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Résumé de l'article

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A Deweyan Critique of the Critical Thinking versus Character Education Debate

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What distinguishes the philosophies of education advanced by pragmatists? Does pragmatism have something distinctive to offer contemporary philosophy of education? This paper applies these questions, which Randall Curren asks in "Pragmatist Philosophy of Education" (2009), to a more specific current debate in philosophy of education: the debate over educating for critical thinking, and/or for intellectual virtues. Which, if either, should be given priority in higher education, and why? This paper develops a Deweyan approach to these questions, inviting character content but also offering specific ways for educators and institutions to stay alert to the pedagogical *and* indoctrination *concerns with character education initiatives, including those for intellectual virtues specifically.*

Critical Thinking and Intellectual Virtue

This paper examines a contemporary debate among philosophers of education between the self-described proponents of critical thinking (CT) and those of intellectual virtues (IVs). Defending the former, Harvey Siegel (1997) claims that "the fostering of rationality and critical thinking is the central aim, and the overriding ideal, of education" (p. 1–2). A proponent of IV, Duncan Pritchard (2023a) argues that "there is an overarching epistemic goal to education, and that this is the development of good intellectual character" (p. 133). Kotzee, Carter, and Siegel (2021; hereafter KCS) write that, "The current debate is focused on the question, 'What, precisely, is one committed to in virtue of maintaining that, for any goal, *X* – be it intellectual virtue, knowledge, critical thinking, etc. – *X* is the "primary aim" of education?'" (p. 179–180).

One of the first things to notice if we are to consider a Deweyan mediation of this debate is how often, as above, it has been explicitly couched as a debate over the "over-arching" or "central" or "primary" aim of education. Dewey was highly reticent about positing a primary or overall goal for education. Debates over the aims of education are a place where values often clash, but also where shared core values can sometimes be sharpened, and revised in light of experience. Dewey would reluctantly posit "growth" as the best shot at an overall aim of education if one is thought needed.[1] "The very idea

[1] Proponents of CT and IV might both claim to find insufficiency in Dewey's account, for "failing" to specify an overarching aim of education. But R. L. Hildreth (2011), and Harðarson (2012) successfully argue that this is actually a strength, and that in rejecting externally imposed aims of education Dewey was pushing away from expert-driven models of educational authority. Curren (2009, p. 500) thinks of growth for Dewey as exhibiting an evolutionary

of education is a freeing of individual capacity in progressive growth directed at social aims" (Dewey, 1916, p. 105).[2] But besides developing the mutually reinforcing character of liberal education and democratic processes, what the social aims are toward which education should be directed is also, Dewey insists, not a matter that can be settled for all times and places.

Dewey also was eager to reject hardened or externally opposed aims, even when they might sound benign, such as "knowledge production." Thankfully, the CT and IV proposals overlap in standing as opposed to those that take educational value to be merely instrumental, a means to the fixed end of knowledge production.[3] Dewey's rejection of the "doctrine of fixed ends,"[4] and his subsequent embrace of means–end reciprocity, arguably have important implications for education. It can firstly help us to set aside the uncareful "either/or" demand that our initial quotes seem to pose, a demand framed in terms of a doubtful – and perhaps harmful – shared premise. In general terms, such an either/or demand rightly invites a neither/nor response.[5] This is not intended to mean, however, that our focal debate is a pseudo-debate. There are important differences between the CT and IV proposals, and trade-offs in the priorities that they entail. Often the contributors to the debate are more guarded, emphasizing priorities under conditions of scarce resources rather than debate over a singular aim of education.[6] We can thus accept the more positive, if general, description of the debate as "instructive in highlighting the importance of differentiating between educating for critical thinking and educating for intellectual virtue in teaching good thinking" (Ferkany, McKeon, and Godden 2023, p. 171).

There are in other words real questions as to whether higher education should more intentionally emphasize character education, or whether doing so would potentially compromise commitment to the centrality of critical thinking skills and abilities, as Siegel and KCS worry. So, having started from an initial Deweyan concern with how the debate is framed as competition over a singular fixed aim of education, I will largely set that aside and move forward to develop a more positive "both/and" Deweyan response to the debate, related to what Ferkany, McKeon, and Godden call a combined or integrated "CT + IV" account (2023, p. 171). The second section looks further at the contemporary debate itself, in which

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view in contrast to views, Aristotelean or other, that involve fulfilling the potential entailed by a fixed species-essence.

[2] "Moral growth does not mean, therefore, to act so as to fill up some presupposed ideal self" (Dewey, 1893/2008, p. 49). "Growth" as a purposefully "thin" and thus flexible aim resists hardening on particular ends in ways that may actually prove stultifying; See especially Forstenzer (2017), who reconstructs how this was part of a late "shift" in Dewey's account from capacities to potentialities. "Growth" respects the negatively stated Peircean dictum not to block the road to inquiry; the thinness of progressive growth as an "over-arching" aim has for related reasons been featured in responses to what Phillip Deen (2012) calls the "problem of liberalism," and relatedly in defense of the self-consistency of "pragmatic pluralism."

