence the epistemological humility to recognize that truth "surpasses our telling. All our concepts fall short of its ultimately unfathomable grandeur." John Paul turns to interrelational language where "truth beckons reason." Moral theology "responds to the invitation of truth" (109). There is therefore a "difference between the deposit or the truths of faith and the manner in which they are expressed" (29). The reason for the humility is evident in the first section of the document, where John Paul establishes the theological context by doing the equivalent of a *midrash* on the dialogue between the rich young man and Jesus (Mt 19:16–26). Here we find that it is precisely the *exitus et reditus* framework which, by establishing God as the object of the moral life, places limits on human knowledge. The passage is worth quoting at some length. Elaborating on Jesus's words, "Why do you ask me about what is

good? There is only one who is good" (v. 17), the Pope writes,

[T]he answer to the question, "What good must I do to have eternal life?" can only be found by turning one's mind and heart to the one who is good: "No one is good but God alone" (Mk 10:18; cf. Lk 18:19). Only God can answer the question what is good because he is the good itself. To ask about the good, in fact ultimately means to turn towards God, the fullness of goodness. Jesus shows that the young man's question is really a religious question and that the goodness that attracts and at the same time obliges man has its source in God, and indeed is God himself... He is the source of man's happiness. Jesus brings the question about morally good action back to its religious foundations, to the acknowledgment of God, who alone is goodness, fullness of life, the final end of human activity and perfect happiness. (VS 9)<sup>4</sup>

In short, the recognition of less than speculative precision in the practical reason of Catholic social teaching is the result of the theo-centering that occurs when the moral life is set within the *exitus et reditus* context.

Finally, in addition to the objective of directing variable and less than fully precise human activity as the object of inquiry, Catholic social teaching follows the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition in its focus on the question of which political economies best facilitate the practice of virtue theologically understood. *Rerum Novarum* states that, "since it is the end of society to make men better, the chief good that society can be possessed of is virtue" (27; cf. also 26) Pius XI perhaps puts it most eloquently in *Divini Redemptoris* (DR, 1981):

Society is for man and not vice versa. This is not to be understood in the sense of liberalistic individualism, which subordinates society to the selfish use of the individual; but only in the sense that by means of an organic union with society and by mutual collaboration the attainment of earthly happiness is placed within reach of all. In a further sense, it is society which affords the opportunities for the development of all the individual and social gifts bestowed on human nature. These natural gifts have a value surpassing the immediate interests of the moment, for in society they reflect divine perfection, which would not be true were man to live alone. But on final analysis, even in this latter function, society is for man, that he may recognize this reflection of God's perfection, and refer it in praise and adoration to the creator. (29)<sup>5</sup>

Like Aristotle and Thomas, then, any recognition of the superiority of one system of political economy over another in the social teachings is at most provisional (Coleman 1991). Even in the later documents, which

favor democracy, the question remains whether it is *true* or *false* democracy, depending on whether the regime facilitates human flourishing (“Christmas 1944”). John Paul II is clear on the provisional nature of any affirmation of a particular social order in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* in a way that summarizes well much of the above discussion:

For the Church does not propose economic or political systems or programs, nor does she show preference for one or the other, provided that human dignity is properly respected and promoted. . . . But the Church is an “expert in humanity,” and this leads necessarily to extend her mission to the various fields in which men and women expend their efforts in search of the always relative happiness which is possible in this world, in line with their dignity as persons. . . . The Church’s doctrine is not a “third way” between liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism, nor even a possible alternative to other solutions less radically opposed to one another; rather, it constitutes a category of its own. Nor is it ideology, but rather the accurate formulation of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence, in society and in the international order, in light of faith and of the church’s tradition. Its main aim is to interpret these realities, determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching on man and his vocation, a vocation which is at once earthly and transcendent; its aim is thus to guide Christian behavior. It belongs to the field, not of ideology, but of theology, and particularly of moral theology. (SRS 41)

### **The Aristotelian-Thomist Tradition of Practical Reason: Implications for Pedagogy**

The documents of Catholic social teaching are addressed to persons in all of the professional vocations, including that of teaching. Indeed, the documents stress the importance of education repeatedly.<sup>6</sup> It is to be assumed, then, that the practices of the profession of teaching ought to follow those outlined by the social teaching. What those practices are depends, in part, on one’s understanding of practical reason in the social teaching. This understanding, in turn, depends in part on one’s interpretation of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition out of which the social teaching develops. It is important, then, to attend to the competing interpretations of this tradition and its implications for pedagogy.

One interpretation begins with the claim that the primary difference between Aristotle and Thomas is the latter’s appropriation of the natural law tradition traceable to the Stoics. This is the line taken, for instance, by Ernest Fortin, who points out that there is no equivalent in Aristotle to the *Summa*’s “Treatise on

Law” (1987, 257–71). According to Fortin, the rootedness of natural law in God’s eternal law gives at least its first principles a “transpolitical” and even universal character. “Human excellence is no longer defined or circumscribed by the conditions of the political life. Through knowledge of the natural law man accedes directly to the common order of reason, over and above the political order to which he belongs as a citizen of a particular society. By sharing in that law he finds himself, along with all other intelligent beings, a member of a universal community” (258). Due to its rootedness in the eternal law and an anthropology developed by theoretical reason, the moral life under the natural law is grounded in “speculative premises.” The result is a moral method that is “more strictly deductive” (260, 259). Such a method produces conclusions in the form of laws. Fortin writes that the person is “immediately aware of the general principles that govern his conduct. As dictates of practical reason these principles constitute a ‘law,’ promulgated by nature itself, which enables him to distinguish between right and wrong. . . . Since they are considered laws in the strict and proper sense of the term, the moral principles in question take on a compulsory character that they did not have for Aristotle and the philosophic tradition generally” (264). Fortin adds as a qualifier that the natural law furnishes only very general standards that are “usually too broad to be of immediate use in guiding one’s actions,” and points up the need for the specificity of legitimately variable human law (265–66). However, the developers of the “new natural law” theory – John Finnis, Germain Grisez, and Joseph Boyle, Jr. being the chief architects – hold that deduction from first principles yields quite specific directives that have all the universality and precision of the conclusions of speculative reason (Finnis 1980, 1983; Grisez 1983; cf. Hittinger 1987). According to Finnis, the natural law principles “determine the method of answering all other practical questions” (deductive) and “determine the whole content of ethics” (1983, 9).

