CHARACTER EDUCATION IN GREECE AND ROME

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"MODELS OF VIRTUE abound in our own country, models of culture must be derived from Greece," says Cicero in that one of his essays which comes nearest to being a contribution to the progress of thought, the De Oratore. Another great interpreter of Rome's golden age, contemplating her imperial destiny, lends striking confirmation to his fellow countryman in the celebrated words of the sixth Aeneid: "Others (the Greeks), I doubt not, will mould the breathing brass to more flesh-like softness and spread over marble the look of life. Others will plead better at the bar, will trace with the rod the courses of heaven, and foretell the risings of the stars. Yours, Roman, be the lesson to govern the nations as their lord: this is your destined culture, to impose the settled rule of peace, to spare the humbled, and to crush the proud."

Much scientific study and much profound reflection remain to be done before students approach even an approximate unanimity on the question of what constitutes virtue, what is morality, not to mention the further difficult problem of what are the most desirable and effective methods of training for character. In attempting to interpret the national ideals of character among the Greeks and Romans, and how they consciously strove for their attainment, it will be appropriate to state a safe generalization: in its early history a people is dominated by customary morality; as it becomes more cultivated customary morality yields gradually to the morality of reason, reflective morality, though there is a large residue of customary morality in the most enlightened nations. The subject of training for character therefore becomes complex. The eternal puzzle of whether the virtues can be taught does not lessen the effort, unless indeed we adopt the attitude of Professor Dewey, who has defined moral education broadly enough to make it include all sound education. The following discussion will be in terms of the accepted ideals of the respective periods of classical history.

Classical culture has a wide reach. Though Roman education is largely derivative from Greece after the invasion of Hellenism in the third century B. C. and though it may be viewed as a continuous whole, there are sharp contrasts and widely varying emphases. This is in fact true as between Athens and Sparta, the only Greek states of which considerable records of educational progress survive. A knowledge of the different political constitution of the Greek city-states and the Roman state, both during the Republic and during the Empire, is essential to the understanding of their several educational systems. While patriotism was commonly regarded as the primary virtue and citizenship was the goal of education among both peoples, the conceptions of effective citizenship were widely divergent.

Certain social and political ideas were common throughout the Greek world. Striking as are the antitheses between Ionian Greek and Dorian Greek in matters which will be discussed later, the numerous states of both divisions all possessed a citizenship which constituted a minority of the population. Slavery was a *sine qua non* to Spartan oligarchy

and Athenian democracy, and it is defended by Aristotle. But the leisure that it gave the citizen class for higher activities is no more than partial recompense for the inevitable evil consequences. Again, while Sparta gave relatively more consideration to women than did Athens, woman's place in Greek thought was a vulnerable point in their system of training for character.

The city-state, which was the universal political unit among the Greeks, had a strong effect upon the attitude of all Hellenic thinkers. It led them to regard the state as an organism. The racial homogeneity of its citizens, in addition to their small numbers and to the fact that they lived in close proximity to each other, gave the figure of a living organism a reality that a modern political scientist would never feel in respect to any important modern state. The emphasis upon efficient citizenship as the chief aim of education is a natural outgrowth of circumstances in the Hellenic world. In a single Greek city, and there only, did the greatest of all original thinkers on human nature and education, Plato and Aristotle, claim the highest virtues for the individual, apart from his civic relationship, and even they allowed a relatively large role to the social ideal; while their fellow countrymen remained generally unperturbed by the theories of their philosophers.

Of all states from which adequate information has filtered down to us Sparta had the most highly perfected discipline. Her aim was military dominion, and her statesmen considered that prowess and martial skill in her citizens would attain that aim. She knew what she wanted and her methods were most effective, at least for the immediate realization of her goal. A relentless discipline was imposed by the state in all the prudential virtues: courage, obedience, respect for the laws, reverence for old age, temperance, frugality, self-control. Aristotle censures Spartan training for neglecting the gentler virtues, such as tenderness, pity, and mercy. The Spartan boy was urged to steal with craft and was considered at fault only when he was caught. While Plutarch is our only authority for this statement, it is consistent with Spartan discipline as a whole and is not questioned by most modern scholars. The system at Sparta was pure socialism, and her citizens were always expected, and always ready, to sink their personalities completely in the state's welfare. When Paedaretus lost his election to the Three Hundred in Sparta he rejoiced to know that there were three hundred men in the city better than himself.