[3] In his 1938 *Logic*, Dewey favours the term "intelligence" over "reason" and criticizes the notion of pure rationality. This already helps with constructing an inclusive "both/and" position (thanks to Jim Garrison for these points; compare Deen [2012]). Today the humanities generally are facing renewed threat from "knowledge" conceptions of educational aims attending a shift away from comprehensive liberal education and towards narrower vocational orientation. I take it that CT and IV share a lot of common ground in resistance to a knowledge-production conception of education. See Boyles (2008), however, for an argument that far from the ideal of autonomy, some Christian character education initiatives have been strongly conjoined with commercialism.

[4] In education as in most other practices, Dewey holds that ends are not fixed but "worked out and developed in the light of the actual conditions." So, he continues, "[t]he philosophy of education neither originates nor settles ends. It occupies an intermediate and instrumental or regulative place" (Dewey, 1930/2008, p. 29).

[5] Disputants could also be talking past one another if they do not share an ordered hierarchy from broad to narrow for such terms as "aims," "goals," "objectives," and "outcomes." "Aims," as the broadest concept, are things often met indirectly; yet the language of "primary aim," as used in the passages, instead seems to be used in relation to competing views of what should be *directly* taught.

[6] KCS (2021) note that "[t]he dispute about what the aim of education is only makes sense if one aim is more important than another and can outrank another aim when it comes to allocation of scarce educational resources" (p. 180, n. 11).

proponents on both sides sometimes appeal to Dewey for support. The third section goes beyond the pedagogical and empirical adequacy challenges that KCS focus on, to dig further into what has been called the indoctrination challenge to IV (and to character education more broadly). The concluding section further develops a Dewey-informed response, highlighted by my own "triangulation" proposal to address serious concerns raised by this third challenge.

The Pedagogical Challenge to IV

As presented through a 2023 symposium published in *Informal Logic*, Siegel (2023) defends the centrality of CT, understanding it as requiring skills or abilities of reason assessment and also a critical spirit component that recognizes "a cluster of dispositions, habits of mind, and character traits" (p. 206). Jason Baehr (2023) in turn defends IV, arguing that while teaching directly for IVs is no "substitute" for the skills and abilities taught in formal and informal logic and critical thinking courses, the former – the nurturing of "the character attributes of good thinkers and reasoners" (p. 174) – should be considered the more primary aim of education. Taking us beyond the rather minimalistic creative spirit component that Siegel wants to maintain, higher education should concern itself directly with the motivational and psychological qualities underpinning the reliable use of critical skills and abilities, and thereby "nurture meaningful progress in developing qualities like curiosity, open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and intellectual humility" (p. 174).

The narrower scope of CT in relationship to IV, focusing on the epistemic rationality involved in reason assessment and leaving aside practical wisdom and the motivational and affective (or as Siegel terms them, the "non-dispositional") aspects of IVs, as neo-Aristotelians understand them, is at the least *one* central issue in the debate between proponents of CT and those of IV. Thus, the symposium editors Ferkany, McKeon, and Godden (2023) point out that at least between Siegel and Baehr, "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" (p. 171). Baehr (2023) thinks of IV as "humanizing" education and doing so in a way that bridges "gaps" left by the insufficiency of Siegel's creative spirit to guarantee that skilled reasoners have a significant level of IV.[7]

Should educators teach for IVs specifically, or more simply allow/assume that these will be *caught* with a sound CT pedagogy, but cannot be directly *taught*?[8] The overlap of the two proposals, CT and IV, may seem so large when put in this way, but there are important differences. While acknowledging much overlap between the proposals, Pritchard (2023a) argues that "a virtuous intellectual character entails a critically rational intellectual character, but not *vice versa*" (p. 129). Croce and Pritchard (2023), as proponents of IV, claim that what needs to be instilled in students are "the right kinds of behavioral dispositions and the corresponding motivational states, and this is an essentially social process" (p. 587).[9] But is proper motivation, as IV proponents understand it, suitable to play the role of a focal epistemic aim of education? (Ferkany & McKeon and Godden, 2023, p. 171). While KCS would doubt this and take it as part of their primary pedagogical challenge to the viability of IV, it is clear that IV's proponents

[7] If IV softens and personalizes/socializes CT, Siegel's reason assessment hardens and depersonalizes it, in his insistence that "[t]hinking is critical just to the extent that it manifests and reflects due attention to, concern for, and competence in, assessing the probative strength of relevant reasons" (Siegel, 2023, p. 207).

[8] Curren (2009) finds "high stakes" testing for moral virtues to be ill-advised, and the same concern of measurement will likely arise when it comes to education for IVs. See also Curren, 2019.

[9] The IVs "are constituent parts of a life of flourishing, and thus are intrinsically valuable" (Croce and Pritchard 2023, p. 586).

instead embrace the more demanding nature of their proposal, arguing from the greater intrinsic value that IVs have for those who cultivate them.[10]

Proponents of both CT and IV have each sometimes appealed to Dewey's writings for support. Dewey certainly saw education as including what White (2015) calls "character content," but White at the same time points out that Dewey did not approach the development of character "the way so many character education programs do, with definitions of key concepts established *a priori* and solutions to moral dilemmas prefabricated for students" (p. 134).[11] For Dewey, virtues and vices are habits of doxastic and moral action, habits best understood in relation to *inquiry* and deliberation. As such the use of characterological concepts, like other conceptual tools used in deliberation, is animated by imagination. "Then each habit, each impulse, involved in the temporary suspense of overt action takes its turn in being tried out. Deliberation is an experiment in finding out what the various lines of possible action are really like" (Dewey, 1924/2008, p. 132). He continues: "It is an experiment in making various combinations of selected elements of habits and impulses, to see what the resultant action would be like if it were entered upon. But the trial is in imagination, not in overt fact" (p. 132–133).