For Fortin and the new natural law theorists, then, the move from a human-focused philosophical framework to a God-centered theological one is a shift from virtue to law. In Fortin’s words, “Within this (theological) context man’s whole moral life acquires a distinctively new orientation: it ceases to be understood solely in terms of human completeness or fulfillment and becomes in the final instance a matter of willing and grateful compliance with a divinely authorized and unconditionally binding law” (Fortin 1987, 265). In this understanding, the virtues simply describe the orientation of appetite necessary to obey the law.

The implications for pedagogy are clear. When practical reason becomes a species of demonstrative

knowledge, then the best classroom format is the lecture. The professor presents the syllogisms which show the truth, in this case as set forth by the church's hierarchical magisterium. Particularly when coupled with the view that the deductive approach can yield precise and universal knowledge on highly specific conclusions, this method makes dialectical interchange unnecessary. Quizzes and exams rather than papers provide the best means of measuring knowledge because ethics now is more like speculative reason – like geometry – and the professor represents the magisterium which in turn represents the law-giving God. Quizzes and exams are better tests of “willing and grateful compliance with a divinely authorized and unconditionally binding law” than papers. If the latter are assigned and if the pedagogy is consistent with the understanding of practical reason, they still function in the same way as quizzes and exams: to reproduce the knowledge demonstrated and thus also to demonstrate obedience to the law. When one disagrees with the teacher (assuming that the teacher is already in obedience to the hierarchical magisterium), one is simply wrong and, if not considered naive, even ungrateful.

If the identifying shift from the philosophical Aristotle to the theological Thomas is less the latter's “Treatise on Law” in the *Summa* than the *exitus et reditus* dynamic of the *Summa* as a whole, then the pedagogical implications are different. The differences become evident if we see how Fortin and the new natural law theorists underread Aristotle and overread Thomas on the place of deduction, universal truths, and law in ethics. For Fortin, Aristotle's ethics lacks a deductive structure that moves from universal truths to compulsory laws. The result, in this view, is an utterly situation-dependent ethics that provides inadequate guidance in particular circumstances. In reference to Aristotle's doctrine of moral virtue as the mean between two extremes, Fortin comments, “Reason tells us, for example, that food and drink are necessary for life, but it cannot specify in any but the most general way how much this or that man should eat or drink” (Fortin 1987, 262).

Closer reading of Aristotle indicates that he does provide an account of universality, rules, and deduction in an ethics that can in fact take the form of commands in particular situations. That this is so is clear if we examine the role of the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (*phronesis*, also translated as “prudence”; NE 6.13.1144b17–1145a6; 10.8.1178a16–19; EE 3.7.1234a29 [*Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle 1992]). Richard Sorabji provides a perspicacious account of how in Aristotle practical wisdom deliberates (NE 6.5.1140a25–b6; 6.7.1141b8–14; 6.9.1142b31; *Rhet.* 1366b20) in light of the good life in general (*pros to eu zen holos*, NE 6.5.1140a25–31), understood in terms

of happiness (*euadimonia*, *Rhet.* 1366–b20) and oriented to the best (*to ariston*, NE 6.7.1141b13; 6.12.1144a32–33). Sorabji's exegesis shows how in Aristotle's view practical wisdom identifies the mean between two extremes in terms of a right rule (*orthos logos*, NE 2.2. 1103b31–34; 3.5. 1114b29; 6.1. 1138b20) that commands (NE 6.10. 1143a8–9). It is noteworthy that Thomas cites Aristotle (NE 6.10) to make his case that the “chief act” of practical wisdom is to “command” (ST II–II, q. 47, a. 8). Thus, it would seem that he would concur with Sorabji's observation that for Aristotle it is “the man of practical wisdom who knows where the mean lies in particular cases” (Sorabji 1980, 206).

There seems to be, therefore, considerable textual evidence that Aristotle's ethics contains much of what Fortin complains is lacking. To be sure, Aristotle's method does not begin with self-evident universal principles, but the good – in light of which persons of practical wisdom deliberate – has validity beyond this or that specific context. In D. J. Allan's words, although “Aristotle does not assume a plurality of independent moral principles,” he does presuppose “a supreme end or good, and a number of rules which can be said either to express the nature of this end, or to provide or suggest the means of its realization” (Allan 1977, 72). Sorabji points out that Aristotle contrasts practical wisdom with experience (NE 6.7 1141b16–21); the former “involves perceiving what to do in particular cases in the light of something more universal” (Sorabji 1980, 207). Practical reason may have a different starting point than theoretical reason – particular cases as distinct from first principles (EE 2.11. 1227b24–25; 28–30; NE 7.8 1151a16–17) – but even here it proceeds in light of “a very general conception of the good” (Sorabji, 207). This is evident in the doctrine of the unity of the virtues. To practice any virtue at all involves knowledge of all of them to a certain extent, and this unity reflects a certain degree of generality. Moreover, although what a virtue requires cannot be *derived* deductively in practical reasoning because of the starting point with the particular case, it can be *represented* syllogistically once the relationship between the *orthos logos* in a particular case and the general conception of the good becomes clear (Sorabji, 208–9). That Aristotle's discussion of moral rules is not more elaborate is not evidence of contextual relativism, as Fortin claims, but of the supposition of its opposite: he thought that the rules were so widely held – at least among the aristocracy – as to not require discussion. Richard Robinson also laments the lack of discussion of principles, but recognizes that the reason is not relativism. On the contrary, Aristotle “did not grasp the fact of moral relativity, the fact, I mean, that sometimes two men, though equally serious and conscientious and obedient to their consciences,

nevertheless find their consciences uttering opposed principles" (Robinson 1997, 90). Aristotle is more like Fortin than the latter supposes.

It appears, then, that Fortin's distinction between Aristotle and Thomas in terms of universality, rules, and deduction versus relativism, virtue, and dialectical insight is overdrawn. This may be because theoretical reason remains his standard. After critiquing Aristotle's doctrine of the mean between two extremes for being insufficiently precise, he comments, "But although this solution may be deemed adequate for purposes of action, it obviously leaves something to be desired from a theoretical point of view." Fortin also finds Aristotle's understanding of practical truth to be wanting because the truth of any given case is "not solely a matter of knowledge." One has to consider circumstances, which "defy analysis in terms of reason alone" (Fortin 1987, 263). From the perspective of theoretical reason, circumstances are not a part of the reasoning process, but they are from the perspective of practical reason. In Allan's words, "Practical reason, then, is for Aristotle not a reasoning process which precedes action, but rather thought expressed in action and controlling it" (Allan 1977, 78).

