



Virtue epistemology and education

Epistemología virtuosa y educación

Rashad Rehman

Franciscan University of Steubenville, United States

rehman@franciscan.edu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7587-4170>

Hassan Ahmad

University of British Columbia, British Columbia, Canada

ahmad@allard.ubc.ca

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6114-5885>

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INFORMACIÓN DEL ARTÍCULO	ABSTRACT/RESUMEN
Recibido el: 16/5/2025 Aceptado el: 20/8/2025 Keywords: Education, capability, welfare, intellect, knowledge Palabras clave: Educación, capacidad, bienestar, intelecto, conocimiento	Abstract: Education is a bifurcated process by which knowledge is generated and transferred through learning tangible skills and intangible virtues. This paper uses Amartya Sen's capability approach to advocate for a normative quality of welfare pursuant to the capability of education. For normative welfare, a particular state of consciousness or <i>midfare</i> must first be achieved. We characterize this <i>midfare</i> as <i>Intellect</i>, which is defined by a set of non-exhaustive virtues that we devise and that prioritize the Finnisian value of knowledge over all other subjective pursuits. We also assess a possible relativist critique to <i>Intellect</i>. The desire is that a working model of <i>Intellect</i> will be implemented within transitioning curricula. Resumen: La educación es un proceso bifurcado a través del cual se genera y transfiere conocimiento mediante el aprendizaje de habilidades tangibles y virtudes intangibles. Este artículo utiliza el enfoque de las capacidades de Amartya Sen para abogar por una calidad normativa del bienestar, en consonancia con la capacidad de la educación. Para lograr un bienestar normativo, primero se debe alcanzar un estado de conciencia o punto intermedio. Caracterizamos

este punto intermedio como Intelecto, definido por un conjunto de virtudes no exhaustivas que ideamos y que priorizan el valor finnisiano del conocimiento sobre todas las demás búsquedas subjetivas. También evaluamos una posible crítica relativista al Intelecto. El objetivo es que se implemente un modelo funcional del Intelecto en los currículos en transición

Introduction

In recent years, as the process by which knowledge is generated, kept, and transferred within and between individuals and groups, education has attracted a significant amount of scholarship. (See Davidson, 1990; Graves, 1999, 1911; Parker, 1970; Ulich, 1945; Watkins, 2012). In inculcating knowledge, education is the process for achieving truth. Acquiring knowledge through education is a bifurcated process. It has the ability to teach tangible skills such as literacy, numeracy, observatory skills, understanding, critical analysis and reflection. It can also instil intangible virtues including, but not limited to, tolerance, respect, empathy, dignity, and temperance. Other virtues can include courage, moderation, justice, generosity, expansive hospitality, greatness of soul, mildness of temper, truthfulness, easy grace, proper judgment, and practical wisdom, among others. (For a fuller discussion on Aristotelian virtues, see Nussbaum, 1993 and Aristotle, 1998; for lesser discussed virtues e.g., the virtues of conviviality, hospitality, lightheartedness, warmheartedness, et cetera, see DeMarco, 2000).

At times, this bifurcated process runs in parallel tracks. Occasionally, it runs orthogonal. By a 'parallel' bifurcated process we mean that skills and virtues are taught independently of each other. In orthogonal bifurcated processes, skills and values are interrelated such that one affects the other and vice versa. In the discussion that follows, we take for granted that the predominant realm of teaching tangible skills is the domain of formal educational institutions – though it need not be.¹ Our interest is to elaborate upon the orthogonal track to advocate for a particular set of virtues that informs skills taught in formal institutions. We do not specify any target group for our analysis but recognize it can be implemented earliest at the primary level and be most effective at the middle and secondary levels of schooling. During all those periods, students are dependent on a teacher or parent for inculcating skills and virtues in order to perceive the physical and metaphysical world. By 'metaphysical,' we simply mean (descriptively) the comprehensive, systematic and unificatory attempt to develop a worldview that inculcates

(possibly) more than the physical world. In other words, we might say, instead of ‘metaphysical,’ ‘the possibilities afforded by the pursuit of knowledge.’

