

The role of character and virtue in education

How can schools prepare young people for the tests of life, rather than just preparing them for tests? Can character and virtue be ‘caught and taught’ in schools? How can character education empower students, and help them respond to the complexities of modern life?

Eminent British philosopher Professor John Haldane will explore these questions in his inaugural lecture at Australian Catholic University.

Named one of the 2022 Catholic Leaders of Today by Catholic Herald and lauded by the Tablet as one of the 50 most influential Catholic minds in the world, Professor Haldane is a Professor of Philosophy of Education at ACU.

His public lecture at ACU’s North Sydney campus will explore ‘Flourishing as an aim of education’.

“One need not hold a religious view to think that as well as equipping pupils with knowledge and skills, education might seek to give or enable them to form some conception of the meaning or significance of life,” Professor Haldane said.

Professor Haldane said virtue education had the potential to transform individual students and societies.

“Virtues like courage, honesty, compassion, self-discipline and gratitude are all habits you need to live a good life,” he said.

“For a long time, the prevailing attitude was just ‘do your own thing’, but this has led to a deeply divided society.

“We can see the reaction against this at an international level, with the rise of right-wing movements in the US and Europe, and these political divisions can be traced back to a lack of common purpose.”

Professor Haldane said there was enormous interest in character education around the globe, with hugely oversubscribed model schools in the UK and US.

“This approach is still in its infancy in Australia, but internationally it’s been taken up with a great deal of interest – not only in schools, but in policing, the armed forces and the professions.”

ACU Deputy Vice Chancellor (Ethics) Professor Hayden Ramsay said the University was proud to lead public debate about the role of education.

"ACU is proud to contribute to public discussion on the role of virtue and character in education.

"Professor Haldane is one of the world's most eminent philosophers and his work at ACU contributes significantly to our understanding of the values and purpose of Catholic education.

"His inaugural lecture at ACU will hopefully spark debate and guide creative thinking on the deeper purpose of education."

Professor Haldane has taught at the University of St Andrews since 1983 and continues there as Professor of Moral Philosophy Emeritus. He is Professor of Virtue Theory in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue at the University of Birmingham and Distinguished Affiliate Professor of Philosophy at Baylor University, Texas.

Public lecture: ‘Flourishing as an aim of education’.

When: Tuesday 15th of November from 4.20pm - 6.30pm AEDST

Where: The Peter Cosgrove Centre, Level 18, Tenison Woods House, 8-20 Napier St

Professor Haldane is available for interview.

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