To put the matter bluntly, Fortin's complaint seems to be that practical reason in Aristotle is not theoretical reason. He therefore downplays or dismisses altogether those aspects of Aristotle's practical reason that are analogous to theoretical reason in order to make his case. This reading of Aristotle appears indebted to Julius Walter and those who have followed his views in one form or another (Walter 1874). According to Walter, the moral virtues, which are habitual states of the appetitive faculty (*orexis*), determine the end of conduct. Practical reason, then, simply discovers the means to this already determined end (cf. Allan 1977, 73–74). Fortin writes that for Aristotle, "the truth of the practical judgment is measured by the mind's conformity with the rectified appetite" (Fortin 1987, 263). To make this reading, Fortin has to underread the role of *phronesis* as an *intellectual* virtue in Aristotle that apprehends the good itself, and does not only determine the appropriate means. Most of Fortin's discussion focuses on the moral virtues, and where he briefly addresses practical wisdom, he bemoans the fact that it is not more like theoretical reason. It appears, then, that Fortin has a tendency to conflate *intellectual* with *theoretical* such that the less that reason is theoretical in the strict sense, the less it is reason at all.

Such a view has problematic implications for teaching and the moral life if we follow Aristotle and hold that "thought itself moves nothing" (*NE* 6.2). Walter and, it appears, Fortin interpret this statement to mean that for Aristotle it is desire alone that moves persons to action, thus the tendency to subsume practical reason under the moral virtues and the

appetites. Fortunately, Aristotle follows his statement with the claim, "but practical thinking can do so," indicating that the first statement refers to speculative thought. In this view, the more practical reason is modeled on theoretical reason, the less it will be able to move persons to action. Fortin's prescription for Aristotle, therefore, is not only not preferable, it is to be avoided if one hopes to have one's students incorporate what they learn about the moral life in class into the whole of their lives.

The role of universal claims, rules, and deduction in teaching can become clearer if we distinguish between how we initially obtain knowledge, how we validate it, and how we engage in its discovery – distinctions which Fortin fails to make. In the course of discussing these distinctions, we will see that for Aristotle, how one teaches depends on the developmental stage of one's students. A person first learns by indication. That is to say, he or she learns by listening to the person with practical wisdom when the latter indicates that some person or act is virtuous. This is most appropriately the mode of learning of the child, whose power of deliberation is immature (*Pol.* 1.13. 1260a12–14). Thus Aristotle tells the child to heed the judgments of his or her elders (*NE* 6.11 1143b11–14). The aim is to give the child enough examples to imitate over time that he or she begins to develop a sense of the general good and thus a somewhat intuitive perception (*nous*) through practiced habituation of what a situation requires. Sorabji points out that the starting point for moral education is actually the last judgment – the conclusion – of a syllogism (Sorabji 1980, 215). If one stops here, then one may think that one performs good actions simply out of habituation – without thinking – and this is Walter's interpretation of Aristotle. True opinion about the good (*sophrosune*) cannot of itself provide a conception of the good (Allan 1977, 77). However, one can then draw on the syllogism itself to *validate* what is known, and, because it articulates the full range of considerations and not just the last judgment, its presentation to youth can bring them to a heightened awareness of the good in general. If one stops at this point, however, the student may think that one first reasons – does the deduction – and then acts. Fortunately, over time the combination of habituation to good example, experience, and exposure to deductive chains of reasoning may lead to the student becoming a person of practical wisdom him- or herself, at which time he or she engages in knowing through dialectical interchange with peers. It is at this stage that the person engages fully, again in Allan's terms, in "thought expressed in action." Fortin appears to view the move from stage one to stage two as a move from Aristotle to Thomas. However, from an Aristotelian perspective, stopping at stage two would constitute arrested intellectual and moral development.

What may make it appear as if Thomas' *Summa*, and in particular the "Treatise on Law," are of the second stage is the question-answer format (stage one) with the answers structured along syllogistic lines (stage two). The deductive formality of the reasoning may even be clearer in the "Treatise on Law" than in other parts of the *Summa*. However, it is important to note that Thomas intends the *Summa* to be an introduction to theology. Such a format is fitting, then, given the teaching aims. Moreover, it is evident from the full structure of the question-answer format itself – beginning with received opinion stated as objections and concluding with Thomas' replies to those objections – that Thomas himself is engaged in a dialectical process of knowing that is, for him, ongoing. Further objections requiring further replies and perhaps even alterations in the answers are expected. If one understands the difference between Aristotle and Thomas in terms of the overall *exitus et reditus* dynamic and not simply the "Treatise on Law," then this open-ended aspect of practical reasoning at its most developed stage becomes more apparent.

It is noteworthy that Thomas' *De Regno*, addressed to a king – that is, one who is already a practitioner – reads much more like Aristotle's *Politics* than it does the *Summa*. One would not conclude from this fact that Thomas holds practical reason to be entirely context dependent; rather, it is further evidence that Thomas, like Aristotle, is aware of the fact that the shape of pedagogy in practical reason is dependent on the concerns and development of the student. If one reads the difference between Aristotle and Thomas in terms of the "Treatise on Law," however, the focus on commanding laws deflects attention away from the overall dynamic of the *Summa*. One pedagogy fits all circumstances as practical reason is made to look and function like speculative reason. Ignored is Thomas' claim, in support of which he cites "the Philosopher" (NE 6.5), that practical wisdom or prudence "resides only in practical reason" and not at all in speculative reason (ST II-II, q.47, a.2).