The notion of education as being a public good that is, in part, regulated by the State has historically attracted criticism across the spectrum of political philosophers. While stressing that education is an important socialization mechanism for raising class consciousness, Weberian and Marxist approaches have critiqued State-run education systems for reproducing inherently unequal social structures and reinforcing the ruling class’s hegemony (Halvorsen, 1990). On the other end of the political spectrum, John Stuart Mill repudiated the notion of an education system entirely run by the State. He mentioned in his treatise *On Liberty* (Mill, 1991, p. 68), “an education established and controlled by the State should only exist, if it exists at all, as one among many competing experiments, carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus to keep the others up to a certain standard of excellence”. (Unlike Mill, our notion of ‘excellence’ will be rooted in natural law rather than utilitarian theoretical commitments). Despite (some) legitimate worries or criticisms of the State’s role in education², the overwhelming practice after the French and American revolutions was that education serves a public function and should be promulgated, as least in part, by the State. For the herein purposes, we acknowledge, *descriptively*, that the State plays a role in educating its citizens.³

The analysis presented here uses Amartya Sen’s theory (1999) that welfare is correctly characterized through a capability lens.⁴ This refers to the range of functionalities⁵ or ability to achieve a certain goal (Sen, 1999; Cohen, 1993). We apply Sen’s theory to the right to education and argue that education as a means to welfare, as Sen conceives it, is incomplete. (We rely here on an account of rights theory situated within the natural law tradition. See e.g., Oderberg, 2013, pp. 375-386). An intermediary step is present and, in fact, needed. G. A. Cohen names that step as *midfare*. In Cohen’s characterization, *midfare* lies between capability and welfare (or utility). It is constituted by the mental states and virtues created within the person in order to result in a best level of utility. Therefore, *midfare* is a normative concept that focuses on a capability’s qualitative ability to effect varying levels of utility (Cohen, 1993). For education, the specific *midfare* that ought to be imparted from teacher to student is what we term *Intellect*.⁶ We choose the term *Intellect* from the Aristotelian conception in the

Nichomachean Ethics (Aristotle, 1998), which deems intellectual virtues such as perceptiveness to be normatively correct responses (Nussbaum, 1993). This means that *Intellect* is a *method* because it is an approach from which one can engage in education, since (we argue) education *assumes* the significance of intellectual virtue.

We stipulatively define *Intellect* as the particular set of virtues learned and continually expanded upon through an education absent of prejudice, epistemic bias, and unwarranted beliefs. It is based on generally accepted observable facts, evidence, and experiential realities.⁷ In line with the Finnisian conception, the set of virtues normatively learned and inculcated as part of *Intellect* are done in pursuit of the overarching basic value of knowledge—being the realization of objective truth.⁸

Intellect accounts for various modes of existence and diversities present within the physical and metaphysical world and held by the modicum of peoples, groups, societies, religions, and cultures. It is achieved through a particular pedagogical process whereby those virtues are transferred from teacher to student. It neither accepts beliefs nor claims within or against peoples not rooted in – or at least inconsistent with – a (metaphysically and epistemically) realist portrayal of existence. In this way, the starting point for our presentation of *Intellect* is the promotion of objective truth; moreover, this includes the possibility of religious truth. The two Finnisian values of religion and knowledge can work in conjunction, if the religion in question is open to reason and faith e.g., Catholicism's well-known adage of "faith and reason" (*fides et ratio*) – see John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* (2000).

This paper proceeds in six subsequent parts. Part I characterizes education and virtue epistemology as outlined in the salient historical and contemporary literature. Part II introduces Sen's conception of capability as the basis for welfare. Part III looks at the capability of education to place it within the framework of *Intellect*. Part IV presents *Intellect's* underlying virtues. Part V responds to a possible relativist critique of *Intellect*. Part VI concludes. Alongside the promotion of realism about truth, this paper's goal is to implement an *Intellect*-based model within a practical framework to improve the quality of education in both developed and developing country curricula.