Pisistratidas, leading an embassy to the king of Persia, was asked whether they represented the state or themselves. "If we succeed, the state; if not, ourselves," was his answer. Plutarch, who in his life of Lycurgus accounts for a large part of what is known of early Spartan educational ideals and methods, relates these incidents. Nor were the women outdone by the men in their civic devotion. The Greek Anthology bears eloquent testimony in the following short poems:

"Eight sons Daemenata at Sparta's call
Sent forth to fight: one tomb received them all.
No tears she shed, but shouted 'Victory!
Sparta, I bore them but to die for thee!'"

And this:

"A Spartan, his companion slain,
Alone from battle fled:
His mother, kindling with disdain
That she had borne him, struck him dead;
For courage and not birth alone
In Sparta testifies a son."

Women, as has been noted, approached more nearly to an equality with men at Sparta than elsewhere in Greece, and morality between the sexes was unusually high.

The dark side of this picture remains. As the Spartan system of moral education was imposed upon the individual from without and not developed from

within, it was an inferior morality. When Spartan citizens were out from under the powerful grasp of the state, away from fear of their state law, their evil propensities found unchecked expression. Lacedemonians abroad were notorious for their greed, cruelty, licentiousness, and dishonesty. Their character depended upon conventional morality, which invariably relaxes with the shift of circumstances.

It is at Athens, among Hellenic states, that the history of educational ideas is of most moment for the present day. Its early history was one in which conventional morality prevailed, which was true of Sparta's entire history. We have learned the issue of such a discipline at Sparta and need not linger long on early Athenian experience. In the Protagoras Plato says: "The master compels the boy to learn passages of the good poets by heart, choosing such poems as contain moral admonitions, and many a narrative interwoven with praise and panegyric on the worthies of old, in order that the boy may admire and emulate, and strive to become such himself." No one who would understand earlier Athenian ideals of social conduct and character should fail to reflect earnestly upon Thucydides' words in Pericles' funeral oration. Moreover, their spirit helps to account for much in the development of the later, or new, education. Pericles (or Thucydides) here stands at the parting of the ways. A strong note of freedom, which is usually ascribed to Greek thought when it is at its best, that is in the later period, pervades the speech.

It was Socrates who was most clearly identified with the break from the old to the new, from traditional mores to ideals based upon reason. He and the Sophists, though with somewhat different methods, struck heavy blows at conventional beliefs. "Man is the measure of all things," said Protagoras, a doctrine sure to play havoc with earlier ideals. They taught the rankest heresy, that what was for the good of the individual was good. Socrates and the Sophists had this in common that they led their hearers into a state of questioning or doubt. This is only the negative aspect of Socratic teaching. Having convinced his hearers of their ignorance, Socrates advanced to his main purpose, to elicit from the individual that individual's own formula of moral action. To him a good disposition and proper moral teaching do not lead to virtue, but merely to conventional morality. Fundamental morality arises only when conduct receives rational approval. Full knowledge is necessary and when that is present the issue will be virtue. For since virtue is avowedly the supreme good, no one who knows virtue will do otherwise. Hence the Socratic "Virtue is knowledge," which was not fallacious for a man of the iron will and self-control of Socrates, but is quite inadequate as a principle for the average man. Socrates is concerned first of all with man's moral nature, and in fact, the whole content of his teaching is almost purely moral.

The Sophists maintained that virtue could be taught directly and systematically, as it had been done in the early period. Socrates believed that only indirectly could virtue be taught, that is, by his method of question and answer, which first led the individual to admit ignorance, and then to rise to a general truth of conduct by thinking through facts for himself.

The educational ideas of Plato and of Aristotle, who did not differ greatly from him, though of far reaching theoretical importance, did not gain currency in the life of Athens or have considerable bearing upon her national ideals. This paper therefore will touch lightly upon these philosophers. Plato, more than any other thinker in antiquity, recognized both the claims of society (the state) and of the individual. He thought of the state as an organism, of the development of character as impossible apart from the state.

But the highest virtue of the individual was essential to the highest good of the state. It is difficult to determine which he would place first. In his emphasis on both he is inconsistent. In his Republic he used the state uniformly as an organism when he outlined his plans for education, and that is significant. In that most profound of ancient pedagogical treatises he portrays the state as the individual "writ large."