It is noteworthy and non-coincidental, then, that as modern Catholic social teaching itself undergoes a shift in its understanding of the moral stage of the laity – from children to adults – it also alters its teaching method. Leo XIII refers to the laity as the *imperita multitudo*, variously translated "ignorant multitude" or "illiterate masses" (Murray 1965, 534–5; 538–41). On the basis of this understanding of the laity, Leo argues for a paternalistic government that censors wrong opinion. "The excesses of an unbridled intellect, which unfailingly end in the oppression of the untutored multitude, are not less rightly controlled by the authority of the law than are injuries inflicted by violence upon the weak. And this all the more surely,

because by far the greater part of the community is either absolutely unable, or able only with great difficulty to escape the illusions and deceitful subtleties, especially such as flatter the passions" (LI 23 [*Libertas*, Leo XIII 1981b]). Such a legal authority, in Leo's view, is to be constitutionally bound to and guided by the Catholic church. Here the laity is viewed as being in stage one, where the wise instruct by indication, simply pointing out which acts or views are right and which are wrong. Pius XI continues this perspective in *Quadragesimo Anno*, where he refers to the laity as children fourteen times.<sup>7</sup> The self-understanding expressed in these earlier documents is that the method is deductive with, as noted above, a strong separation between "unchanged and unchangeable" official teaching and specific applications (Curran 1985). Examination of the documents themselves reveal that the reasoning is actually more complex, but the understanding expressed in the documents regarding the operative method indicates that the popes think that it is deductive. Moreover, while *Quadragesimo Anno* does refer to *Rerum Novarum*'s impact in making Catholic workers "leaders of their fellows," it is also the case that the lay associations that grew as a result of Pius's encouragement were thoroughly monitored and even administered by the hierarchical magisterium. Therefore, even though there was a principles (clergy)-applications (laity) distinction and even separation, the parameters of the latter were strictly limited.

A shift in the understanding of the moral development of the laity is evident in Pius XII's Christmas addresses. In his 1944 address, titled "True and False Democracy," the identifying characteristic of the former is that it consists of a "people" as distinct from the "masses." A people "lives and moves by its own life energy." Each person is "conscious of his own responsibility and of his own views." In contrast, the masses "are inert of themselves and only can be moved from the outside" and are thus "an easy plaything in the hands of anyone who exploits their instincts and impressions; ready to follow in turn today this way, tomorrow another." While Leo XIII moved from the observation concerning the ignorant masses to the prescription that there be a paternalistic government, Pius XII's experience of dictatorial government led him to view such pliability as a great liability, and thus accents both as observation and as normative social theory the practice of responsibility in freedom among the laity. The masses "are the great enemy of true democracy and of its ideal of liberty and equality" (Pius XII 1944, 81). The good fortune is that the experience of living under fascist regimes has brought about a new reality. "Moreover – and this is perhaps the most important point – beneath the sinister



lightning of the war that encompasses them, in the blazing heat of the furnace that imprisons them, the people have, as it were, awakened from a long torpor. They have assumed, in relation to the state and those who govern, a new attitude – one that questions, criticizes, distrusts. Taught by bitter experience, they are more aggressive in opposing the concentration of dictatorial power that cannot be censured or touched, and call for a system of government more in keeping with the dignity and liberty of citizens” (79).

Like Pius XII, the Second Vatican Council accents persons’ growing awareness of their dignity and thus their role as agents in their own destiny (GS 9, 26, 55, 63, 73). This is a theme that continues in church teaching to the present (DH 1; PP 15, 34, 64–65, 77; OA 15, 22, 47; JW 4, 17, 52, 71; RH 17; SRS 26; CA 51). *Gaudium et spes* and the later documents also follow Pius XII in claiming that mature agency involves freedom with responsibility. The Council writes, “In every group or nation there is an ever increasing number of men and women who are conscious that they themselves are the artisans and the authors of the culture of their community. Throughout the world there is a similar growth in the combined sense of independence and responsibility. Such a development is paramount for the spiritual and moral maturity of the human race” (GS 55).<sup>8</sup>

Such a new stage in the development of the laity requires a new pedagogy where the laity join in deliberation with the hierarchy and thus become a part of the magisterium rather than simply being commanded by it. The Second Vatican Council’s *Gaudium et spes* is the first to give clear articulation to such a method. The church’s task is that of “scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in light of the gospel” (GS 4). Here, *church* means all members. “With the help of the Holy Spirit it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age in light of the divine Word” (44). The method of scrutinizing the signs of the times in light of the gospel and tradition (46) is restated in official documents up to the present.<sup>9</sup>

At first exposure and in comparison to the earlier attempts at deduction, this method of reasoning may appear excessively loose – even prone to relativism. Yet the process of reading the signs of the times in light of the gospel is quite similar to Aristotle’s attempt to seek the mean between two extremes in a particular case in light of a general conception of the good. Also like Aristotle, the popes and council understand that the ongoing practice of such discernment by a disciplined community does give rise, in the words of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II cited earlier, to more specific “principles of reflection, norms of judgment, and directives for action.”

Perhaps most importantly, we find reflected in the popes’ and council’s hard-won experience two points from Aristotle and Thomas. First, what is considered proper pedagogy is dependent upon one’s reading of the student. When the hierarchy’s perception of the laity shifted from viewing them as susceptible children to thinking of them and urging them to be responsibly free adult moral agents, the pedagogy changed accordingly. Second, without coercion, speculative thought or practical reason that aspires to be like speculative thought moves no one to action. Again in Pius XII’s words, the “masses” are “inert of themselves and can only be moved from the outside.” A pedagogy that treats the laity as if they are children prepares them poorly for a world in which both oppressive governments and what John Paul II calls “consumer civilization” attempt to keep them that way (RH 16).<sup>10</sup>

In the next section, I will show how a turn in the interpretation of the primary principles of reflection, norms of judgment, and directives for action reinforce the shift in practical reasoning in the documents of modern Catholic social teaching. This will allow me to describe in detail the pedagogical implications of these changes as embodied in the new Program in Catholic Social Tradition at the University of Notre Dame.

### **The Common Good: Providing the Conditions for Human Flourishing**

One of the central claims throughout Catholic social teaching is that the person is indeed social. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, “By his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential” (GS 12).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, a helpful concept with which to begin an analysis of the documents is the socially oriented one of the common good. Such analysis will also show how the shift from viewing the laity as children to considering and urging them to be freely responsible adults manifests itself in the articulation of the core concepts – the directives for action – in the teaching.

The definition that, with some variation, modern Catholic teaching gives for the common good is that it is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allows social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment” (GS 26).<sup>12</sup> The first step to unpacking this definition is to elaborate on these conditions of fulfillment. Catholic social teaching responds that the core condition is a kind of unity in plurality that the documents discuss under the analogous terms of harmony, order, balance, and solidarity. The documents bring this core norm to bear on the complete range of the kinds of social relationships – for instance, those of employer and worker, church

and state, state and economy, economy and family, rich and poor, agriculture and industry, individual and society. Its ubiquity and range of application are evidence of its role as the governing norm that gives the concept of the common good its fundamental substance.<sup>13</sup> The basic idea is not new. Pius XI refers, for instance, to Thomas Aquinas in making the point: "Order, as the Angelic Doctor well defines, is unity arising from the apt arrangement of a plurality of objects; hence, true and genuine social order demands various members of society, joined together by a common bond" (QA 84, citing Thomas, SCG 3, 71, and ST I, q. 65; a. 2, c.c.).

