

## Relaying Ethical and Social Values through Active Role Models

The pedagogical elements that provide a sense of experiential safety and inner stability include emotional attention from adults and also the relaying of ethical-moral qualities, the firm setting of boundaries and rules, adherence to good standards of behavior and conflict resolution strategies, as well as a natural relationship with one's own sexuality. In Waldorf education the preschool and kindergarten children are not taught through reflection and discussion; rather adults model desired qualities so that they are a living, natural reality which the child can take for granted and which he can then make his own through imitating them. The respect, appreciation, tolerance, and sensitivity that an adult shows toward the child will have an immediate impact on the behavior of the child, and that behavior will become habit. In turn, the child expects rules to be obeyed and agreements kept. Through practical life experience, he learns what it means find his place within a community.

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# Can Moral Principles Be Taught?

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Pedagogy will bear fruit especially when the virtues of courage and moderation will be seen in the right light. These virtues need to be considered individually by educating children in such a way that they will retreat gradually from creating sorrows for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Rudolf Steiner speaks several times of virtues related to morality, virtues that were already recognized in antiquity, for instance by Plato.<sup>2</sup> Steiner describes these virtues and connects them with human physiology, for the constitution of the physical body itself has been endowed with the potential of serving human beings in developing morality. One aspect of helping parents and teachers to help children develop a moral outlook is to understand how the human constitution is related to these virtues, because the physical body in its essence supports the essentially human, which, by its nature, is inherently moral.

## The First Platonic Virtue: Wisdom

But it is through the head that morality pours in when it encounters the ego forces in the blood.<sup>3</sup>

**The physical body itself has been endowed with the potential of serving human beings in developing morality.**

Steiner calls this world of ideas the world of life forces, the ether, and he calls the virtue by which we may become aware of this world the virtue of wisdom. Steiner discusses four virtues that together make up our morality. Wisdom is the first, and it is particularly related to the human ego, the eternal essence, and to the human head.<sup>4</sup> When ego forces pour through a person's blood, they energize this person, and so we may use wisdom in our actions deliberately. Coursing within us, uniting the whole physical body with our mind and soul, our blood leads us

into will activity. If we are to act consciously and with due respect toward others, then we must consider all consequences of our actions toward individuals, toward society, and toward the world—this requires wisdom, foresight, and forethought.

By learning throughout life, by learning from one's mistakes, it is possible to increase one's life's wisdom. According to

Steiner, this capacity of learning from one's life extends to learning from one's past incarnations. This usually does not happen by conscious design, however, as there are presently few individuals who have a sense of their past incarnations. We experience ourselves as most conscious in our heads. Our sense impressions stir us up; they awaken us; they call upon us to react to them; they stimulate our consciousness—not always in a positive way, as, for instance, when we need to resist advertising. Other sense impressions tend to drive us with extraordinary power toward action that we would not do if we had been able to keep a cool head. That the virtue of wisdom is associated with our head, with our intelligence, means that we reflect before we act.

1. Paraphrased from Rudolf Steiner's *The Secret of Death in Relation to Middle Europe and Its Folk Spirits*, Lecture of January 31, 1915, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2005.

2. About Plato's teachings on morality, see the *Politeia* and the *Nomoi* in works of Plato.

3. Steiner, Rudolf. *The Riddle of Humanity*, Lecture 5, London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1990.

4. *Ibid.*, Lecture 6.

How might we encourage children and adolescents to develop this virtue? The result would be a recognition that human beings learn throughout life, that we can learn to change or adjust our actions, to recognize past erroneous behavior, and so resolve not only to learn from it but also not repeat it. This is a point not easily brought home to children and adolescents; they quite naturally resent having to listen to moralizing speeches and demands. How then can we accomplish the task?

We must provide examples by action, and not by talking about our ideas in a rational manner. We can tell stories, particularly to younger children, in which the consequences of unconscious, irreverent, spiteful, or malevolent actions are depicted pictorially. History is rife with numerous examples for older students. At the appropriate age we may describe historical examples of individuals who have acted out of moral principles, for instance, Gandhi on the Salt March.

Another way to gradually increase thoughtfulness might be to review from time to time the results of actions, thoughts, and ideas. We can mention from time to time what will be learned in the future, several years, or even several days hence. A time perspective is thus encouraged and is entirely appropriate for an area concerning activities of knowledge, wisdom, and life events. Report writing provides an excellent opportunity for a teacher to review a student's achievements and preview future potentialities. Parents could take the opportunity at birthdays or other occasions to discuss future and past.