The doctrine of the Mean elaborated at length in the Ethics by Aristotle is a revelation of the lack of stress upon virtue for its own sake among the Greeks. In this point Aristotle is an authentic interpreter of the thought of his times. With him well reasoned activity which leads to happiness is virtue. Wrong conduct, vice, is to miss the mark; right conduct, virtue, is to hit the mark. The former was a misfortune, not a sin. Above all things, it was a matter of common sense and rational insight and not one to get excited over or to take too seriously. Ethics was not the sum total of life, as it was with the apostle Paul, who was withal the most intellectual man among New Testament authors. Indeed the Greeks were interested in many other things, in some of them far more than in virtue, in the limited sense: politics, of course, and literature and the other arts, to mention only some of the more conspicuous elements of a full life which they lived for the sheer joy of it. If we may repeat an often repeated truism, which is at least more than half true, the Greeks were more in love with beauty than with virtue; their interpretation of what was good morally was contingent upon their idea of what was good aesthetically. To them beauty was not the beauty of the modern aesthete; it was intimately connected with life. The Greeks of the best centuries of their history (it is, to be sure, Athens that we have chiefly in mind) loved life first, beauty (or art) next, then among other things virtue—virtue I mean in its modern and limited sense. "Not by her discipline, like Sparta and Rome, but by the unfailing charm of her gracious influence did Athens train her children," says Professor Wilkins in his book on National Greek Education.

The large measure of freedom at Athens, the laxness of discipline, the tolerance of individual caprice were of course not wholly beneficial. There were dangers and ill consequences. An Alcibiades was a pupil of a Socrates; nor was that phenomenon rare. The nobler of Athens' citizens—and happily there were not a few—blossomed into the fullest and richest personality; but there were many who would have fared better under the rigors of Spartan discipline.

Before leaving the subject of Greek education one more point may be mentioned. It is the emphasis placed upon the moral value of music in Greek states generally. A familiar theme of painting is that of the Centaur Chiron instructing Achilles in the playing of the lyre. Homer and other poets were sung to the accompaniment of that instrument. Dorian modes had an ennobling effect, Ionian a voluptuous effect. Two additional strings on the lyre caused such bitter antagonism that the authorities had them removed. "Whoever he be," says Plutarch, "that shall give his mind to the study of music in his youth, if he meet with a musical education proper for regulating his inclinations, he will be sure to applaud what is noble and generous and to rebuke and blame the contrary. He will become clear from all reproachful actions, for now having reaped the noblest fruit of music, he may be of great use both to himself and to the commonwealth. Music teaches him to abstain from everything indecent, both in word and deed, and to observe decorum, temperance, and regularity." We cannot question that music has an effect for good or for evil, but its large place in all Greek education can only be accounted for by the unique susceptibility of that

race to this as to other expressions of art.

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It is to Rome that we now turn. If one were asked to mention what he regarded as the most important words in the Latin language the list would perhaps be somewhat as follows: *disciplina, mos maiorum, religio, lex, ius, civitas, fides, honestas, integritas, simplicitas, constantia, fortitudo, gravitas, virtus, iustitia, pietas, temperantia, castitas, patientia, prudentia, consilium.* If their language is the most complete and authentic revelation of the national ideals of a people—which can scarcely be controverted—and if the words just cited are a representative selection, we have in them a key to the interpretation of Roman character and to the fundamentals of their education. It concerned itself little with the intellectual life. The practical and the moral, which in large part are identical, possess the field. We are speaking of the indigenous education which prevailed while Rome was a city-state, before the influx of foreign ideas and especially before Hellenism had gained a foothold. Efficiency was the aim. It was utilitarian in the broader sense and was calculated to produce the best fathers, the best citizens, and the best soldiers. The ideal of education for the enjoyment of the artistic and the intellectual life would have been wholly unintelligible. In this respect, as in others, Sparta and Rome bore a closer resemblance than Sparta and Athens.

Early Roman society found itself differently constituted from that of the Greek states with respect to three important factors that affect the development of national ideals of character. In the first place, slavery, with its attendant ill effects, was at a minimum. Again, regard for woman was higher than in any ancient country. And connected with this was the emphasis on family life, which was incomparably stronger than at either Sparta or at Athens.