Over the course of modern Catholic social teaching, however, the understanding of what kind of social arrangements produce a unified diversity undergoes a basic shift, particularly in the political and economic spheres. We have, to continue the musical metaphor, a modulation in the harmony. The earlier documents stress the importance of the hierarchical structuring of society across the full range of social spheres. One must relate properly "higher" and "lower" orders, groups, or persons, or else risk disorder. Gradually and selectively, Catholic social teaching has shifted to relative egalitarianism: the presupposition that equality best facilitates harmony and therefore that it is inequality that must be explained (cf. Christiansen 1984, 651–75). In keeping with the teaching that persons are more than material beings, what is in question is first of all an equality of access to the conditions of flourishing in the complete sense of the term. The later documents interpret such access in terms of persons' participation in – as opposed to their marginalization from – the various social spheres. Coupled with this shift in prudential judgment regarding what best facilitates harmony is a change in the degree to which the vision of an egalitarian eschatological community is allowed to impact the shaping of temporal society. The more the spiritual and temporal dimensions of salvation history intertwine the more egalitarian the social theory.

This much said, it is important to make some clarifications before proceeding with the analysis. What occurs is a gradual shift in presumption in a limited range of social spheres. This means, first of all, that neither before nor after the shift does Catholic social teaching understand either hierarchical order or equality to be disharmonious *per se*. The change is in which ordering, once the general guidelines are set out, enjoys the benefit of presumption and which bears the primary burden of explanation. A presumption in favor of equality does not entail, for instance, that good reasons cannot be given for hierarchical structures within a business corporation, though it would mean greater alertness to the abuses of the latter organizational pattern. Secondly, the shift is a gradual

one. However much the Second Vatican Council might have been a watershed event, the developments that are the focus of this section begin to take place early on in modern Catholic social teaching and continue to unfold in the writings of Paul VI and John Paul II. Thirdly, the shift in presumption does not take place to the same degree or even in the same way in all of the social spheres. It has been greatest in the political and economic spheres, and far less so in the domestic sphere, particularly as this pertains to relations between genders.

In Leo XIII's writings, the hierarchical language of "higher" and "lower" extends across the various social spheres. In each case, the one in the "higher" position is to command, legislate, judge, and punish for the sake of the common good; the one in the "lower" position is to obey – to carry out the order – also for the common good. Therefore, even in the economic sphere, where Leo decries excessive inequality and calls for a just wage that allows workers to acquire some private property, he does not, as his successors do, recommend worker ownership of the means of production or participation in workplace decision-making. Similarly, while he follows Aquinas in stating that there is no one legitimate form of government exclusive of others, his political theory is strongly anti-democratic. The "untutored multitude" is incapable of self-rule. There is no question that God has "set husbands over their wives" in the familial sphere (*ID* 20). In each case, only through the "participation of" the "higher" in the "lower" is the latter an active agent (*RN* 28; *LI* 8).

Leo reinforces the affirmation of social inequality in a number of ways. A hierarchical cosmology provides a template social organization. A paternal metaphor offers a more proximate image. Those who rule should do so "as fathers, for the rule of God over man is most just, and is tempered always with a father's kindness" (*ID* 5). Leo also draws on the observation that there are "innumerable differences" between persons to back "inequality in condition." Society needs both rich and poor "to maintain the equilibrium" (*RN* 14–15). To keep the society harmonious, the two classes are to exercise different virtues. The rich are to exercise "charity" and "generosity," while the poor are to display "endurance" and "tranquil resignation" (*RN* 14, 18, 20, 24). While persons are all equal in their souls, the soul is utterly separate from concrete history, such that the realization of equality is not an appropriate goal for this life (*RN* 20, 32; *LI* 3). The afterlife serves as the equalizer, punishing the rulers and the rich if they did not practice generosity and rewarding the ruled and the poor if they were patient (*ID* 5, *LI* 33, *RN* 18). These multiple backings reinforce the claim that to break with the hierarchical structuring is to foster disorder, and so violate the common good. Arguments in the economic sphere that

push beyond a just wage and charity threaten the strong, virtually absolute, right to private property that is necessary to secure economic hierarchy, and thus stability (RN 12, 30). Calls for broadly distributed political agency are “well calculated to flatter and to inflame many passions” (ID 31). Such calls are “at variance on many points with not only the Christian, but even the natural law. Amongst these [immoral] principles the main one lays down that as all men are alike by race and nature, so in like manner all are equal in the control of their life” (ID 23–24). Because of such views, “the risk of public disturbance is ever hanging over our heads” (ID 31).

We have already noted the shift to greater political egalitarianism with Pius XII’s distinction between “the masses” and “a people.” The shift to relative egalitarianism in the economic and political spheres becomes so thorough in the writings from John XXIII to John Paul II that not only do they no longer give the presumption to hierarchy, they focus on the “gap” between rich and poor, powerful and weak, as a problem of particular concern, not only in economic life, but in all spheres of society. Reference to John Paul II will have to suffice: “This fact is universally known. The state of inequality between individuals and between nations not only still exists; it is increasing. It still happens that side by side with those who are wealthy and living in plenty there exist those living in want, suffering misery. . . . This is why moral uneasiness is destined to become more acute” (DM 11).<sup>14</sup>

The primary problem with inequality is that it denies groups and persons the ability to participate in the life of the institutions that constitute civil society. The repeated call in these documents for society to be so shaped that groups and persons can “participate in,” “share in,” or “take part in” its activities is so frequent that *participation* itself becomes the new norm guiding assessment of the health of the common good – that is, of whether groups and persons in fact have access to the conditions of flourishing.<sup>15</sup> The oppositional term is “marginalization.”<sup>16</sup> The link between equality and participation is so tight that the documents in this span often couple the terms, such as when Paul VI refers to “the aspiration to equality and the aspiration to participation” as the “two forms of man’s dignity and freedom” (OA 22). It is also clear from these documents that equality is not an end in itself, but has value only insofar as it enables groups and persons to participate in the life of humanity. Immediately after he identifies the two aspirations, Paul issues a warning: “If, beyond legal rules, there is really no deeper feeling of respect for and service to others, then even equality before the law can serve as an alibi for flagrant discrimination, continued exploitation, and actual contempt. Without a renewed

education in solidarity, an overemphasis on equality can give rise to an individualism in which each one claims his own rights without being answerable for the common good” (OA 23).