Engagement with "thick" evaluative and characterological concepts is an important resource for deliberation as thus understood.[12] Whether characterological concepts are "sufficiently action-guiding" is part of KCS's pedagogical challenge,[13] yet this need not be taken as their role, except, indeed, were character education to *displace* rather than complement CT pedagogy. But it is good psychology that takes note of how attributing virtuous or vicious qualities depends upon reference to a situation and not to will alone, heroically independent of environmental cues or triggers. If IVs do not have a characteristic psychology, as their grounding in a love of epistemic goods seems to assume, then the dispositional attribution of virtues and vices can be called into doubt as lacking empirical adequacy.[14]

The Indoctrination Challenge and Two Overlooked Sub-problems

The ideological/indoctrination challenge to IV is concerned with the power relations and ideologies that virtue/vice attributions[15] might carry along with them, and how exemplars are chosen and presented. If selected role models and exemplars of moral or intellectual virtue over-represent particular racial, religious, gender, or political groups, etc., this lack of diversity can obviously be troubling. Faculty may lack the breadth to find suitable role models and exemplars from under-represented groups. There are

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[10] Pritchard is clear that his IV proposal is more demanding than those who cite intellectual character development as part of their educational axiology, but who limit this to "*critically rational intellectual character*": "I want to argue instead, however, for a more demanding conception of good intellectual character that specifically concerns the intellectual virtues. On this alternative model, the good intellectual character that is the overarching epistemic goal of education is to be understood as *virtuous intellectual character*" (p. 130; emphasis in original).

[11] White (2015) notes that for Dewey the meaning, nature, and content of character "are integral portions of any adequate ethical theory" and that "character is a fact entering into any moral judgment passed" (p. 134).

[12] It is widely agreed that there is no value-neutral way of applying thick concepts; a person needs to be "engaged" with the valenced concept in order to be in a position to apply it in reflective judgment.

[13] KCS (2021) hold that IV is "insufficiently action-guiding" and "does not have available a suitably effective pedagogy to qualify the acquisition of intellectual virtue as the aim of primary education" (p. 177). Logical and epistemic norms are not relative to persons in the way Aristotle held virtues to be.

[14] This empirical adequacy challenge is a second set of problems that KCS develop against IV, though we haven't space to develop it here.

[15] Dewey held that praise and blame function to make people aware of and responsive to the consequences of their actions. But this primary function of praise and blame can be warped by bias, and made to serve other sundry functions. The habits of trait-attribution are an important focus of study in contemporary social psychology, and vice epistemologists recognize a continuum from robust to (merely) rhetorical vice-charging.

additionally several long-standing concerns that "character" and "virtue/vice" concepts derive from paternalistic and conservative conceptions of morality.

Kristján Kristjánsson (2013), another supporter of IV, counters that most of these indoctrination-related concerns about character education are myths. Carr (2023), by contrast, critiques of Linda Zagzebski's and Kristjánsson's exemplarism for its reliance on intuitive judgments of admiration. Even if concerns about exemplarism in moral theory are sometimes serious, might IV be thought substantially less susceptible to them, given that its focus is restricted to *intellectual* virtues? Pritchard (2023b) makes this claim explicitly, acknowledging the ideological "baggage" some aretaic concepts carry, but responds that the values in question with the IV proposal are primarily epistemic or intellectual by nature, and "not wedded to any particular way in which a student should think but … merely focused on helping students to think" (np).

But how true is this? Pritchard, at the same time, holds that the central advantage of IV resides in virtue theory's teleological structure: it "incorporates a conception of how the students ought to be and what values they should have" (np).[16] There is tension between these two claims. But I will argue that concern with Pritchard's response should go deeper. The response does not recognize how often and easily the extension, the *descriptive content* of a thick evaluative or characterological concept, can be subtly shifted, leading to very different applications. So, in connection with the indoctrination challenge, let us pose and provide examples of two further problems that have escaped much recognition in our focal debate.

