



EDITORIAL

Genealogies of *Cura Personalis* and the Psychological Humanities in the Jesuit Tradition

A. Taiga Guterres 

Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA
Department of Formative Education, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA

A psychology of education which does away with reason, and is concerned exclusively with man's animal functions, or with the interpretation of his human functions in terms of the mechanical [stimulus-response] theory, cannot humanize. . . . It will glorify instinct and mechanize all learning, reducing it to its lowest form, 'association' or 'bond-making.' It will neglect the acquisition of aesthetic ideals and will take no notice whatever of human freedom, and of the moral issues which are essentially bound up with responsibility.¹

—Jaime Castiello, S.J.

The Jesuit tradition has an enduring history of reflecting on the human psyche in close connection with philosophy and theology. Long before psychology emerged as a distinct modern discipline, Jesuits were already engaged in forms of discernment, formation, and institutional assessment that presupposed sustained attention to temperament, affect, and character.

In the early modern period, the Society of Jesus drew on then-current accounts of temperament as a way of understanding the variety of persons called into its life and mission. In the triennial catalogues that superiors compiled as part of the Society's governance, Jesuits were not only listed according to age, studies, and assignments, but they were also described in

1 Jaime Castiello, S.J., *A Human Psychology of Education* (Sheed & Ward, 1936), 7–8.

terms of their dispositions and temperaments, often employing language indebted to Galenic humoral theory—sanguine, melancholic, choleric, and phlegmatic—to capture characteristic patterns of affect, judgment, and behavior.² However foreign such categories may now seem, they testify to a longstanding Jesuit conviction that apostolic and educational work requires careful attention to the concrete, differentiated constitution of persons.

That concern was also embedded in the curricula of Jesuit education. In the classical framework of the *Ratio Studiorum*, questions that would later be assigned to psychology were distributed across logic, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, rhetoric, and theology, especially in treatments of the faculties of the soul, habit, passion, judgment, freedom, and moral action. The point isn't that Jesuits "had psychology" in a modern disciplinary sense, but that reflection on interiority, volition, formation, and human flourishing was structurally present in the educational vision. The eventual rise of modern psychology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries therefore didn't introduce concern for the psyche into Jesuit education from the outside so much as reconfigure an older set of questions in new scientific idioms and paradigms.

In the United States, that reconfiguration became especially visible in the educational debates that culminated in the 1934 *Instructio* to the American Assistancy. The document sought to articulate a Jesuit philosophy of education adequate to the pressures of modernization, accreditation, and professionalization while retaining a distinctly Jesuit understanding of the person and of formation. Particularly significant is its language of *personalis alumnorum cura*, the "personal interest in the student," which appears in Article 7 and would later become more familiarly condensed into *cura personalis*.³ In its original context, this phrase didn't simply denote generic kindness or pastoral warmth. It named a special means of Jesuit education, in the spirit of the *Ratio*, whereby instruction, example, counsel, exhortation, and individualized guidance were all understood as essential to the formation of the student as a whole.

Recent historical work has clarified that *cura personalis* itself is the product of a layered documentary history rather than a timeless slogan

2 Cristiano Casalini, "Discerning Skills: Psychological Insight at the Core of Jesuit Identity," in *Exploring Jesuit Distinctiveness: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ways of Proceeding within the Society of Jesus*, ed. Robert A. Maryks (Brill, 2016).

3 A. Taiga Guterres, "Articulating a Jesuit Philosophy of Education in the Twentieth Century: A Critical Translation and Commentary on the *Instructio* of 1934 and 1948," *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*, 2nd ser., 1, no. 1 (2025): 73–114, <https://doi.org/10.51238/1ZnRn8z>.

reaching unchanged from Ignatius to the present.⁴ The English phrase “personal interest in the student” first appeared as one of the hallmarks of a Jesuit philosophy of education in the 1932 *Report of the Commission on Higher Studies*, fixing both agent and object and foregrounding a pedagogical attitude of individualized attentiveness charged to the educator. When this material was translated into Latin and incorporated into the 1934 *Instructio*, it became *personalis alumnorum cura*, shifting the focus from “interest” to a broader field of *cura* and embedding the student within an institutional grammar of care and responsibility. Over time, this longer expression was shortened in discourse to the now familiar *cura personalis*, which has subsequently been widely glossed as “care for the whole person.” The English drafting, the Latin phrasing, the later shorthand, and the contemporary gloss each occupy different positions in the documentary history of the concept and carry distinct semantic nuances.