The documents back this solidarity-informed egalitarianism in a number of ways that contrast directly with the backings for hierarchy. Instead of natural inequality, there is natural equality. *Gaudium et Spes*, for instance, admonishes, “Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God’s likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ, and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition” (29). Those instances where persons do have different abilities do not lead to a justification of social stratification, but to heavier obligation on the talented and fortunate to aid others. “[N]o justification is ever found for those who surpass the rest to subject others to their control in any way,” argues *Pacem in Terris*. “Rather they have a more serious obligation which binds each and everyone to lend mutual assistance to others in their efforts for improvement” (87). The key theological shift is the location of equality not in a soul separate from human history and in an afterlife and endtime utterly beyond it, but in human dignity, both body and soul, and in salvation history as it imbues and is, in turn, reflected in human activity. While careful to keep salvation history and human history distinct, these documents allow the two to interact in such a way that the equality in solidarity that marks the end of the former can be a concrete aspiration of the latter, and the work of the latter can contribute to the aims of the former. According to *Gaudium et Spes*, the “earthly and the heavenly city penetrate each other” (GS 40). The result is a call not to “tranquil resignation” on the part of the bulk of humankind, but to agency. The Council declares, “[T]he expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age. Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ’s kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of concern to the kingdom of God” (39).

As modern Catholic social teaching develops, then, it becomes increasingly clear that relative equality rather than hierarchy is the primary form of the harmony that is the necessary condition for the flourishing that constitutes the common good. Moral agency through participation in the various associations and institutions of society constitutes the main form of that flourishing because it also is how groups and persons participate in the life of God.

While formal equality has gained the presumption over formal hierarchy, it alone, although necessary, is not a sufficient condition for flourishing. Indeed, the practice of equality without the practice of the virtue of solidarity does not yield harmony at all, but rather an individualism that is characterized by the domination of the language of personal or private rights.

Indeed, from the idea of an egalitarian concept of the common good we find extrapolated related terms that fill out the social theory of Catholic teaching in a way that is decidedly not individualistic. Rather than simply bulwarks against infringements of private liberty, rights – in this view that emphasizes participation in the various spheres of society – are the “minimum conditions for life in community” (*EJA* 79–84 [*Economic Justice for All*, National Conference of Catholic Bishops 1986]). The primary duty of those already participating in the life of society is to make the sacrifices necessary so that those who are presently marginalized can also become active participants. This is one of the key meanings of the phrase “option for the poor” that has become part of the official lexicon since the 1970’s (*OA* 23). In John Paul II’s words, “the whole tradition of the Church bears witness” to the “option or love of preference for the poor” (*SRS* 42). Such witness is to manifest itself in all activity from ownership and the use of goods to the distribution of power. “[I]t is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of lifestyles, of modes of production and consumption, and of established structures of power which today govern societies” (*CA* 58), all of which is to take place “in the context of the common good” (*SRS* 39). The duty of the poor or marginalized, in turn, is to exercise those virtues – particularly solidarity – necessary for them to become active agents in the building up of the common good. We are a long distance from the counsels of *Rerum Novarum* advising the poor to suffer patiently and the well-off to give out of their excess once they have reached their stage in life.

Regulating this movement from marginalization to participation for the sake of the common good is the principle of subsidiarity.<sup>17</sup> The principle articulates philosophically the insight that the best associations or institutions for addressing a particular situation are those that are most proximate to it. Properly understood, subsidiarity cuts in two directions. First of all, it carries a presumption against direct involvement by large-scale institutions. The role of the larger institutions is to support, not to replace, the smaller ones. In fact, the root meaning of the Latin *subsidium* is “support.” The larger institutions have difficulty discerning and responding to the unique textures of human life. If they usurp the prerogative of

the smaller, more intimate institutions, the result can be the opposite of what was intended. However, subsidiarity also affirms that the role of the larger institutions in the form of support is positive and necessary. In fact, in extreme situations, the larger, more remote institutions can intervene directly, but care needs to be taken that this be a short-term remedy, or else the smaller, more proximate associations will atrophy. Understood this way, the principle of subsidiarity minimizes or qualifies hierarchical involvement in favor of the more egalitarian exchange that can take place when the primary activity is on the smaller scale. Even where there are hierarchical aspects to responding to a situation, the more egalitarian aspects are to take the lead.

As indicated earlier, this egalitarian understanding of the common good and its related concepts imbues the analysis of multiple social spheres. The next question that arises, then, is that of what such egalitarianism looks like in detail in an educational setting. The University of Notre Dame has established an undergraduate Program in Catholic Social Tradition. Those who have designed the program have done so in light of the social teaching. It therefore provides a good case for examining more specifically the pedagogical implications of the social teaching.

### **Practicing the Common Good: The Formation of Responsible Adult Participation**

In 1994, a small group of faculty began to gather to assess the possibility of developing an undergraduate program that would make it possible for the university’s undergraduates to study and to live Catholicism’s social tradition. In 1996, the group asked me as a member to direct our efforts. Two factors created some exigency in establishing just such a program. The first is that few Catholics, whether at Notre Dame or elsewhere, know the social teaching. John Paul II poses the rhetorical question, “It must be asked how many Christians really know and put into practice the principles of the church’s social doctrine” (*TMA* [*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, John Paul II 1994]). The American bishops comment that “our social heritage is unknown by many Catholics. Sadly, our social doctrine is not shared or taught in a consistent and comprehensive way in too many of our schools” (“Sharing Catholic Social Teaching,” National Conference of Catholic Bishops 1998). The second exigency is the fact that Notre Dame graduates go on to assume positions of great power in all spheres of social life, including National Security Advisor; Chair, President, or CEO of Motorola, Texaco, Mobile, and the Chicago Mercantile Exchange; executive producer of “Nightline,” and a nationally

syndicated talkshow host. The faculty group worked on program design for four years and their proposal was approved by the University in December 1998. Autumn 1999 was the first semester of the running of the program (cf. [www.nd.edu/~cstpprog](http://www.nd.edu/~cstpprog)). Given the fact that the faculty group designed the program “in light of the social teaching” as distinct from deducing it from principles, what is put forward is the result of discernment rather than entailment, and is, therefore, both allowing of variability and open to modification.