The sphere of wisdom, related to the human head, where ideas and thoughts live in the cosmic ether world, is also related to the changing rhythms of time, to forgetting and remembering, and so to memory.

### The Second Platonic Virtue: Courage

Consider the virtue of fortitude or courage. On the one hand, human nature may swing toward recklessness, that is, toward unrestrained activity in the world with full exertion of all one's forces. On the other hand there is cowardice. Evil originates when either we lose out to the world or

the world is lost to us. The "good" consists in avoiding both of these, not swinging too widely to one side or the other.<sup>5</sup>

It is a challenge for us to use the potential for courageous action in such a way that no harm befalls other human beings. We see instances of this challenge every day. Present-day life has changed in remarkable ways from life of barely two hundred years ago. In our present-day society, at least in the Western world, there is not much need of physical courage, except in response to natural disasters or conditions of war. Can this be the reason that so many young human beings engage in reckless behavior, because society at large does not require courage in more physical and conventional ways?

Courage may be transformed from bodily demonstration, however, to a purely mental display. A public show of courage, as for instance with a person who is a whistleblower, has become quite common. Daring displays, particularly among younger people, take many forms, from clothes to behavior. What kind of courage might be expected or appropriate in today's world? In his novel 1984, George Orwell envisaged what might become of a world given over to mental slavery. I believe his descriptions, as well as the descriptions in the science fiction classic, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, are really solicitations for all human beings to develop mental courage.

What is mental courage? One aspect of courage has to do with maintaining a balanced, middle position in this present world, rather than to indulge extremes. Mental courage means to recognize a balanced and therefore impartial stance. It takes mental courage for us to carry out our judgments, fully cognizant of consequences.

Courage has long and rightly been associated with the human heart. Steiner makes this same connection and elucidates it further by connecting the seat of courage in the human heart with our astral body, our purely spiritual organization of movement and conscious activities.

**[Teachers] must provide examples by action, and not by talking about [ideals] in a rational manner.**

5. Steiner, Rudolf, *The Spiritual Foundation of Morality, Francis of Assisi and the Christ Impulse*, CW 155, Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1995.

Whenever strength of heart—strength of mind, industriousness of the soul—streams down out of the moral sphere, it streams into the area of the chest, which encloses the heart. We can say, when morality radiates down [from the head], it is here, in the area of the chest and heart, where it particularly takes hold of the astral.<sup>6</sup>

What might this mean? Would mental courage also have its seat in the heart? In recent years the idea of “heart thinking” has been spoken about by a number of scientists. Such heart thinking calls on practices other than intellectual thinking. Whenever we use heart thinking—and we frequently do so—we are secure in ourselves, we feel ourselves in balance in our point of view, so that the world does not overwhelm us, nor do we try to dominate the world. I believe that this is one aspect of heart thinking, and one aspect of not giving in to evil temptations.<sup>7</sup>

We are now dealing with quite other capacities in human beings than the conscious cultivation of wisdom. We are now dealing with an area of human consciousness in which we are, most of the time, neither aware nor fully awake, in which we need to make judgment calls, in which we need to take personal responsibility, and in which we need to follow a feeling of doing the right thing. This is a sphere in which there exists a good deal of uncertainty, because we are compelled to take steps forward into the unknown. Courageous steps into the unknown are the challenge for present-day humanity. Whenever we follow our heart in this balanced way, we are certainly exercising a moral right of action.

One way we might view the seat of courage in the heart is in interaction with our head. What is the relation of wisdom to courage? What is it that holds us back from reckless actions, from going head over heels into an activity that we will eventually regret and wish that we had thought through before acting? It is apparent that our

6. Op.cit., Steiner, *The Riddle of Humanity*.

7. For instance, a book discussing heart thinking is Florin Lowndes' book, *Enlivening the Chakra of the Heart*, New York: SteinerBooks,

head and our heart need to work together. Our eternal self, our ego, has the task to control the astral body, the seat of movement and consciousness. In other words, we are challenged to become ever more vigilant and conscious of how we act.

The need for human beings to express courage is deep-seated. Why does it need to be expressed physically? What are the intentions of peace activists at present, and can their intentions actually be realized? Without the possibility of human beings showing some kind of physical, bodily expression of courage, a condition of peace anywhere in the world seems unlikely. Do means exist for expressing physical courage other than bravery in times of danger? Might it be appropriate to say, as human development has progressed since the beginning of the twentieth century, that now is the time in which mental courage, not only physical courage, must be learned? Think of the atrocities that were perpetrated upon millions of human beings in this last century. Not only physical courage, but also mental courage was needed

in order to defend our own humanity from mental and physical slavery, and many human beings did exercise such mental courage.