Within living tradition of Jesuit education, the eventual articulation of *cura personalis* thus enters an existing family of *cura* terms such as *cura animarum* (care of souls), *cura bonorum* (care of goods), and *cura apostolica* (care of the works or apostolates).⁵ In each case, *cura* names a structured responsibility—juridical and sacramental, administrative and material, or governance-oriented. When *personalis* is joined to this family, it encourages *cura personalis* to be heard not only as an affirmation of concern but as a particular kind of apostolic responsibility of educators ordered toward concrete persons, especially students, within Jesuit works. The brief passage from “personal interest in the student” to *personalis alumnorum cura* to *cura personalis* is therefore not just a change of wording. It marks what Paul Ricoeur would call a “veritable event in thinking,”⁶ in which the individualized pedagogical relationship becomes conceptually aligned with the broader Jesuit grammar of *cura* and given an institutional and apostolic weight it didn’t necessarily previously bear.⁷

4 Guterres, “Articulating a Jesuit Philosophy of Education in the Twentieth Century,” 73–114. See also Barton T. Geger, S.J., “*Cura Personalis*: Some Ignatian Inspirations,” *Jesuit Higher Education* 3, no. 2 (2014): 6–20.

5 See Geger, “*Cura Personalis*: Some Ignatian Inspirations,” 6–20.

6 Paul Ricoeur, “From Interpretation to Translation,” in *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, ed. André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, trans. David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 331.

7 See also Gadamer’s idea on *Wirkungsgeschichte*, or “history of effects,” whereby every act of understanding is shaped by prejudgments that belong to a living tradition rather than to an individual subject. HansGeorg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (Continuum, 2004), esp. 299–306.

The significance of the 1934 *Instructio* would continue to unfold in mid-twentieth-century Jesuit educational practice. The phrase *personalis alumnorum cura*, first rendered in English as “personal interest in the student,” became increasingly generative in later discussions of Jesuit schooling and student formation. By the 1950s, this concern was taken up in more explicit relation to counseling, developmental guidance, and the broader psychological formation of students. Figures such as Robert A. Hewitt, S.J., drew directly on *personalis alumnorum cura* to argue for the importance of personal counseling within Jesuit secondary education, signaling a widening sense that intellectual instruction alone was insufficient to the Jesuit educational task.⁸ In this same broader current, Jesuit initiatives such as the Guidance Institute reflected an expanding willingness to think about the formation of students across intellectual, affective, vocational, and spiritual domains, and to do so with serious attention to contemporary psychological insight.⁹ This development helped open Jesuit educators to engagement with humanistic psychologists, including Carl Rogers, whose emphasis on personal growth, interpersonal regard, and the formation of the person resonated, though never without tension, with Jesuit educational concerns.

That period also makes visible the emergence of Jesuits who were formed in modern psychological thought yet resistant to reductive accounts of the person. Jaime Castiello, S.J. (1898–1919),¹⁰ is a particularly revealing example. His *A Human Psychology of Education* presented educational psychology from the standpoint of empirical inquiry while insisting that education must remain ordered to the development of the whole human person rather than reduced to technical management or behavioral efficiency.¹¹ Castiello is important not simply because he “used psychology,” but because he represents a specifically Jesuit effort to receive experimental psychology without surrendering questions of spirit, moral formation, and human finality. His work stands as an early twentieth-century instance of the kind of integrative labor that the contemporary movement of the psychological humanities now seeks to renew.

8 Robert A. Hewitt, S.J., “Personalis Alumnorum Cura,” *Jesuit Educational Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1956): 35–41.