Education and Virtue Epistemology

Tangible skills relate to reading and understanding words, calculating numbers, measuring distances, and observing movements in objects and changes in their physical characteristics related to colour, size, shape, texture, and state. The skills are also applicable to understanding extrinsic events, both past and present. In general, skills regard a sensory understanding and hence have their proper object sensory knowledge related to concrete and practical ends. Intangible virtues cannot be directly perceived by the senses – though we might say they are ‘perceived’ by the intellect.⁹ Examples include the implantation of qualities such as compassion, self-confidence, and justice, which are – and ought to be – salient to our understanding of interpersonal relations and societal structures. The inculcation of these virtues does not necessarily relate to learning a positive skill such as reading, writing, or calculation; nor are there set methods or guidelines for these virtues to become rooted within an individual. Of course, each virtue has parameters, but these parameters are specified and defined by the definition of the virtue itself rather than an explicit methodology of choice e.g., being ‘just’ requires giving to another what they are owed (parameter), but there is no context-less universal rule for implementation (method) by which this is achieved.

Virtue, an active, developing, reliable characteristic/disposition of a human person,¹⁰ while being intrinsically beneficial in raising the individual in the formation of her character, is instrumental because it informs one’s worldview or *Weltanschauung* while also shaping the interpersonal relationships and societal structures within which she lives. Here, we use ‘character’ as defined by Jason Baehr (2017, p. 1153): “...a person’s character is comprised of her dispositions to act, think and feel in various ways”. We will take Annas’ definition of virtue and Baehr’s broad Aristotelian outline of ‘character’ to be correct inasmuch as these provide a holistic and excellence-centred definition. As an intrinsic matter, virtues are good to have in and of themselves despite their practical ends. They are not desirable character-qualities for any subservient ends – even if there are subservient, useful ends. The argument for this claim is found in Finnis: being clear-headed is more desirable to being muddle; qualities of compassion and justice are superior to shrewdness or injustice. In other words, from the mere desirability of the virtues against their counterpart vices, it follows that virtues are desirable qualities in and

of themselves. What is implied in contemporary educational paradigms of the sort we describe in this paper is a *tacit commitment* to John Finnis's (1980) natural law conception of knowledge, which is a basic value aimed at achieving truth. Education assumes that we teach truth, whether in the form of tangible or intangible skills. We are not endorsing Finnis' natural law theory in every respect, but we are using his language of basic goods because that is how contemporary education treats the value of education, namely, as a basic, truth-oriented good that at least partially fulfils human nature.

Despite their conceptual differences, Annas points to the relationship between intangible virtues and tangible skills. She states, "...[virtue] shares the intellectual structure of a skill where we find not only the need to learn but the drive to aspire, and hence the need to 'give an account', the need for articulate conveying of reasons why what is done is done" (Annas, 2001, p. 20). It is consistent with our account of both tangible skills and intangible virtues to consider virtue to be a specific kind of skill, that is, a non-tangible skill. In the pre-modern world, specialized institutions of knowledge were available to the societal elite or those who demonstrated particularly high academic aptitude¹¹; however, the general shift of education across nation states has been to make tangible skill learning the purview of formal educational institutions¹² – though our argument in no way diminishes the household's role in education.¹³

Sen's Capability Approach to Welfare

In *Development as Freedom*, Sen expressed his dissatisfaction with the Rawlsian conception of equality as being the normative demand of a person's condition and primary goods as being the metric by which to measure utility. For Sen, people are diversely situated such that each person requires a different amount of primary goods to satisfy similar needs. Moreover, Sen differentiates between capabilities and functionings. He states that "[a] person's 'capability' refers to the alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for her to achieve. ... While the combination of a person's functionings reflects her actual *achievements*, the capability set represents the *freedom* to achieve" (Sen, 1999, p. 75). Capabilities are the distinct options available while functionings are those capabilities the individual actually achieves. Capability thus consists of the various combinations of functionings, which Aristotelians conceive as the building blocks for 'flourishment' or *eudemonia* (Aristotle, 1998).¹⁴

Sen gives three reasons for favouring a capability rather than Rawlsian or Utilitarian approach: 1) it concentrates on those deprivations *intrinsically* important to the individual (unlike low income, which is only *instrumentally* significant; 2) there exist influences on capability deprivation (and subsequently on real poverty) other than low-income levels; and 3) low income is circumstantial within and between communities, families, or even to different individuals. While recognizing that Sen's conception of welfare as a function of capability remains incomplete, we concede that his reasons adequately address the superiority of the capability approach compared to previous approaches.