The training of the Roman child was in the home, both parents participating to a large degree. Plutarch's Life of Cato shows the devotion of that stern statesman and his solicitude, even in small details, for his child's proper upbringing. Exercising every precaution against improper influence, he became his son's schoolmaster. "He was as careful to avoid all indecent conversation in his son's presence as he would have been in the presence of the Vestal Virgins." Cato would not bathe in his son's presence. A line from Ennius says, "For Roman citizens to appear nude before their fellows is the beginning of evil." Pliny the Younger, writing more than two centuries later but true to the best traditions of earlier times, says that "every child had a teacher in his father; if he had no father the oldest and best citizens assumed a father's place." No higher encomium could be pronounced upon a Roman boy than *"adulescens pudentissimus."* Juvenal tells us in a notable line that the highest reverence is due to childhood.

Tacitus, though doubtless a *laudator acti temporis,* helps to the understanding of the genuine old Roman character in the *Dialogus de Oratoribus:* "In olden times our children were born of virtuous parents and reared by the loving care of a mother, who was the servant of her own children. . . . Thus it is said did Cornelia train her two sons, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus; thus did Servilia train Julius Caesar; thus did Attia train Augustus for his future destiny. The aim of this stern discipline was that while the child's character was unspoiled he should learn the practice of virtue; and that whether his lot was to be a soldier, a jurist, or an orator, he might give himself wholly to duty."

We need not enumerate the practical virtues which were indelibly stamped upon the early Romans. From love of country and pride in her achievements flow [illegible] others. Lucilius accurately re-

nects the best ideals of an earlier day when he makes part of his famous definition of *virtus:* "To place first the welfare of our country, second that of our parents, third and last our own." It is noteworthy that the individual Roman voluntarily submitted to the state, while at Sparta there was legal compulsion. Individual liberty was strong in Rome; at Sparta it could only be collective liberty.

"Long is the road through precepts, short and effective through examples," observes the Younger Seneca, at the same time approving this method of early Roman training for character. Horace gives evidence from his personal experience. He elaborates in two separate satires the methods of his father, who by pointing out the consequences of wrong doing, shielded him from evil influences and guided him into right conduct.

While direct instruction was not thought effective, as a rule, in its influence on character, there is one large exception. The Laws of the Twelve Tables, dating from the middle of the fifth century B. C., clearly express or imply most of the characteristically Roman qualities that the previously mentioned selection of Latin words stands for. These Laws issued from early Roman society and for fully half a millennium had a powerful effect upon Roman education and character. Roman boys learned them by heart even down to Cicero's day. Their influence is analogous to that of the Decalogue; their educational role is much larger, constituting an important part of the content of formal instruction. In Cicero's judgment "that single little book of the Twelve Tables, if any one look at the foundations and sources of law, assuredly surpasses the libraries of all the philosophers, both in weight of authority and in plentitude of utility." From the mass of favorable testimony these laws must have cooperated with instruction "through examples" to the end of producing a quality of virtue in the early centuries of the Roman Republic rarely and perhaps never equaled in history on a large scale.

Since the scope of this paper admits of limited discussion on Roman education it has seemed fitting to confine it to the part which was peculiarly Roman. Many of the best features persisted for centuries after the invasion of Hellenism in the third century B. C. And the Greek overlay, which was a matter chiefly of intellectual culture, that is of Greek literature and art, Greek rhetoric, Greek philosophy, need not detain us here. To discuss the influence of the philosophical schools, particularly of Stoicism, on Roman moral ideals and Roman character, would call for another paper. *"Mens sana in corpore sano,"* though the words of a satirist a century after the beginning of the Christian era, correctly interpreted, sum up the ideals of the early period. A sound mind can only mean a mind unencumbered with the culture of Greece, a mind well furnished with the substantial Roman virtues. Even Quintilian, a contemporary of Juvenal, whose treatise on the training of the orator is the most complete and illuminating that is extant on Roman education, whole-heartedly adopts the view first propounded by Cato, *"Orator est vir bonus dicendi peritus."* "An orator is a *good* man skilled in speaking," and makes it fundamental in his whole system of education. The reading of his work carries the conviction that he meant it. Though he was Rome's greatest educational theorist it would be going far to maintain that his theory was accepted; we should admit at once that the practice of his time and later showed no evidence that his ideal was effective. The decay of the ideals which had controlled the private and the public life of the sturdy sons of the Republic was one of the potent causes of the decay of the later Roman Empire.