

Symposium: Civic Education in the Ancients and America*

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**Editor's Note: This is Part One of a two-part Symposium. Part Two, which includes the contributions by Jividen, Hess, and Baraklow, will be published in Vol. 8, No. 2 (2014).*

When the conversation turns to civic education today, several questions are immediately raised: What are the conditions for civic education? What role should the state and civil society play? To whom should such an education aim: leaders, ordinary citizens, both? What should be the content of civic education? Should classical learning be incorporated or entirely left out? And who should teach this education? Can political leaders, like presidents, act as civic teachers for the whole political community? What about those who are marginalized in society, like African-Americans, or inaccessible, like intellectuals? What contributions can they make to civic education, if any?¹

In this symposium, “Civic Education in the Ancients and America,” the contributors address these questions from the disciplinary perspectives of history, philosophy, political science, and classics. The answers they provide both complement and dissent with one another, offering us a rich and nuanced account of civic education both among the ancients and the Americans and the relationship between these two. What we discover is that not only do different regimes provide different accounts of civic education but the nature of civic education itself evolves as the political community does. Furthermore, even during the same period of a regime, different visions of civic education can be proposed and compete among themselves, whether by political leaders, social reformers, or public intellectuals. At the same time, we may be able to detect some commonalities among these distinct accounts of civic education. There might be something that both the ancients and the Americans share.

The contributors in this symposium adopt a broad definition of civic education to include the institutions and processes that affect citizens' beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members of a political community. The source of civic education is diverse: it can come from the state, civil society, or the individual. However, the outcome of civic education is the same: the common good of the political community, whether it is Aristotelian virtue, Roman republican values, the founding principles of the American regime, or a criticism and replacement of those ideals. Although the conceptualization of the common good may vary from regime to regime and from thinker to thinker, it is the notion that public interests predominate over private ones that is the ultimate aim of all civic education.

I start the symposium with my contribution, “Aristotelian Pluralism and Diversity: The Conditions for Civic Education and the Common Good,” an examination of the conditions that make a meaningful civic education possible for Aristotle. Unlike the Spartan and Socratic

regimes, the Aristotelian political community protects a plurality of institutions and a diversity of goods because civic education and the common depend upon them. Rather than encouraging discord and anarchy, these conditions promote unity and concord among citizens. It is the preservation of this plurality and diversity that enables citizens to become part of the commonality of the regime. It is this paradox that makes possible a genuine civic education dedicated to the common good.

From Greece we next turn to Rome in Joseph A. DiLuzio's "The Civic Education of Cicero's Ideal Orator." In his article DiLuzio investigates Cicero's program for civic renewal in the final years of the Roman Republic. For Cicero, the most disturbing event in Rome is the rise of factionalism where self-interest triumphs over the common good. To remedy this situation, Cicero calls for a civic education of oration in combination with law, custom, and the experience of distinguished leaders. The hope is that this education would yield political leaders who are eloquent, wise, and care for the common good.

How this classical understanding about civic education was transmitted to the American Founders is explored in Tim W. Caspar's "Cicero and America." Caspar's focuses on Cicero's *De Officiis* because of its influence on the American Founders' understanding of natural law and the common good. In Cicero's work, the Founders discover a model of the best and most practical republic possible with institutions conducive to political moderation and the rule of law. And also like Cicero, the Founders believe that individual virtue must be inextricably tied up with the common good. Thus, the civic education which Cicero devised for Rome is located in the American experiment of constitutional governance.

Jason Jividen adopts the principles of the American Founding as the criteria to evaluate presidents as civic educators for the United States. In "Presidential Statesmanship as Civic Education," Jividen examines the political rhetoric of Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt as a form of civic education. According to Jividen, American civic education evolves from the natural rights tradition of Lincoln to the progressive visions of Wilson and Roosevelt. This evolution prompts us to consider not only alternative answers about presidential leadership and rhetoric but also about the nature of civic education and democracy itself.

The last two contributions are from Emily Hess and Jordon Barkalow, who explore how excluded individuals can contribute to American civic education. In "'It Must Develop Men': Frederick Douglass and Education in Nineteenth-Century America," Hess looks at Douglass' account of civic education as a means not only to improve the fate of blacks but also to provide an intelligent, virtuous, and moral citizenry upon which freedom itself depends. Believing that education was indispensable for social reform after the Civil War, Douglass calls for a practical and racially integrated education for African-Americans. Douglass recognizes that the country had to adopt a new type of civic education in order for it to fulfill its promises of freedom and equality that were made at its founding.

The final article of the symposium, Barkalow's "American *Paideia*: Public and Private Leadership and the Cultivation of Civic Virtue," focuses on Emerson's understanding of civic education as a remedy to the problems of alienation, conformity, and skepticism in modern

American life. Like Plato, Emerson wants to improve the condition of the individual soul. By studying nature, the individual eventually sees that virtue is connected with the common good. Emerson's self-reliant, democratic scholar therefore engages the public in the hope that they, too, will discover their own virtue that resides in them.

The aim of civic education therefore is the cultivation of individual virtue and the common good of the regime. In this symposium, the contributors offer different models of civic education: Aristotle's preservation of plurality and diversity; Cicero's program of rhetoric and practical experience; the American Founders' education in Cicero; the civic rhetoric of Lincoln, Wilson, and Roosevelt; Douglass' proposal to improve and integrate blacks into the American regime; and the Emersonian scholar as type of public intellectual. From these different accounts, we see that the division between the classical world and the modern one, between the ancients and America, is not as deep as we may have originally thought.

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Endnotes

1. For some of the issues concerning civic education today, refer to Gutmann 1987; Macedo 2000; Galston 2001, 2005; Finkle 2002; Nussbaum and Cohen 2002; Torney-Putra 2002; Hess 2009.

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