The first is the persuasive definition problem: thick evaluative and characterological concepts are especially prone to having their descriptive content subtlety shift*,* even as their positive or negative valence remains. Illicit use of persuasive definition can altogether escape the notice of students, who in such cases would be subject to rhetorical manipulation in ways that substantially heighten the indoctrination challenge. Persuasive definition is a well-studied phenomenon in argumentation theory; indeed, it was discussed at length in *Informal Logic* a few issues before the CT/IV symposium, though no direct connections were noted.[17] Proposing changed extensions can be argued for explicitly, and is often a normal, licit aspect of public debates, as we will see. But when employed illicitly as a rhetorical technique, persuasive definition works somewhat oppositely to the standard account of slanted language. In slanted language, the descriptive content remains as it was, but a new euphemistic or dysphemistic term may be promoted to replace the original, in order to positively or negatively impact an audience's affective response. In persuasive definition, most often the normative valence of a concept remains intact, but its extension or descriptive content is changed, impacting how the audience is likely to apply the concept in particular cases. "A persuasive definition is a form of stipulative definition which purports to describe the true or commonly accepted meaning of a term, while in reality stipulating an uncommon or altered

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[16] As examples, Pritchard (2023a) writes: "The intellectual virtues are held to not only be instrumentally valuable, however, but also finally valuable. They are constituent parts of what it is to live a good life of human flourishing, what the ancient Greeks referred to as *eudaimonia*" (p. 130). The debate over teaching well-being overlaps with our focal debate, though one caution is that "growth" for Dewey does not imply any fixed species-essence. By implication, neither should "flourishing" or "well-being."

[17] Deweyans should appreciate some aspects of C. L. Stevenson's influential discussion of persuasive definition, in which to choose a definition is to plead a cause. On persuasive definitions, see also Macagno and Walton (2008a; 2008b), and Walton (2005). Pruś and Aberdein (2022) use Walton's work to show that not all definitions are persuasive, and to argue that this saves pragmatists from having to accept that claim, given that pragmatists reject essences and see meanings as set by use. Walton, they argue, consistently maintains the pragmatic side in the essentialism–pragmatism debate. They also emphasize that definition should be considered argumentative, and that the burden of proof is on the arguer. But neither of those two rules will be maintained when persuasive definitions are not recognized as such!

use, usually to support an argument for some view, or to create or alter rights, duties, or crimes. … In argumentation, the use of persuasive definition is sometimes called definist fallacy."[18]

There are many normal, expected uses of persuasive definition and so the persuasive definition problem is a quite general worry; but our second associated problem makes its connections with the ideology/indoctrination challenge more specific. The use of persuasive definition is complicated not just by liberal–conservative divisions, but also by the varying educational axiologies of public and religiously missioned schools. While it goes largely unacknowledged in the current CT/IV debate, there are clear undercurrents of our second problem associated with the indoctrination challenge. This is the partiality-and-the-virtues problem: religious identity is typically particular, favouring one testimonial tradition over others; yet the manifestation of IV is typically associated with impartial treatment of reasons and evidence.

An example of the partiality-and-the-virtues problem is Zagzebski's book *Epistemic Authority* (2012), which treats "deferential trust" in the religious authority of one's own inherited testimonial tradition as intellectually virtuous because of an expression of intellectual humility.[19] Despite the objectivity or neutrality that her appeal to love of truth might seem to secure, Zagzebski is here making virtuous people's doxastic partiality. This move from intellectual humility in its primary sense as limitations-owning to an application in which its expression is deference towards a purported ecclesiastic or supernatural authority over belief is an example of persuasive definition at work, and its upshot strongly favours favouritism; that is, doxastic partiality. Her re-definition of intellectual humility widens the boundaries for correct application of a word which is generally greeted with a very strong positive connotation; the persuasive definition valorizes conduct which would not normally be thought to be a manifestation of intellectual humility.

Other religious proponents of IV have recently portrayed "firmness" in inherited beliefs as the virtuous golden mean between too much and too little trust in a purported divine authority or revelation. But treating our doxastic partiality as intellectually virtuous in these sweeping ways can serve to insulate authority claims of all kinds from reasoned criticism. "Exemplarism," as Zagzebski develops it, rests on admiration. But another way to look at the issue at hand is not that these persuasive definitions are so revisionary, but rather that our examples highlight how schools in which religious education is part of a stated mission tend to operate with a triadic model implicitly or explicitly in place: religious virtues/vices are not just to be added into the mix, but operate top-down, with moral and intellectual/epistemic norms interpreted through if not subordinated to them.[20]

Whether through persuasive definition or a leading role for religious virtues, examples such as these problematize the claim that IV proposals are ideologically neutral due to their special connection with the acquisition of epistemic goods like "knowledge" and "understanding." For the latter terms will likely be used in quite variable ways as well, when separated from methods of science, or when such goods are treated as the result of special access. The worry about IV proposals, especially as they are

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[18] See https://dbpedia.org/page/Persuasive_definition, accessed February 2024. The most common examples of persuasive definition are with thick *evaluative* concepts, concepts which "often involve emotionally charged but imprecise notions, such as 'freedom,' 'terrorism,' 'democracy,' etc." But I argue that thick *aretaic* concepts are as easily prone to persuasive definition, and potentially with as great a consequence.

[19] See Merrick (2020) for one direct reply; Merrick argues that Zagzebski does not sufficiently consider how wholesale deference to tradition may perpetuate a host of epistemic justice-related problems. On Merrick's account, "non-deference to some traditionally authorized beliefs is not indicative of member's arrogance, but rather an attempt to cultivate the virtue of epistemic justice" (p. 97). Compare also Ranalli (2022) and work in the Carter, Kelp, and Simion (2020) "Virtue Epistemology of Trust" project.