We agree with Sen's first reason for championing the capability approach because deprivations vary according to each individual. The value of education or health care may differ according to an individual given her particular age, location, or aspirations. Likewise, income serves as an instrument in attaining primary goods and is therefore useful. A practical example is the Dinka peoples of South Sudan who correlate wealth to the amount of cattle a man owns. In the Dinka culture, a man must possess sufficient amounts of cattle with which to pay a bride's family to marry off his son (Deng, 1998, 2009). Lineage is an intrinsically significant capability for the Dinka that may not be affirmed by other cultures. High income levels—an abundance of cattle for the Dinka—is not demonstrable of welfare itself. Rather, it serves as an instrument to reach welfare.

According to Sen's second reason, a capability approach is also superior. The presence of an independent legal system illustrates as such. Human rights laws, property laws, tort laws, or general legal principles such as the rule of law, which are enacted and enforced pursuant to a legal system bereft of any one overwhelming political (or private) influence provide the capability to live a dignified life. A person can make decisions regarding her private property and have redress against another individual who has allegedly done her wrong, irrespective of income level. In such a system, income levels do not play a factor in attempting to exercise a civil or political right. In Sen's framework, this represents a substantive freedom.

Finally, Sen's third reason is fulfilled given that individuals variably prioritize income according to individualized desires or aspirations. An academic motivated by scholarship or discovery or a public official dedicated to the service of her constituents may place less value on income. Conversely, a business executive expanding her business or a

consumer wishing to increase her material goods will preferentially value a high income. At the communal level, the Dinka example is still useful. The Dinka peoples place a high value on non-monetary qualities such as respect for others (*atheek*) and social order (*cieng*). Low income is not illustrative of poverty to the same extent as a lack of *atheek* or *cieng* (Deng, 1998). Therefore, capability can provide an expansive understanding of welfare that considers both intrinsic and instrumental components.

The Capability of Education

As discussed above, our focus is on education as the process by which knowledge is transferred from teacher to student. Education aims to actualize the ability to seek and attain knowledge to understand both the physical world and metaphysical realities that inform interpersonal relations, societal structures, and one's comprehensive worldview. This capability is contingent upon the availability of physical institutions, materials, teachers, parents, proper nutrition, proper standards of living, and private and public funds. Likewise, education is contingent upon intangible factors such as societal and familial support and encouragement, an impetus to learn on the student's part, time, energy, and dedication on the part of all parties as well as a general societal focus on education's centrality to the well-being of the individual and community. (See e.g., Metcalfe, 2013)

Education appears as a unique functioning pursuant to Aristotle's (2002) observation that "all human beings by nature desire to know".¹⁵ From an Aristotelian standpoint, the pursuit of knowledge through the capability of education becomes a functioning whenever the capability is present. In contrast, as Sen rightly notes, capabilities other than education may not necessarily be converted into functioning. For instance, despite the capability to procure sanitary nutrition, a person may choose to fast thereby not allowing this capability to turn into the functioning of satiation. Likewise, the capability of political participation within a democratic system may be fully available to a citizen yet she may choose not to exercise such a capability to convert it into its corresponding functioning (Sen, 1999).

In its broadest sense, the capability of education as both skill and virtue transfer is predominantly utilized given its availability. To function as well as understand the world, a student will seize the opportunity to be educated if one is provided. The capability of

education can become a functioning without the student-child even knowing it. Virtues can be imparted, or skills can be taught through habitual processes that render a student a passive consumer. As opposed to other capabilities that may not be exercised to become functionings, education, more often than not, will be converted into a functioning given the modes and methods whereby the conversion can take place.