The core of the program is an undergraduate *concentration* – an interdisciplinary minor – in the Catholic social tradition. The goal of the concentration is to foster relative egalitarian participation by the students in practical inquiry – that is, intellectual inquiry that guides and is informed by *praxis* for the sake of the common good. The concentration consists of a core seminar (three credits), three electives (three credits each), and a selection of three one-credit colloquia or experiential learning seminars. The aims of the program in its structure and pedagogy can be made clear through elaboration on the core seminar, which I teach, with other elements of the program drawn upon where helpful.

The first way that the core seminar tries to foster free and responsible participation is to set as its aim the development of the students such that when they complete the course, they can join in any graduate seminar on Catholic social teaching and related topics. The graduate seminar is structured as much as possible to simulate the exchange that the students will experience at academic conferences and in the public forum. The focus is on the close reading of primary texts with the expectation that the gathering of any secondary information is primarily the responsibility of the student. One student prepares a short paper on the week's reading to be made available the day before class; another student prepares a response. The class begins with the response. Dialogue between author and respondent ensues, and then broadens to include the rest of the class. The professor serves as a moderator who, when necessary, guides the conversation, makes clarifying points, and even gives brief *ad hoc* lectures when thicker background information or conceptual explanation seems required. The ideal class is one where the professor needs to say nothing. In classes where there are a number of students who have taken my courses before, I often have a student serve as moderator. Here we have relative egalitarianism regulated by the principle of subsidiarity: the professor serves a supporting function and involves him- or herself directly only when necessary, and then with the commitment to remove him- or herself from direct participation as soon as the discussion allows. The professor demonstrates knowledge in lecture form only when the dialectic among the students has broken

down and must always be in service to the restoration of the dialectic.

The egalitarianism here is not absolute – it does not eliminate hierarchy – it simply forms the presumptive mode of engagement until the situation requires otherwise. As indicated earlier, equality is not an end in itself, but rather serves the common good, and it may be necessary to shift to more hierarchical modes at certain points. Indeed, as long as courses require evaluation of students on the part of the faculty, there will necessarily be an ongoing hierarchical element, one which is backed by judgments about the professor's expertise. Even so, the presumption on the side of egalitarianism implies a pedagogy where the professor also continually learns from her or his students and is explicit about that learning process.

The pedagogical question that arises is that of how to facilitate the development of undergraduates such that they can flourish in such a setting. Much depends, of course, on the state of undergraduate learning. The first task is to assure that the class is of seminar size. In large universities with research aspirations, the press to reduce faculty courseloads and so to enlarge the size of classes is a constant. In designing the Program in Catholic Social Tradition, the faculty group required that the core seminar have no more than fifteen students. I take a number of steps in the first half of the course to prepare the students for dialectic. First, I make secondary resources available on reserve at the library so that the students can readily access the best of these texts. Also, in the first week, I lecture on the basic themes in Catholic social teaching. This aids the students in knowing what to look for when reading the texts. Moreover, given that the students read one document a week, on Tuesday in the final five to ten minutes I elaborate more on general themes and on Thursday at the same time I discuss themes to look for in the particular upcoming document. Therefore, the lectures are more than *ad hoc*, but are still kept at a minimum. Finally, rather than have a paper-response-conversation format, in the first half of the semester I take what I call a “salient themes” approach. Each student writes one to two paragraphs on three themes, complete with citations, that appeared to be salient to him or her for each class. The class begins with the professor asking for a volunteer to offer a salient theme. After the student presents the theme, the professor asks if others picked up on the theme as well. The salient themes approach seeks to draw on the interrelated nature of the various themes and concepts in Catholic social teaching to generate dialectical conversation, but with the professor more active than in the paper-response-conversation approach. The aim here is to use the salient themes approach so that the students build a fund of working knowledge of the basic themes that will in time make

them ready for the paper-response-conversation approach.

All of these adjustments to the undergraduate seminar function in the attempt to bring the students to point where they are able to participate as free and responsible adults in egalitarian dialectics, and in the second half of the course we assume the paper-response format of the graduate seminar. Here again the pedagogy follows subsidiarity: while needed, the professor involves him- or herself rather directly in the running of the class, but when the students demonstrate greater capacity for generating and sustaining conversation, then the professor recedes to a more indirect, supportive role.

Addressing the question of the option for the poor occurs at different levels. Within the classroom, it alerts the professor to the dynamics of the conversation with attention to who is participating and who is not and whether one person's participation is marginalizing someone else. Here, I pay special attention to matters of gender for two reasons. First, there is empirical data that shows that men tend to dominate in classroom discussion in a way that directly affects women's participation. Second, while there is not room to make the case here, official Catholic gender theory – with its emphasis on the man as the active “head” and the woman as receptive “heart” in any association – contributes to this dynamic (cf. Whitmore 1997). On the programmatic level, the option for the poor manifests itself in an open enrollment policy. Some of the concentrations at Notre Dame have competitive entrance. This latter policy favors students who attended stronger high schools and biases the concentrations against students who Notre Dame accepted with somewhat lesser credentials for purposes of diversity. Competitive entrance based on freshman-year grades has the effect of excluding precisely those students who the option for the poor in Notre Dame's admissions policy attempts to invite to participate in the life of the community. This leads to the third, university-wide level, consideration with regard to option for the poor, and that is that, due to rising tuition and the structure of financial aid, the students who attend Notre Dame themselves increasingly come from fortunate backgrounds. The structure and policies of the Program in Catholic Social Tradition themselves cannot alter this situation, but perhaps its students and faculty at some point can contribute to a change in the trend (Pope 1994).

In addition to the writing that arises out of the close reading of texts, the core seminar requires that students spend two to three hours per week in a setting that is similar to that of their anticipated professional vocation. The students are to interview the persons in the setting, observe their practices, and, to the degree possible, participate in the activities of the

workplace. The students also keep a journal, writing what I call a “pastoral ethnography,” that is, ethnographic reflection on the life of the setting in light of the social teaching. In the final project, the student constructs what a workplace of her or his anticipated professional vocation would look like in light of the social teaching. This project can be done through any one of a variety of media, from the essay to the design and miniature construction of a housing development. Students are encouraged to use the modes of expression required in their anticipated professions.