[20] "Many philosophers and theologians have long argued that religion is essential to human flourishing, and that there are distinct virtues, such as piety, associated with worshiping God. …. There are also many different secular approaches to cultivating a good character" (Miller and Knobel, 2015, p. 36). For further comparison among Christian philosophers over the merits of doxastic partiality, see and Gardner (2023), Schmidt (2023), and Dormandy (2021). Some Deweyans assert the need for a new model of religious education for democratic, multi-faith societies (Sutinen et al., 2015).

made for public schools, is that while in theory they highlight shared habits of good inquiry, in their application they may instead be persuasively redefined to make a virtue of our existing loyalties, leading to suspension or devaluing of inductive norms and other epistemic universals associated with the impartial weighing of evidence.[21] If evidentialism leaves insufficient room for our natural partialities and culturally conditioned beliefs, fundamentalisms of all sorts insufficiently explain the crucial distinction between (morally or intellectually) virtuous and vicious expressions of partiality (Axtell, 2023). These are further reasons why it is important to recognize a partiality-and-the-virtues problem, which the response to the indoctrination challenge by Pritchard I think does not. How education that uses concepts of intellectual virtue and vice navigates treacherous issues of epistemic partiality is the proverbial elephant in the room.[22]

To summarize thus far, the indoctrination challenge is not one that character education generally either meets or fails, short of looking at the specific educational programs and their classroom implementation. However, our examples indicate some ways that an authoritarian or paternalistic conservatism could creep into character education in public institutions. If education in IVs is to be complementary with CT and formal/informal logic, it must avoid the potential rhetorical manipulation of students and other indicators of indoctrination. But to consider more closely how this is possible, let us move to more specific suggestions for a Deweyan mediation of the CT/IV debate.

Suggestions for a Deweyan Mediation: Balancing One CE with Two Others

We previously noted how Dewey would challenge any framing of our focal debate as one over a singular, overall aim of education. This sort of talk discourages a healthy reciprocity of means and ends, and also fails to note important "mission" differences between public education and schools with a religious education mandate. With the pedagogical challenge to IV, we noted that Dewey acknowledges substantial character content in Dewey's his conception of education, but urged virtue-talk to focus not on the motivational structure of individual people but on effective habits of inquiry, something which also ties them more directly with empiricism and methods of science. These considerations already qualify the IV proposal in substantial ways, but arguably also enable affirming a "both/and" response to the CT/IV debate, one in which the resources of thick concepts genuinely augment CT pedagogy. But how does this "both/and" response play out with respect to concerns raised by the indoctrination challenge, more specifically?

Rhetorical persuasion attends people's selection, definition, and application of intellectual as well as moral virtues and vices. Dewey (1932/2008), on my reading, acknowledges the persuasive definition problem that we cannot fully separate the virtues, nor give each one a "fixed meaning, because each expresses an interest in objects and institutions which are changing" (p. 113). In contrast to his sharp criticisms of didacticism, Dewey views contestation over meanings positively, as part of what pragmatists often term "pragmatic pluralism." Dewey (1924/2008) acknowledges that "[a]n individual usually acquires the morality as he inherits the speech of his social group" (p. 58). But this is only a starting point. He does not necessarily share Nietzsche's generalized skepticism of received concepts but emphasizes here as elsewhere that intelligence is discovered through "continuous, vital readaptation" (p. 240).

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[21] We may take "loyalties" here on analogy with friendship. In "Epistemic Partialism," Mason (2023) defines epistemic partialism as "the view that the general and justifiable partiality which we show to our friends often rightfully extends into the epistemic domain" (p. 3). The analogue of "friends" to religious or other in-groups which share loyalties should be obvious.

[22] Moral psychologists Graham et al. (2017, p. 63) distinguish centripetal (inward-pulling, partialist) and centrifugal (outward-pushing, impartialist) forces in moral reasoning, correctly noting that "[i]deological disagreements about the importance of centrifugal versus centripetal morality also manifest in disagreements about the proper content of character education programs."

As part of the reciprocity of means and ends, the continuous, vital readaptation of concepts acknowledges legitimate uses of persuasive definition. What Deweyans should appreciate is not just that persuasive definition is a constant companion of public debate, but also that it sometimes plays a licit, and at other times an illicit, move in argumentation. To choose a definition, with thick concepts, is to plead a cause. But this can be done either explicitly through argument, or tacitly, through rhetorical persuasion. When made explicit, we have instances of what the literature terms "conceptual engineering"; this can be a healthy form of normative inquiry.[23] Some "ameliorative" projects in social epistemology are explicitly engaged in conceptual engineering, since they are often associated with offering new applications of concepts, including characterological concepts, for the improvement of social practices (Axtell, 2021). With Dewey, pragmatic pluralists such as Fesmire (2024) urge us to "lay bare, classify, and analyze deep experiential entanglements between diverse and often discordant elements of moral life" within a wider framework of conceptions that puts these elements in communication. Addressing directly these frictional intersections is the best path forward, a path that privileges more adaptive virtues of inquiry.