For Finnis, the instrumental form of knowledge means that its acquisition serves a distinctive goal to benefit an individual and/or society through learning a skill or practice. A societal benefit can include a profession or trade or a wherewithal to participate fully within political or economic processes. Finnis construes curiosity-based knowledge – distinct from knowledge *via vana curiositas* – as a virtue simply because “[i]t would be good to find out” (Sen, 1999, pp. 60-61). (Of course, one might add *ceteris paribus* clauses here cf. ff50). In a word: being well-informed is preferable to being muddled (Sen, 1999). Finnis further elaborates on this type of knowledge by noting that not all things are equally worth knowing and not every form of learning is equally valuable (Sen, 1999). This notion relates to *Intellect* which, as an avenue to optimal welfare, places priority on certain virtues over others in order to inculcate the basic value of knowledge. *Intellect* serves as a curiosity-based knowledge since it instils the virtues of clear-headedness and a state of being well-informed. *Intellect* is also instrumental since being clear-headed and well-informed enables the individual to hone her perspective to understand in greater depth and accept the truth of the matter in question. Finally, education as a precursor capability to acquiring the Finnisian basic value of knowledge and then Sen’s conception of welfare is a holistic process. It teaches both tangible skills while inculcating intangible virtues that consider immaterialities.

Education as *Intellect*

In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle outlines the most important experiential spheres. He accords each sphere a corresponding normative virtue. For summary of the spheres and virtues, see Nussbaum & Sen, 1993, pp. 246-27). For Aristotle, there is a correct choice of response within every sphere (Nussbaum, 1993).¹⁶ ‘*Intellect*’ is taken from Aristotle’s terminology of the ‘intellectual life’ sphere. The following, in no particular order, is a list of normative virtues that ought to be inculcated through the formal educational process. This list is of our own design, and we define each virtue with illustrations and

definitions. These virtues define *Intellect* as a normative *midfare*—the non-utility function achieved through a primary good, in this case education. As we outline them, we will define, explain, and argue for each individual virtue in the context of a student's education.

Creativity

Creativity is the ability to generate innovative ideas, concepts, methods, or technology. These ideas can be independent or dependent upon previous knowledge, concepts, and conceptual systems. Creativity allows the student-child to use her intellectual capacities to envision things differently than the present. By having and utilizing creativity, the student uses her imagination such that she and those around her can view the world anew. This virtue is essential within education. It allows the student to use the full capacity of her mind to create new or modified knowledge irrespective of how it affects current knowledge 'holders,' ideas, concepts, or any paradigm contingent upon current understanding. Creativity enables the student to be iconoclastic when there exists a superior substantive or procedural mechanism, theoretical or practical, to those currently available. Conversely, if creativity is not nurtured, the student is entrenched in a malaise where her potential goes unfulfilled and the world cannot be exposed to a full extent of knowledge that can possibly be conceived and applied.

Curiosity

Curiosity is a desire to know something.¹⁷ This is similar to the Finnisian conception, described above. While the term is the same, the virtue of curiosity is distinct from Finnis' classification of curiosity-based knowledge, which he sees in contradistinction to instrumental knowledge. As a virtue, curiosity is an intrinsic quality generated and nurtured within the student where she has the desire to further comprehend any realm of enquiry. Curiosity (as we use it) is a functionally insatiable appetite to continually improve one's current level of knowledge. Curiosity can relate to understanding the physical world through the hard sciences, the societal world through the social sciences, or the aesthetic or metaphysical world through the arts and humanities. Curiosity is also inextricably linked to the knowledge transferor whose own curiosity is a factor in the quality and quantity of curiosity instilled within the student.¹⁸ If institutions do not cultivate curiosity amongst their

students, they pose a core educational deficit against them by limiting possibilities of intellectual inquiry and knowledge.

Tolerance

Tolerance is the disposition of permitting, allowing, or accepting other beliefs and actions. In education, it allows one to accept realities different from which she is accustomed.¹⁹ Tolerance instills acceptance of individuals or societies with different beliefs or practices. From all of the virtues of *Intellect*, tolerance may be the most controversial since it does not accept beliefs merely based on opinion²⁰ with no epistemic basis. Some opinions should not be tolerated – especially those endorsing intrinsically immoral or evil actions. For example, female genital mutilation is an immoral practice that does not warrant tolerance.²¹ Educational institutions have a responsibility to cultivate tolerance in their students inasmuch as they are often public institutions with pluralist values, even if there is a baseline moral uniformity.²²

Humility

Humility is an honest look in the mirror: a simultaneous affirmation of what one is and negation of what one is not - no more, no less. In relation to *Intellect*, humility is linked to a cautious behaviour that instills a sense of understanding of one's own limitations and hence one's possible limited achievements. As a virtue, humility reminds the student that acquiring knowledge is infinite. In the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, he repeatedly emphasized that humility was not mere shyness or not appreciating one's gifts and talents. Rather, it was ordered towards the virtue of magnanimity; that is, the striving for the higher things. (See e.g., Aquinas, 1882). Boyd (2014) specifies humility by arguing that it:

- (1) Operates according to right reason,
- (2) Knows the place to which its possessor has been assigned,
- (3) Provides a restraint on the desire for honor, and
- (4) Can function appropriately only with its twin virtue of magnanimity.