9 In May 1947, the Jesuit Provincials of the American Assistancy approved the recommendation of the Executive Committee of the Jesuit Educational Association to create a Guidance Institute. The first one was held at Fordham University from July 5 to August 12, 1949. A second one would be held at Boston College from August 7–15, 1963.

10 Jaime Castiello, S.J., was born in Guadalajara, Mexico and entered the Society of Jesus in 1918. He would go on to do his doctoral studies in Bonn, Germany, before he would end up teaching at Fordham University.

11 Castiello, *A Human Psychology of Education*.

George Aschenbrenner, S.J., offers a later and especially revealing example of how deeply psychological language became woven into Jesuit spirituality itself. In his influential account of the “consciousness examen,” Aschenbrenner argued that the examen should be understood not narrowly as an examination of conscience focused on discrete moral acts, but more fundamentally as an examination of consciousness attentive to the movements of God within affective experience.¹² In that shift, one can see the attempt to rearticulate Jesuit spirituality toward a more explicit recognition that interior life, discernment, and responsiveness to grace require finely grained attention to experience, affectivity, and subjectivity. Psychology here doesn’t displace theology. Rather, it becomes one of the ways through which Jesuit spirituality and education increasingly came to describe the experience of human formation.

From this perspective, the contemporary discourse of the psychological humanities can be understood not as an alien import into Jesuit education but as a contemporary dialectic with one of its recurrent intuitions. By psychological humanities, I mean those interdisciplinary approaches that situate empirical psychological inquiry within broader humanistic, philosophical, and theological reflection on the person, and that refuse to reduce education to technical behavior management or narrow metrics of performance. The history sketched here suggests that Jesuit schools, colleges, and universities already inhabit many of the questions that animate the psychological humanities: How should institutions attend to affect, subjectivity, and interiority without collapsing into therapeutic individualism? How can formation practices draw on psychological insight while remaining ordered to genuinely humanizing ends?

For Jesuit education today, this history poses at least two tasks. First, it calls for renewed critical reflection on how *cura personalis* is invoked in institutional life. If the phrase is treated simply as a branding device or as a generic term for practically any programmatic effort, it risks losing contact with its layered origin in “personal interest in the student,” *personalis alumnorum cura*, and the broader Jesuit grammar of *cura* and formation. Attending to that origin doesn’t require antiquarian nostalgia. It asks institutions to ensure that their appeals to *cura personalis* remain answerable both to the individualized pedagogical relationships and to the structural responsibilities for students that the phrase came to name.

12 George A. Aschenbrenner, S.J., “Consciousness Examen,” *Review for Religious* 31, no. 1 (1972): 13–21. See also Joseph A. Tetlow, S.J., “The Most Postmodern Prayer: American Jesuit Identity and the Examen of Conscience, 1920–1990,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 26, no. 1 (1994): 1–67.


Second, this history invites Jesuit institutions to make more explicit spaces where psychology, philosophical and theological reflection, and lived practices of formation can be held in critical conversation. Whether in curricular design, student affairs, campus ministry, or faculty development, the question isn't whether psychology will shape Jesuit education, but how. The examples of Castiello, the guidance initiatives, and Aschenbrenner's rearticulation of the examen suggest that the most generative moments occur when psychological insight is neither uncritically embraced nor reflexively rejected, but received within a thicker account of the person ordered to freedom, responsibility, and grace.

In this context, the psychological humanities offer one contemporary way of naming and organizing this integrative work. They encourage Jesuit schools, colleges, and universities to ask how their practices of *cura personalis*—in classrooms, residence halls, advising offices, and chapels—might be deepened by serious engagement with both the human sciences and the broader traditions of moral, spiritual, and philosophical reflection that have always shaped Jesuit education. If *cura personalis* is to remain more than a slogan, it will require precisely this kind of ongoing, critical, and hopeful reworking at the intersections of psyche, spirit, and institution.

Correspondence:

A. Taiga Guterres, Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA;
email: guterres@bc.edu

ORCID:

A. Taiga Guterres  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9464-3485>