The partiality-and-the-virtues problem is easily discernable as a subtext of the CT/IV debate: The "epistemic aim of education," which is Siegel's main reason to resist IV and prioritize CT, is marked by its impartiality in weighing evidence and competing arguments, which it associates with requirements of rationality. Siegel (1997) describes the critical spirit that animates this aim much like a Kantian "good will"; for duty's sake it is a spirit "which rejects partiality and arbitrariness; which is committed to the objective evaluation of relevant evidence" (p. 39; See Baehr, 2020, and 2021, for commentary). So, the two problems are interrelated, and I see them as being implicitly among the deepest sources of conflict between the two educational axiologies, CT and IV. With respect to the partiality-and-the-virtues problem, Dewey was both understanding of human partiality and at the same time highly aware of the tension it held with open-mindedness. Dewey gives name to many habits of good inquiry, attitudes "central in effective intellectual ways of dealing with subject matter." Open-mindedness is one of these. In his section "The Traits of Individual Method" in *Democracy and Education* (1916) from which this passage is drawn, he further writes that, "Openness of mind means accessibility of mind to any and every consideration that will throw light upon the situation that needs to be cleared up," and he connects this core virtue with our need to redress our own natural tendencies towards partiality: "Partiality is … an accompaniment of the existence of interest, since this means sharing, partaking, taking sides in some movement" (pp. 180–181).[24]

This does not, however, place Dewey alongside Siegel as a defender of evidentialism and strict impartiality cast as a requirement of rationality.[25] The larger point is that the concerns raised here point out differences between public and religious education, highlighted by tensions between the impartial

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[23] While persuasive definition is the more specific rhetorical concern, more explicit means to concept revision would draw us into the literature on conceptual engineering, or conceptual ethics, as it is also called. McPherson and Plunkett (2020) describe the dynamics of metalinguistic negotiation: "In metalinguistic negotiation, a speaker uses (rather than mentions) a term to advocate for a view about how that very term should be used. Speakers in a metalinguistic negotiation might well express conflicting normative views about how a word should be used – views that will standardly be based on normative considerations about things *other* than words and concepts (e.g., how we should live, how we should organize our social/political institutions, or what objective joints there are in reality) – even if those views are expressed through pragmatic mechanisms (rather than in terms of literal semantic content)" (p. 283, n. 31).

[24] Thanks for Jim Garrison for bring Dewey's discussions in this section to my attention. See also Dewey, 1916, pp. 49 and 366; Dewey, 1933/2008, p. 136.

[25] See Haji and Cuypers (2011) for criticism of Siegel's veritism, and Robertson (2009); see also the Garrison–Siegel debate (Siegel, 2001; Garrison, 2002), in which Jim Garrison aimed to undercut Siegel's assimilation of autonomy with "evidential rationality." Compare my own proposal below to triangulate character education programs with critical character epistemology and conceptual ethics with Siegel's focus on the thin normativity of epistemological "rationality."

weighing of evidence and argument, on the one hand, and those commitments of a theological sort that a person thinks are entailed by their active commitment to a particular religious faith.[26] It is not clear, moreover, that Siegel's appeals to epistemic rationality are helpful at the frictional intersections of communities that are contextualized by race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, nationality, etc. Thick concepts arguably aid us in navigating these intersections better than can repetition of the old, stalemated dynamic of dogmatic authoritarianism versus skeptical evidentialism.

In summary, the indoctrination challenge may be the *most*, not the *least* interesting challenge to IV, since valenced thick concepts, which describe and evaluate simultaneously, are highly subject to rhetorical manipulation. This challenge should not be overlooked, since as Dewey (1939/2008) reflects, "Until what shall be taught and how it is taught is settled upon the basis of formation of the scientific attitude, the so-called educational work of schools is a dangerously hit-or-miss affair as far as democracy is concerned" (p. 115). This, I have argued, is not a reason to shirk character education, but rather a reason to apply consistent CT, and encourage openness of mind through closer examination of our own partialities, and those of others. The evolution of the CT/IV debate should bring these issues into discussion *explicitly*; this development would invite critical character epistemology (Kidd, 2022; see also Battaly, 2023), in which the approach is neither skeptical nor Panglossian but rather melioristic, taking lessons from psychological studies of personal and social biases, and insights from "vice epistemology" as a needed balance to an exclusive focus on virtues.

Deweyan philosophers of education should *anticipate* how the politics of identity will affect character education initiatives; they should demand "upfront" an account of how a character education initiative will navigate the distinction between intellectually virtuous and vicious expressions of partiality, rather than responding to these concerns only after serious problems emerge. To anticipate these dynamics, philosophers of education should, I think, favour Chris Ranalli's structural epistemic account of indoctrination (2022), which identifies two distinct sources of indoctrination: the attitudes of instructors, and epistemically insulating instructed content.[27] The former anticipates bias in the choice and representation of models and exemplars; the latter anticipates dangers from illicit rhetorical persuasion used to insulate ideological assumptions (conservative *or* liberal) from reasoned criticism. But the conceptual ethics that we are led to when on guard against indoctrination within public and private education, is a shared normative task. Philosophers of education who are attentive to rhetorical persuasion can seize the opportunity to help mediate, rather than simply take sides in, the ongoing cultural debate.

