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Intellectual Virtue in Critical Thinking and Its Instruction
Introduction to a Symposium

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Résumé de l'article

Comment la vertu intellectuelle est-elle liée à la pensée critique? Peut-on être un penseur critique sans exercer la vertu intellectuelle? Peut-on être intellectuellement vertueux sans pour autant être un penseur critique? Comment nos réponses à ces questions devraient-elles éclairer l'enseignement de la pensée critique? Telles étaient les questions qui ont guidé les conférences dotées par Charles McCracken en 2023, présentées à l'Université Michigan State par les professeurs Harvey Siegel et Jason Baehr. Ce bref commentaire présente leurs articles respectifs, qui paraissent dans le numéro actuel de Informal Logic.

Intellectual Virtue in Critical Thinking and Its Instruction: Introduction to a Symposium

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Abstract: How is intellectual virtue related to critical thinking? Can one be a critical thinker without exercising intellectual virtue? Can one be intellectually virtuous without thereby being a critical thinker? How should our answers to these questions inform the instruction of critical thinking? These were the questions informing the 2023 Charles McCracken endowed lectureships given at Michigan State University by Professors Harvey Siegel and Jason Baehr. This brief commentary introduces their respective papers, which appear in the current issue of Informal Logic.

Résumé: Comment la vertu intellectuelle est-elle liée à la pensée critique? Peut-on être un penseur critique sans exercer la vertu intellectuelle? Peut-on être intellectuellement vertueux sans pour autant être un penseur critique? Comment nos réponses à ces questions devraient-elles éclairer l'enseignement de la pensée critique? Telles étaient les questions qui ont guidé les conférences dotées par Charles McCracken en 2023, présentées à l'Université Michigan State par les professeurs Harvey Siegel et Jason Baehr. Ce bref commentaire présente leurs articles respectifs, qui paraissent dans le numéro actuel de *Informal Logic*.

Keywords: Jason Baehr, Harvey Siegel, intellectual virtue, critical thinking, critical spirit, reason assessment, teaching good thinking

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This brief commentary introduces two papers appearing in the current issue of *Informal Logic*: "Rational thinking and intellectually virtuous thinking: Identical, extensionally equivalent, or substantively different?" by Harvey Siegel, and "Educating for good thinking: Virtues, skills, or both?" by Jason Baehr. Professors Baehr and Siegel were the 2023 Charles McCracken distinguished lecturers at Michigan State University, presenting these papers as a mini-symposium on the role of intellectual virtue in critical thinking and its instruction held on the MSU campus on February 10, 2023.

Critical thinking is widely regarded as a—maybe the—focal aim of courses in introductory informal logic in the university. But what exactly does this amount to? What is the substance of this aim? When should instructors judge their students to have become critical thinkers?

As Siegel notes at the start of his contribution to this symposium, our notion of critical thinking, as a sort of good thinking, is fundamentally normative. Teachers of critical thinking aim to teach good thinking (or thinking well), however more exactly they understand this concept and their aims. The attributive use of 'good' here, understood to mean thinking par excellence, invites a comparison to intellectually virtuous thinking. How is this related to critical thinking? Can one be a critical thinker without exercising intellectual virtue? Can one be intellectually virtuous without thereby being a critical thinker? How should our answers to these questions inform critical thinking education?

One natural answer to these questions is this: intellectual virtue is necessary for critical thinking and *vice versa*. So, a person who is not a critical thinker could not be intellectually virtuous—not fully anyway; such a person would lack some crucial dimension of intellectual virtue. Likewise, a person who lacked intellectual virtues—curiosity, open-mindedness, carefulness, and the like—could not be a critical thinker or would lack some crucial dimension of critical thinking. Becoming a critical thinker requires becoming intellectually excellent and *vice versa*.

On such a view, critical thinking and intellectual virtue are interdependent. And this interdependency entails a symbiotic relationship in their exercise, practice, learning, and instruction: im-

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proving a thinker's critical thinking ability contributes to their capacity to improve their intellectual virtue, and inculcating the intellectual virtues in a person can improve their critical thinking abilities. However, this mutually-reinforcing, virtuous feedback cycle has a negative counterpart: failing to develop one's critical thinking abilities precludes one from realizing the intellectual virtues—and it might even contribute to one's becoming intellectually vicious, while neglecting to cultivate the intellectual virtues prevents one from becoming a critical thinker. One acquires both critical thinking abilities and intellectual virtues together, or not at all. There is no such thing as the non-intellectually virtuous critical thinker, or the intellectually virtuous non-critical thinker.

If true, this is a significant insight for the appropriate curriculum in critical thinking education. Historically, these curricula have been largely devoid of materials and methods directly concerning instruction regarding intellectual virtues. Unless the materials and methods presently in use for critical thinking instruction happen to coincide with those appropriate to teaching intellectual virtue, the standard critical thinking curriculum is incomplete and stands in need of significant reform.

The interdependence view has considerable appeal and is gaining adherents with the recent interest in intellectual virtue approaches in epistemology and argumentation theory. Critical thinking scholars have widely agreed that critical thinking has a characterological aspect. Siegel's (1988) *reasons conception*, for instance, distinguishes a *reasons assessment component* and a *critical spirit component.* The critical spirit includes not only behavioral aspects—dispositions manifesting a generalized interest in seeking and assessing reasons and in governing one's beliefs and actions accordingly—but also characterological aspects, including particular habits of mind and character traits such as open-mindedness, independent-mindedness, and intellectual humility.