This experiential learning dimension of the course follows from the insights from the tradition of practical reason that some experience is necessary even to learn the practical sciences<sup>18</sup> – thus the immersion in the professional setting; and that practical reason serves to guide *praxis* (cf. Pfeil 1999) – thus the final project of constructing a workplace. This is as opposed to an understanding of practical reason that attempts to model the deductive format of speculative reason, which makes experience-informed dialectic unnecessary. Outside of the core course the program requires one to two credits of work in experiential-learning courses, and a proposal is now before the development office for funding for a more extensive internship program. In the meantime, we accept as electives three-credit internships that are part of other programs as long as the written requirement relates the experience to the Catholic social tradition.

As indicated, the focus of the experiential learning is on the anticipated vocation of the student. This is because the social teaching itself addresses persons in the professional vocations. The faculty committee therefore designed the curricular part of the program as an interdisciplinary concentration rather than a major with the idea that the concentration should inform rather than displace study within the student's major, whatever the area of study. One of the side-effects of the lack of knowledge among Catholics about their social teaching is that they tend to assume that it requires a radical life like that of Dorothy Day. Many of the implications of the social teaching are indeed counter-cultural. (For instance, given the relative scarcity of goods, the claim that the goods of creation are intended for everyone suggests a maximum as well as a minimum living wage.) Still, how the teaching is lived out can take many forms. The supposition that the social teaching requires Catholic Worker-like austerity frequently leads to the conclusion that such a way of life cannot be taken on as a whole, but only in the form of occasional, if regular, volunteer work. In lieu of specific knowledge about the social teaching, then, it comes to be understood as something one does alongside of, but not integrated with, the practices of the rest of one's life. Again, this runs counter to the

tradition itself; thus the accent on professional vocations in the Concentration.

### Conclusion: Prospects for Practical Reason at Catholic Colleges and Universities

In 1884, F. H. Bradley commented that the idea of practical reason "has been placed on the shelf of interesting illusions," and it is precisely the orientation towards "thought expressed in action" in the proposal for the Program in Catholic Social Tradition that met with the most resistance in the College Council. The argument was that practical wisdom is not knowledge appropriate for earning credit in a modern university. Closely related was the objection that the Program is confessionally oriented. Belief in the tradition studied would involve attempts to live it and, it was feared, to require others to believe and live it. What was offered as an alternative was a *study of religions* type of program in social traditions generally, including Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and a variety of other traditions.

We had several interrelated responses. First, we argued that, *pace* the current practices of universities, the tradition of practical reason is a long and, perhaps until recently, respected one. Moreover, the alternative offered, which when worked out amounted to one course or less per tradition, was, if taken as fully adequate, a recipe for dilettantism. We noted that the *study of religion* approach has its own set of institutional presuppositions and practices; it is not as value-neutral as it purports to be. We also made it clear that we were certainly open to others proposing a distinct concentration in, for instance, the Jewish social tradition; we were just not the persons to do so.

While the opposition to the proposal was deeply felt and vocal, it was not, as the 31–2 final vote indicates, representative of the College of Arts and Letters. This fact raises the question of whether Bradley's pronouncement applies to colleges and universities that have kept their religious affiliations at the center of their identity. Here, the opponents of the proposal may well be right. It may be precisely the confessional mission at such colleges and universities that has served to maintain the linkage between the intellectual life and the active life. If this is the case, then it may be possible to establish similar programs elsewhere. A grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion to the University of Notre Dame has made possible the project "Teaching Catholic Social Teaching," which will facilitate the development of such programs at twelve Catholic colleges and universities. An article on that project will follow upon the latter's completion, at which time there may be more to say in response to Bradley.

### Notes

1. cf. also QA 59 and MM 241 (*Mater et Magistra*, John XXIII 1992a).
2. cf. also, for instance, LI 9, ID 46, 48, RN 42, DR 34.
3. see also GS 62 (*Gaudium et Spes*, Second Vatican Council 1992); EN 63 and 65 (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI 1992a).
4. cf. also 10–11; GS 41.
5. cf. also 52; ID 32, "Christmas 1942," 54; MM 20, 246, PT 146, GS 87.
6. see, for instance, LE 12 and 18 (*Laborem Excerens*, John Paul II 1992b), SRS 44, CA 33.
7. In the opening greeting and 10, 12, 15, 39, 44, 100, 109, 112, 123, 128, 141, 146, and 148.
8. cf. also 63, 68, 87; DH 1, 2, 7, 8; PP 6, 15, 22, 30; OA 2, 41; JW 7, 10, 71; RH 16; SRS 39.
9. DH 15, PP 2, 13; OA 1, 3, 4; JW 2; EN 75; DM 2; SRS 7; CA 3.
10. cf. also RH 15; SRS 28; CA 28, 29, 33, 36, 37, 39–41; EN 55.
11. cf. also ID 3; LI 21; RN 37, 38; QA 118; DR 29; MM 60, 219; PT 23, 31, 46; DH 4.
12. cf. also GS 74; MM 65, PT 58, DH 6, PP 42, SRS 38.
13. cf. ID 14, RN 15–16, 21; "Christmas 1957"; PT 1–5; GS 8, 35, 56, 78; PP 17; SRS 26, 38–40.
14. cf. also John XXIII, MM 69; PT 63; Second Vatican Council, GS 63, 71, 88; Paul VI, PP 8–9; John Paul II, LE 17, SRS 9, 12–16, 28, 39, 42, 44–45, CA 33.
15. See MM 49, 61, 65, 75–77, 91–92; PT 26, 40–41, 56, 73–74, 79, 145–47, 150; GS 9, 31, 60, 65, 71; PP 1, 6, 27–28, 30; OA 13, 22–23, 41, 47; JW 6, 9, 18, 28, 42, 46, 53, 55, 65, 67; RH 17; LE 14, 22; SRS 15, 17, 33, 39, 44–45; CA 35, 43, 46.
16. cf., for instance, JW 10, 16; EN 30, CA 33, 42.
17. cf. QA 79–80; MM 53, 117; PT 63–65, 140–1; GS 74–5; PP 33; OA 46; FC 45.
18. NE 1.3. 1095a2–4; 1.4 1095b2–8; 10.9 1179b24–26; Pol. 1334b6; 1338b4.

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