For Dewey (1930/2008), education should serve social aims, and the very "idea of democracy involves individual responsibility for judgment and choice" (p. 135). Dewey's zetetic or inquiry-focused philosophy "exemplifies not a quest for certainty but a quest for responsibility" (Dewey, 1918–1919/2008, p. 346). The hope for IV is that in its central concern with good habits of inquiry, it respects communities and traditions yet serves melioristic purposes. Melioristic thinkers, whether secular *or* religious, actively seek cooperation strategies of problem-solving over zero-sum thinking, and "excellences" which remediate our natural biases in order to meet shared problems of the modern world.

Both academically and politically, character education has been controversial (see Watts and Kristjánsson [2023] for a further analysis). Recent initiatives, and perhaps especially those that focus on intellectual traits, have the appearance of being progressive; even if repelled by the moralistic associations

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[26] There is a well-known tension between faith and open-mindedness, since faith by some accounts "closes" inquiry. But acknowledging open-mindedness as a general intellectual virtue and close-mindedness as a vice should not be thought to preclude theists from reconciling their faith with intellectual responsibility. What it does show is that sharing a list of intellectual virtues is far from sharing full extensions/applications of those virtues.

[27] Ranalli responds directly to Zagzebski, and also to van Woudenberg (2009), who relatedly holds the view that indoctrination *implies* falsehood, so that no acquisition of true belief can be a case of indoctrination. Van Woudenberg's view is highly implausible, but his fideistic conflation of issues of form and content in the acquisition of worldview beliefs points back directly to "insulating instructed content" as a signpost of indoctrination.

of character education, educators might expect education for *intellectual* character to be above the fray, since these are habits associated with the obtainment of *epistemic* goods of truth, rational belief, and understanding. However, this claim, while made by proponents of IV, turns out not to be clear cut: IV proposals are still subject to the challenges of pedagogical and empirical adequacy. Given our discussion of the problem of persuasive definitions, they are not free from the indoctrination challenge either. To be sure, reflection upon IVs and the role they play in inquiry has the potential to support a healthy marketplace of ideas, and to improve public discourse in democratic society.

These are reasons why the adoption of character education initiatives into higher education curriculum is appealing to many. Certainly it appeals to proponents of an integrated "CT-plus-IV" proposal such as McKeon and Ferkany (2023), and in the remainder of the paper I will go on to interpret this language of "supplementing" CT with character education, or of "combining" and "integrating" as being amenable to the progressive, experimental ideals of education that Dewey articulated. Yet a bare "both/and" or "CT-plus-IV" response to the debate, I think Dewey would warn, does not guarantee that the specific manner of integration will be appropriate to public schools: this very much depends upon the program's implementation, and on individual instructors as well. In a period of rising religious nationalism, such proposals could serve illiberal aims, inviting overt favouritism and parochialism through choice of exemplars, or even surreptitiously serving authoritarianism and valorizing doxastic partiality over impartiality.

In this paper we have already traversed many of the arguments in our focal CT/IV debate, noting first Dewey's general opposition to the assumption that there is a single, ultimate aim of education.[28] If cast in this way the debate becomes an instance of a more general fault that gives rise to either/or thinking, a type of thinking Dewey argues is all-too pervasive (see Mays's chapter in *The Handbook of Dewey's Educational Theory and Practice*, edited by Lowery and Jenlink).[29] But what can we more positively describe as the best resources for mediating the present debate? And what is the practical import of interpreting Dewey's own response to our focal debate as combined CT and IV? The practical import, I think, extends all the way from curriculum adoption of character education initiatives at the university level to the individual instructor's course and lesson design.

On the one hand, that Dewey's conception of education highly values the development of deep-seated and effective habits is quite apparent throughout his published works. In "Moral Principles in Education" (1909/2008), he asserts that a school is only designed on a moral basis if its resources increase a student's social intelligence, social interests, and social power, and that moral education requires "the development of character through all the agencies, instrumentalities, and materials of school life" (p. 4). In his discussions of "the training of mind" in *How We Think* (1910/2008) and *Democracy and Education* (1916/2008), as well as later works including *Experience and Education* (1938/2008), Dewey further articulates how and why education should encourage in students the develop of deep-seated habits of inquiry, habits which improve the quality of judgment across a wide range of contexts and content fields. Dewey (1938/2008) is critical of teaching methods which are "static," and both traditional and progressive education, he argues, are sometimes examples of this. Inquiry learning is discussed as a counter-point educational method to those which either do not incorporate enough experiential content, or comport to the exploitation of sentiment and opinion: "The essential need … is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public. We

[28] Basically, everyone party to our focus debate presents themselves as holding a "both/and" stance. Proponents of IV view their proposal as being compatible with the integrity of CT (even if KCS do not); and proponents of CT think that teaching the critical spirit aspects of CT leads to sufficient integration (even if proponents of IV deny this). So, it is primarily only in respect of alternative claims about a fundamental aim of education that IV and CT are deemed incompatible proposals.

[29] In *Experience and Education* (1938/2008) and elsewhere, Dewey emphasized that educational philosophy should be developed positively and constructively, to which he contrasted either/or thinking (see Mays, 2019).

have asserted that this improvement depends essentially upon freeing and perfecting the processes of inquiry" (Dewey, 1925–1927/2008, p. 366; see Fesmire 2024 for development).