As we understand the conjunction of (1)-(4), humility is the sober-headed, objective appraisal (whether evaluatively good or bad) of one's character and the recognition of what it ought to be. If humility is not fostered as a virtue in educational institutions, there

is a risk of intellectual pride, an inability of self-correction, listening of others and the possibility of meaningfully existing within an intellectual community.

Integrity

Integrity is wholeness or completeness of character, a consistency of inner feelings and outer action. It has been described as what a person does when no one else is watching (May, 1984). As instilled through *Intellect*, this virtue inculcates the notion that the values by which a student lives her life should be (or aim to be) consistent in all circumstances. In education, a proper inculcation of this virtue ensures that a student will be honest in her acquisition and/or practice of knowledge and not act with any malicious intent. This virtue's pragmatic effect is palpable. Individuals part of a society, and educational institutions generally rooted in integrity will be unlikely to lie, cheat, or defraud one another as such occurrences require an inconsistency of inner and outer feelings or, otherwise, a lack of wholeness in character.

Impartiality

Impartiality is an attempted absence of implicit or explicit bias when reviewing competing perspectives. Impartiality is another virtue related to *Intellect's* preference for the truth. Impartiality, like the classical virtue of prudence or *prudencia*, ensures a sobriety and even-headedness when making decisions. The driving force of impartiality is the desire for the truth of a matter rather than a subjectively desired outcome. The impartial student bases her views on how things are rather than accepting skewed presentations by others. Educationally speaking, a student entrenched in the virtue of impartiality is difficult to persuade by socio-political manipulation, propaganda, and emotion.

Diligence

Diligence is conscientiousness in performing a particular task. In education, the diligent student is one who studies tangible skills such as reading, writing, numeracy, the arts, and sciences with a focus on detail. This virtue relates to curiosity and humility. The diligent student will continue to yearn for knowledge and will understand that the totality of knowledge can never be encompassed by a mere human being. The diligent student values both the time and effort required to adequately learn a skill or concept, whether attained for intrinsic or instrumental purposes. Educational institutions have a

responsibility in cultivating the virtue of diligence in their students. When it is not fostered, the result can be unprofessional, hasty, and premature work. The concern here parallels (or is found in) a more recent debate on whether graduate students should submit their papers to professional journals since their work may be (and usually is) at its infancy. At any level of education, diligence is the preventative prognosis against intellectual prematurity. The diligent person is able to recognize her contributions to a specific intellectual investigation, identifying her own methods, presuppositions, limitations, and relation to the broader intellectual community.

Determination

Determination is a resolve to fulfill a purpose from the outset of a task despite hardships, obstacles and, in idiomatic language, the grunt work of one's task. In education, while it can relate to acquiring knowledge for its own sake, it pertains more to the instrumental notion of education that has a purpose other than the pursuit of knowledge. This virtue instills a sense of drive and ability to persevere upon receiving an initial negative result. Determination relates to diligence and humility given that knowledge can be pursued to infinite depths. The determined student is also curious because she seeks to know something of which she is currently ignorant. If educational institutions do not invest in instilling determination, the results can include incomplete work, failure to meet expected educational standards, and an overall lack of intellectual self-confidence. As a virtue-based approach, *Intellect* does not necessarily limit or even define the substance or methodology of educational institutions. In fact, *Intellect* encourages novel substantive and methodological knowledge if it improves upon previous knowledge.