What is the quest for boldness, for courage, that lives naturally in every human being, which every human being strives to fulfill in order to have self respect? Is there a deep-seated need for human beings to face danger, to

face the unknown, and to be recognized for this bravery? Is there another region of the human soul in which courage is required? Can danger and the unknown be found in other locations, other places than the physical world? Two areas from which many human beings shy away are conscious and deliberate self-development and conscious and deliberate adherence to disciplines that will expand their consciousness. Dangers lurk there, and these dangers must be faced with courage, mental courage.

### The Third Platonic Virtue: Moderation

The third virtue is connected with organs of the human body that are even less complete than the heart or the brain. This virtue will gain its actual form later in human development and is

**Whenever we follow our heart in this balanced way, we are certainly exercising a moral right of action.**

present today only in potentiality. It is the virtue of moderation. It could also be called sun-filledness. We can be immoderate in many ways, but whenever we take our desires in hand, limit our bodily responses to external stimuli, we create order in forces that we shall then not deliver to Lucifer in our next incarnation. We shall, however, deliver those forces that live in our digestive system, metabolism, and reproductive system if we indulge in passionate delirium.<sup>8</sup> This virtue of moderation is difficult to achieve in today's world, a world in which our desire nature is continually assaulted with demands to lose itself through our passions.

Steiner mentions that the virtue of courage is also threatened by Luciferic forces. Both courage and moderation must become controlled by the human ego, by the power of the individual. And Steiner points out how essential it is, if our present stage of human evolution is going to successfully move into the future, that regarding pedagogy the virtues of courage and moderation must be stimulated and practiced.

Human desires are aroused in the abdomen, and temperate persons are those who are able to rule over their desires by thinking about them, feeling their way into them, and consciously experiencing them. Temperance first arises when desires are made as conscious as it is possible for them to be made. This happens in the ether body.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, when exercising control over passionate reactions, we enable the sun-filled area of our human constitution to emerge. It might be relevant here to note that the German word for the "diaphragm" in our abdomen is *Sonnengeflecht*, "sun-network."

In ancient times the denying of sensory pleasures was an essential means to achieve spiritual enlightenment. In medieval times the elimination or denial of one's desire nature was equated with religious sainthood. What was not considered in the past was that there can be progress in spiritual development only if the soul no longer feels the urge for physical satisfaction. Today we might smile at the medieval monks or nuns who believed they could whip themselves into sainthood. Today we must go about achieving moderation of all things in life in a different way.

8. Paraphrased from Rudolf Steiner, *The Secret of Death*.

9. Paraphrased from *The Secret of Death*, 12, and *The Riddle of Humanity*, Lecture 5.

One aspect of the virtue of moderation is recognizing the temporary nature of everything in the physical world. What is permanent is the essence of the individuality, our own spiritual being. The challenge of moderation or temperance is to look at ourselves and at other human beings as spiritual beings. Steiner says that the virtue of moderation is the virtue to be especially practiced and developed in our present age, the age of the consciousness soul:

Now we still have to consider what may be called the virtue of the consciousness-soul: temperance or self-discipline. In the fourth post-Atlantean cultural epoch these virtues were still instinctive. Plato and Aristotle spoke of them as the chief virtues of the consciousness soul, inasmuch as they considered them to be the mean of what exists in the consciousness soul. The consciousness soul arises when the human being becomes conscious of the outer world by means of the physical body. The body that has evolved to serve the consciousness soul can be crushed by the world, or the human being can come to lose contact with the world.

Temperance is the virtue that enables the human being to avoid both of these extremes. Temperance is neither asceticism nor self-indulgence, but the proper mean between the two. This is the virtue of the consciousness soul.<sup>10</sup>

Now we can understand why Steiner says that today it is especially important that the virtues of courage and moderation should be brought to children as part of their education. Courage must be transformed from physical courage to mental courage. Moderation indicates a shift from simply accepting the validity of the physical sense world to empowering our view of the validity of spiritual forces in the sense world and the validity of spiritual beings acting on, and on behalf of, human beings.

Another aspect of the virtue of moderation has to do with its connection to time. Temperance has its root in the Latin word for time. The timing of our actions may lead to self-indulgence, to

10. *Ibid.*, Lecture 3.

asceticism, or to moderation. As a conscious individual we ought to consider the best timing for our actions and, in the larger picture, the overall purpose of our life. It is particularly vital, in this age of the consciousness soul, to become sensitive to the timing of our actions before birth and after death, to consider the relationship of our eternal self to time.