On the other hand, Dewey (1916/2008) was explicitly critical of "set[ting] up character as a supreme end" and at the same time devaluing content knowledge and skills (p. 364). He prescribed pedagogical aims and methods far less didactic and moralistic than what he perceived to be the norm among the public as well as in private schools of his era, and he was often, accordingly, critical of the character education of his era. Pietig (1977) argues that Dewey's ideas on moral education contrast with "character education programmes reflect[ing] a trait-inspired approach to morality … [wherein] character was assumed to be a structure of virtues and vices. … Dewey's conception of morality was broader; he held that character embraced all the purposes, desires, and habits that affect human conduct" (p. 170). Dewey scholars have often concerned themselves directly with the public/private school distinction and with effects of fundamentalism on character education initiatives, issues which are quite relevant today (Boyles, 2008). In a period of rising religious nationalism like our own, these concerns may well extend to the adoption of IV proposals.[30] A "CT-plus-IV" response, if that is what Dewey would recommend, must not neglect the importance of agent motivations, but neither should it exaggerate inner motives by de-naturalizing them, making a love of truth mysterious and unverifiable. It is the business of education "to cultivate deep-seated and effective habits of discriminating tested beliefs from mere assertions, guesses, and opinions; to develop a lively, sincere, and open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded" (Dewey, 1910/2008, p. 28).

A Deweyan response to the CT/IV debate, I believe, is one that experimentally invites a social dynamic to play out through discussion of IVs, while insisting that educators and institutions do not simply let their students get "caught in the middle," unable to recognize illicit rhetorical persuasion that might attend characterological concepts, or instances when a form of character education carries the signs of indoctrination. Even though their descriptive content and application cannot be firmly fixed, the fact that concepts representative of deep-seated intellectual habits of good inquiry, like open-mindedness, intellectual humility, etc. *are* widely shared and admired, is generally speaking already a step forward. However, philosophy of education which draws from Dewey should not stop there, but more positively work to integrate the contextual, the empirical, and the normative (Curren 2009, p. 500).

IV talk supplements CT pedagogy in promoting this integration, but will do so best if it explicitly triangulates concerns with the contextual, the empirical, and the normative. A pragmatist approach motivates this triangulation, which can in turn help mediate debates over educational axiology. Critical character epistemology is informed by science and is a constant challenge to routinized or ill-adapted habits of thinking. Conceptual ethics seeks to make the rationale for concept change explicit, and capturable in reasoned arguments, the premises and logic of which can be assessed. My proposal, then, to describe the needed mediation of our focal debate, is to experimentally invite increased character content or character education in higher education, but to balance it with two other forms of character education: (critical) character epistemology (informed by empirical studies), and conceptual ethics (as the normative inquiry that engagement with thick evaluative concepts invites).

Triangulating these three forms of character education, I think, better ensures "accessibility of mind to any and every consideration that will throw light upon the situation that needs to be cleared up" (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 180). If so, it helps articulate what Dewey (1939/2008) saw as a main advantage of political democracy, that "it is an educational procedure" (p. 115) and thus a setting for continued

[30] Pietig (1977) explains Dewey's differences from the character education of his era: "Because character education programmes were aimed at developing specific virtues in students, the programmes were narrowly conceived and were unable to affect major changes in educational practice. … [Dewey] held that character embraced all the purposes, desires, and habits that affect human conduct" (p. 170). This may partly explain why Dewey was in some conservative circles seen as undercutting character education. See also White (2015), who discusses the "oppressive benevolence" of some character education initiatives, while defending Dewey against those who blamed him for what they perceived as a shift towards character-eroding public education.

individual growth and liberation of powers that promote social aims. Reflecting upon thick concepts is a vital resource for inquirers, stoking an imaginative application of intelligence leading to improved deliberation, whether in public or private higher education settings. Imagination and intellect should be active when engaged with thick evaluative and characterological concepts: Asking "what if…?" questions surrounding valenced thick concepts promotes the higher-order critical reasoning dispositions that come with the ability to think hypothetically, and to distinguish the logic of an argument from the perceived truth of premises or conclusions. This is a "CT-plus-IV" proposal, responding "both/and." The cultural context of character education initiatives as a place where conservative and liberal sentiments are likely to clash should not be neglected; rather, and consistent with pragmatic pluralism, a mediation of the CT/IV debate through the triangulation proposal and constant attention to potential indoctrination concerns can help forge a healthier democracy. This invites a normative inquiry involving our conceptual ethics[31] and conversations that we simply need to have. As Haslanger (2020) writes in "Going On, Not in the Same Way," "Contestation over meaning is not 'mere semantics' for – together with political and material change – it can shape our agency and our lives together" (p. 231).

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[31] McPherson and Plunkett (2020) explain the importance of conceptual ethics, but do not privilege the aretaic in the way that character education proponents might. Their approach is consistent with Dewey's "Three Independent Factors in Morals" (1930/2008) thesis concerning normative ethical theories. None of the three main types of systems of normative ethics (consequentialist, deontic, or aretaic) is a complete theory, or carries automatic or conclusive authority.

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