Intellect and Relativity

A possible relativist²³ objection to *Intellect* may be to say that its constitutive virtues are subject to variations within and between cultures and peoples.²⁴ A relativist may exclaim that curiosity or tolerance is acceptable where it does not *offend* higher moralities rooted in an ancient past or religious belief. Others may note that in some cultures, humility is to be minimized given its propensity to instill shyness and thereby inhibit an individual from meeting her potential. Others may yet note that impartiality is subservient to any connection an individual may have to the State or an ethnic or political group. In this light,

the relativist views the purpose of education as contingent upon a student's contextual and circumstantial reality. To the relativist, the pursuit of knowledge, in the Finnisian sense, is subjective.

An initial issue with the relativist argument is that achieving truth through knowledge becomes but among a myriad of other purposes related to national, ethnic, socio-political, or individual hubris. The prime purpose of knowledge, as envisioned through *Intellect*, is acquiring truth such that other subjective purposes are set aside. While *de facto* variations exist across cultures, *Intellect* views truth as an objective purpose. Knowledge is the means by which to obtain this purpose. Aristotle's characterization of knowledge is thus helpful:

[y]ou cannot understand anything through a demonstration unless you know the primitive immediate principles. ... from perception comes memory, as we call it, and from memory (when it occurs in connection with the same item) experience; for memories which are many in number form a single experience. And from experience, or from all the universal which has come to rest in the soul ... there comes a principle of skill or understanding - of skill if it deals with how things come about, of understanding if it deals with how things are (Aristotle, 1994).

As in Aristotle's definition above, *Intellect* emphasizes experience, observation, and reason. Knowledge, in order to achieve truth, must be at education's forefront. Nothing should distract the student from this goal. The relativist's argument merely considers the presence of knowledge if it accords with her subjective beliefs. Generally speaking, the relativist is not concerned with enhancing knowledge according to new methods of discovery and understanding. The relativist remains content with knowledge that accords with her core beliefs while being unable to challenge and eventually alter those beliefs when confronted with new understandings. *Intellect* is not worried about the iconoclastic nature of knowledge. Rather, it welcomes knowledge within its foundational virtues. (To consider further replies to relativism, see Shafer-Landau, 2001, pp. 9-15)

Conclusion

This discussion has presented *Intellect*—a virtue-based approach that serves as the normative *midfare* to education—through Amartya Sen’s capability-based conception of welfare. *Intellect* is the set of underlying virtues that prioritize the Finnisian conception of knowledge as the basic value for attaining truth (Finnis, 1980).²⁶ *Intellect*’s prioritization of truth-seeking through evidence and experiential knowledge in the background, introducing a novel approach that could begin at the primary level and continue up until the secondary level for transitional nations is a worthy endeavour that can assist the next generation of students to reach their full intellectual potential. Given that educational purposes have been driven by secondary ends over truth, character and the development of knowledge, *Intellect* is a rational alternative. If virtues that constitute *Intellect* are applied, there will be a further effort to ensure truth within each circumstance. The quality of and approach to education in a child’s formative and adolescent years reflect her basic understanding of the world throughout her life. *Intellect* serves as both a theoretical framework and a practical method by which to approach a student’s education. Of course, the underlying assumption behind this framework is that the student will accept and emulate *Intellect*’s virtues. Critiques and improvements to the model presented here are welcomed to produce a robust functioning model of *Intellect* that can be implemented in educational curricula.

Notes

¹ What constitutes the destination of a ‘professional’ teacher will vary culturally-geographically based on differing evaluative standards. For example, in Canadian educational institutions teachers are officially credited teachers at various levels of education; however, there is no explicit (and relevant) designation of ‘professional.’

² See e.g., Chesterton (1930): “There begins to be a mere vanity in being educated, whether it be self-educated or merely State-educated. Education ought to be a searchlight given to a man to explore everything, but very specially the things most distant from himself. Education tends to be a spotlight, which is centred entirely on himself. Some improvement may be made by turning equally vivid and perhaps equally vulgar spotlights on a large number of other people as well. But the only final cure is to turn off the limelight and let him realize the stars.”

³ This paper’s purpose is not to delineate the (de)merits of the State’s role in education. Whether little or great, we are only saying that the State, descriptively, has had *some* role to play in educating its citizens.

⁴ Sen’s book (1999) is an elaboration upon the lecture by Sen (1979).