### The Fourth Platonic Virtue: Justice

Plato's word *justice* refers to the ability to give our lives direction, the ability to know ourselves, to orientate ourselves in life. Morality begins on Earth; but Earth also marks the completion of a higher order, one that was already beginning on Saturn. So we have another stream, another order, that flows from Saturn to Earth, and we will now call that the stream of justice. Our senses have the tendency to scatter us in all directions. The development of our twelve senses through Sun, Moon, and Earth evolutionary stages leads us to a rightness and uprightness that includes justice (moral rightness) and moral uprightness. Justice first makes its appearance on Earth. And justice works inward to counter the peripheral tendency of the senses; the sphere, or stream, of justice works toward the center.<sup>11</sup>

Steiner asserts that moral qualities have been connected to the essence of humanity since the first stage of the cosmic evolution of earthly existence. The virtue of justice in this sense is related to the human physical capacity to stand upright. This is a gift of the spiritual world that enables human beings after birth to gain uprightness and language.<sup>12</sup> Soon after birth children are able to orient themselves toward the stars in uprightness and toward other human beings through language. The senses play a pivotal role in these capacities. Another capacity that awakens in young children soon after that time is memory, which is accompanied by the capacity to experience continuity of being and, with it, the ability to refer to oneself as "I." Memory is directed toward

our inner experience, not toward something external, although our experiences of the external world result in memories. And so the third direction that is taken by the sense of justice is toward our memories, toward our center, toward ourselves. In other words, the whole physical human being is concerned with justice and oriented in three directions, particularly so in early childhood.

Whoever would exercise this virtue of justice would place every thing, every being in its right and correct location; we would enter into relationship with others, would leave our own selves. In doing this, we would live within all-encompassing justice. We originate from the cosmos; heavenly forces permeated us in earlier incarnations. When practicing justice we unfold cosmic forces, but spiritually. Justice represents the measure of how humanity is related to the divine. Injustice practically means loss of divinity; it demonstrates a loss of the divine.<sup>13</sup>

Steiner relates the virtue of justice to the whole human being. The whole body is involved as newborn children incarnate, accomplish uprightness, soon thereafter enter the world of language, and finally learn to direct themselves toward their inner beings by re-living memories.

Virtue	Part of Human Body	Part of Human Constitution
Wisdom	Head	Eternal Self or Ego
Courage	Heart	Astral Body
Moderation	Abdomen	Ether Body
Justice	The whole body	Physical Body

### Conclusion

We may now relate the four virtues to our bodies and to our spiritual constitutions: The whole human being is constitutionally predisposed toward morality. Whenever we nurture any of the virtues, we foster morality in growing children and adolescents.

As teachers, whenever we encourage our students to practice the right timing of the pursuit of knowledge, whenever we demonstrate through stories and examples that eventually justice will be done—if not in this life, then in the next,

11. Op. cit., Steiner, *The Riddle of Humanity*.

12. See also Rudolf Steiner, *The Spiritual Guidance of the Individual and Humanity*, CW 15, Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1991.

13. Paraphrased from Rudolf Steiner, *The Secret of Death*.

though this is not an appropriate theme for younger students—then we prepare them to stand strong against the influences of Ahriman, who would have us possess knowledge and justice immediately. Whenever we allow an element of consideration, of waiting for just the right moment to emerge, so that courage does not become foolhardiness and moderation does not give way to indulgence, then we prepare our students to resist the influences of Lucifer.

Steiner says that it is vital in education that the virtues of courage and moderation be promoted so that the students, children and adolescents, do not bring sorrows on themselves. He means that whenever virtues are reinforced through education and in everyday life by parents or other adults, then they may take their own existence consciously in hand. He means for us to live in such a way today that our future body is not compromised and thus becomes useless to our spirit. Our contemporary Western worldview is mired in materialism and it will be necessary to expand this narrow viewpoint toward a real spiritual perspective. Steiner hints at that future:

Our present cosmos is, regarding morality, neutral. The world of nature does not contain morality. However, a future world will come about that will express morality also in nature. Human beings carry their striving for morality into the future, to begin with towards their future incarnations, and so will become the agents for a future moral world in the course of time.<sup>14</sup>

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14. Paraphrased from Rudolf Steiner, *Philosophy, Cosmology and Religion in Anthroposophy*, Lecture 9, CW 215, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1980.

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