It would seem to be a short step from here to the view that intellectual virtue is necessary for critical thinking. The new essays in this symposium make clear that the range of overlap between critical thinking and intellectual virtue is extensive. Baehr and Siegel agree that good character is a requirement of being a critical thinker and that thinking well demands competence in certain

reasoning skills. Further, both agree that being a critical thinker involves motivational dispositions, which character partly supplies. In Baehr's lexicon, intellectual virtues just are the character attributes of good thinkers and learners, and these include traits such as those just enumerated (open-mindedness, independent-mindedness, intellectual humility).

But, as is often the case in philosophy, much hinges on the details. Despite the considerable overlap between their views, each symposiast also identifies points outside of this intersection. For Baehr, enacting any given intellectual virtue (open-mindedness, say) requires (a) *competence* in activities characteristic of open-mindedness (e.g. entering into an alternative perspective); (b) doing so from the right *motivation* (namely from a love of epistemic goods); and (c) having the *judgment* to do all this on just the right occasions and in just the right ways. These are substantial demands that may well be *individually*, but not collectively required by either the reason assessment or the critical spirit components of being a critical thinker. For example, as Siegel argues, skillfully reconsidering one's current standpoint on some issue might require the judgment component of open-mindedness but may not require the motivational component. Siegel contends that open-minded reassessment of one's standpoint manifests critical thinking if reason demands it, whether or not one does so from a love of epistemic goods.

Siegel thus distinguishes dispositional from non-dispositional components of the intellectual virtues, where the latter include particular motivational states—specifically the love of epistemic goods. He is happy to concede that the dispositional components are coextensive with the dispositions, habits of mind, and character traits comprising the critical spirit. However, this leaves out the non-dispositional, motivational features of intellectual virtues.

In the deeper background lurks a possible disagreement about the relationship between critical thinking, intellectual virtue, and rationality. Intellectual virtues are often understood teleologically as the character traits conducive to attaining epistemic goods, like knowledge and understanding. So intellectually virtuous persons are likewise thought to be those who love such goods. As Baehr argues in his contribution to this symposium, this view of the

relationship between intellectual virtues and epistemic goods informs the kinds of motives said to configure the motivational aspects of intellectual virtue: the intellectually virtuous person is *motivated* by a love of these epistemic goods—that is, they are motivated by their valuing epistemic ends intrinsically.

Now consider: what is the nature of epistemic rationality on such an account? Does it reduce to instrumental rationality, such as the position that what is rational to believe depends on our epistemic concerns? For theorists such as Siegel, no such reduction can make sense. For them, what is rational to believe depends solely on our reasons, and these may or may not speak to our epistemic concerns; if my evidence indicates that human activity is the primary cause of climate change in the past century, then it is rational to believe this—and irrational to believe otherwise—whether I care to understand our climate situation or not.

If we take our theoretical lead from the McCracken symposiasts, the motivational dimension of intellectual virtue is at the heart of the controversy about its suitability to play the role of a focal epistemic aim of education. This theoretical disagreement has important pedagogical consequences, for a love of epistemic goods is not easily taught if it can be at all. What besides exemplification can a teacher do to communicate what it is to have such love, or to have it in the right way? For Siegel, this is not a substantial concern even if it is a strike against intellectual virtue as an epistemic educational aim; being a critical thinker does not require this motivation anyway. Baehr is more sanguine, however, elaborating in his contribution many ways educators can teach intellectual virtue, including love of epistemic goods, beyond exemplification.

In this symposium, Beahr and Siegel re-examine the relationship between critical thinking, intellectual virtue, and rationality, as well as discussing the teaching of critical thinking and intellectual virtue. These new papers are instructive in highlighting the importance of differentiating between educating for critical thinking and educating for intellectual virtue in teaching good thinking. The area of overlap is so large that it is easy to miss the locus of disagreement between critical thinking and intellectual virtue theorists regarding the optimal approach for teaching good think-

ing in higher education. In the end, Siegel says the locus of disagreement is the motivational component: epistemic duty versus love of epistemic goods. Both Siegel and Baehr speak to the characterological development that is needed to develop good thinkers. This is an area of significant overlap.

Is it helpful to think of the "reasons conception" and intellectual virtue as demanding different approaches to understanding critical thinking and its instruction? If we think that there are at least two normative dimensions of good thinking, one characterological and the other epistemological/logical, then we might consider that each approach focuses on a distinct normative dimension of good thinking, *each* of which should inform the pedagogy of teaching critical thinking across the curriculum. For, even if the interdependence view is mistaken—even if the cultivation of intellectual virtue amounts to something more or other than developing one's reasoning skills and critical spirit—it might nevertheless be the case that there is a symbiotic relationship in their exercise, practice, learning, and instruction. Moreover, perhaps inspiring a virtuous motivation—a valuing of epistemic goods for their own sake—ought to be included among our instructional ends when teaching critical thinking. While these issues remain unresolved following Baehr and Siegel's exchange in the 2023 McCracken symposium, the possibilities they raise should inspire further work on the interconnections between traditional and areatic approaches to critical thinking and its instruction.

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