⁵ The term “functionality” or “functionalities” is traditionally a term attributed to Aristotle even though contemporary authors attribute it to Sen in his definition of capability. Sen acknowledges the Aristotelian roots of “functionalities” in Sen (1999, p. 75).

⁶ Throughout this paper, we write *Intellect* italicized and with a capital “I” to distinguish it from any other general characterization of intellect or *intellectus*. When using *Intellect* throughout this article, it will denote

our particular definition of the term that is or might be predicated on a set of normative virtues instilled through the formal education process.

⁷ We will not focus on educational institutions' responsibilities in promulgating tradition; however, for further discussion see Pieper (2015, pp. 29-42).

⁸ We are using "objectivity" to mean *mind-independent* i.e., the truth-maker of a proposition is mind-independent in the sense that what makes a proposition true or false is *reality*.

⁹ For a brief history of virtue epistemology's resurgence in contemporary philosophy, see Zagzebski & Fairweather (2001, pp. 3-14).

¹⁰ For spatial considerations, we cannot defend at any acceptable length our specific definition of virtue; however, this definition and its defence is found in Annas (2001, p. 8).

¹¹ For a history of the right to education, see Beiter (2006, pp. 17-46).

¹² For tables listing the enrolment in formal schooling over the years, see Countries and Economics (2021).

¹³ Recent treatment of adjacent issues is found in Abbarno (2020).

¹⁴ In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes *eudaimonia* as the highest good for human beings.

¹⁵ The entire quote is "All human beings by nature desire knowledge. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer sight to almost everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things" (Aristotle, 2002).

¹⁶ Some of the spheres that Aristotle indicates include fear (especially fear of death), bodily appetites and their pleasures, distribution of limited resources, management of one's personal property, where others are concerned, attitudes and actions with respect to one's own worth, attitude to slights and damages, and association and living together and the fellowship of words and actions.

¹⁷ For one component of the historical treatment of curiosity (*curiositas*) as a vicious character trait, a related though separate issue, see Rehman (2021).

¹⁸ Concerning the ethical character of teachers and its effect on the student's education, see Lockowski (1997).

¹⁹ To clarify, we are not saying that all morals are indicative of the definitive virtues of *Intellect* – morality is *broader* than virtues, especially on a broader moral nonconsequentialism present in this work.

²⁰ 'Mythic' in the narrow sense of falsehood, not in the more philosophically accurate sense of a mode of symbolic orientation in the world. See Metcalfe (2013, pp. 1-70).

²¹ For discussions concerning female genital mutilation and ethics, see Kopelman (1994), Atoki (1995), Elsayed (2011). Our argument is that as moral objectivists, we are able to distinguish the moral and cultural/social/legal, such that we are able to regard various claims of tolerance as defeasible on *objective* moral grounds.

²² However, tolerance is a minimum threshold virtue, if taken to mean that we have a moral obligation to habitually cultivate tolerance of others. A helpful distinction may be drawn from Josef Pieper's philosophy of love, where human beings are to be fundamentally *loved*, but some of their (difficult, wrong, etc.) actions *tolerated*. See Pieper (2012).

²³ We do not 'nuance' an approach which balances objectivity and relativism for two reasons. First, our definition of objectivity as mind-independence requires the falsity of relativism. *Even if* our statements about reality are positioned or socially conditioned, we are affirming the thesis that we can still nonetheless know reality as it is. This is the antithesis of relativism. Second, our approach is epistemically open in the sense that statements of 'objectivity' are non-dominating: we take it that knowing reality is a (partially) shared, epistemic endeavour in which dialogue, argumentation and listening are fundamental.

²⁴ While often the formulation of the relativist's claim (and a shared view of popular anthropologists), this claim is empirically overstated and historically exaggerated. For a comprehensive survey of universally shared natural law moral beliefs e.g., beneficence, justice, duties to elderly and children, mercy, magnanimity, faith, veracity, et cetera, from the writings of ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Babylonians, Chinese, Norse, Indian, as well as from Christians and Jews, see Lewis, (2001, pp. 731-738). This puts pressure on the relativist to supply the burden of proof against the general moral objectivism of human beings socio-culturally, transnationally, and historically (without recourse to overgeneralizations).

²⁵ Exceptions do exist to the model in which skill building is the purview of the formal educational institution.

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