TOWARD A REGULATIVE VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY FOR THE THEORY AND

PRACTICE OF EDUCATION

A Dissertation

by

MARK JASON ORTWEIN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2011

Major Subject: Curriculum & Instruction

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,   G. Patrick Slattery
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ABSTRACT

Toward a Regulative Virtue Epistemology for the Theory and Practice of Education.

(August 2011)

Mark Jason Ortwein, B.A., Oklahoma State University; M.S., Pittsburg State University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. G. Patrick Slattery

This dissertation develops and explores how a particular variety of virtue epistemology (VE) applies to the theory and practice of education. To this end, several key issues are addressed: knowledge and epistemology, knowledge in education, virtue and culture, and the application of a particular variety of VE to education. Furthermore, this dissertation employs a philosophical methodology based in theoretical work from two disciplines—philosophy and education.

In Chapter I, I explicate the purpose of this dissertation and provide a rationale for pursuing this project. I also clarify some key terminology, discuss some delimiting factors, and offer chapter previews. In Chapter II, I discuss how Edmond Gettier challenged the standard definition of knowledge as justified true belief. This resulted in the development of virtue-based epistemologies. Having distinguished between several forms of VE, I conclude this chapter by advancing regulative virtue epistemology (RVE). In Chapter III, I provide a conceptual and historical overview of the concept of knowledge in the specific context of educational theory. This discussion provides important context for the application of RVE to educational matters. In

Chapter IV, I consider how the concept of virtue is understood in several diverse cultural contexts. Here I ameliorate a potential worry—that virtue is a distinctly Western concept. Finally, in Chapter V, I apply RVE to the theory and practice of education. It is shown that RVE has important implications for the *epistemic aims* of education—that is, the ultimate knowledge-related purposes of education. Specifically, I find that understanding offers a more holistic account of educational theorizing, and places greater responsibility on teachers and students in their educational activities. I also conclude that RVE widens the aims of education to include other epistemic goods. I then demonstrate that communication—an important feature of education—is also regulated by intellectual virtue. Finally, I present two proposals for teaching from an RVE perspective, and find that each has particular strengths and weaknesses. I conclude with some areas for future research.

DEDICATION

For Sarah

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many were involved in the writing of this dissertation. First, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of my dissertation committee. Professor Patrick Slattery, the chair of my dissertation committee, was a constant source of support and insight throughout the writing and thinking process. I am truly thankful for his guidance and example, and for his intellectual courage and tenacity. Indeed, without his encouragement, I would never have pursued philosophy of education! Likewise, Professor Benjamin McMyler offered lucid comments and suggestions that drastically improved the overall quality of this dissertation—especially Chapters II and V. Professor Larry Kelly offered valuable practical and professional advice that will serve me for years to come. Finally, Professor B. Stephen Carpenter II provided intelligent and pinpointed observations about my draft; these comments were invaluable.

And, second, I would like to acknowledge the immeasurable support of my family and friends. Without my wife, Sarah, and my three children—Ava, Ruby, and Dashiell—I would not have finished this dissertation. That is the simple and honest truth. I would also like to thank my mother and father, Jay C. Ortwein and Karen L. Ortwein, for reading, and reading, and reading to me. To the staff at Mugwalls—thanks for the "threefill" and "office space." And, hearty thanks to my pals at Apartment 43—Phillip Gregg, Aaron Watson, Trey Bechtold, Corey Suter, Chris Adams, Adam Wright, Jake Free, and Sam Free. You guys are great.

NOMENCLATURE

NCLB   No Child Left Behind

RVE   Regulative Virtue Epistemology

VE   Virtue Epistemology

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

When I began my doctoral program at Texas A&M University, I only had a very vague idea about what I wanted to study. Initially, I thought I would conduct research in the intellectual history of education. This seemed a good way to combine my interest in history with my penchant for *theorizing*. I still have ambitions to do work in this area and a few solid research ideas too. However, my interests took a decidedly philosophical turn during the fall of 2008.

I began to reflect on the concept of knowledge. I do not recall what prompted this shift, likely some conversation with my future advisor. Nevertheless, these musings led me to the (somewhat obvious) conclusion that teachers and academics alike are tied to knowledge in very particular and interesting ways. Teachers, naturally, are clearly interested in knowledge—teaching or facilitating the acquisition of it, arranging it, highlighting or avoiding it, and so forth. Academics are also deeply involved with knowledge. They teach it too, but they also consume and produce a particular kind of knowledge—a variety that functions in a particular way. In short, knowledge is an important feature of education. However, I also noticed that there seemed to be two (broadly conceived) ways of talking about knowledge in education. According to one account, knowledge is the indubitable result of rigorous quantitative

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This dissertation follows the style of *Educational Theory*.

research. According to the other, it is highly fluid, contextual, socially constructed, relative, or some mixture of all these. Thus, given my lack of clarity and the overwhelming number of frameworks to choose from, it seemed worthwhile to pursue a deeper understanding of the concept of knowledge. With my advisor's support and encouragement, I ventured into the philosophy department and took my first course in epistemology.

Initially, I had difficulty relating these concepts to the field of education. Although immensely interesting, epistemology is generally a very abstract and narrowly focused discipline. This makes its direct application very difficult, even indirect application involves a stretch. Perhaps halfway through the course, however, we began to reflect upon the notion of virtue epistemology (VE). I was immediately struck by its relevance for education and made a mental note of it. As I progressed through my program, and took more courses in the philosophy and education departments, VE's significance for education became clearer. Once more I began to reflect upon VE but this time as a potential dissertation topic. In the following section, I suggest several reasons why VE is a worthy topic of study for education. I then clarify the purpose of this dissertation.

RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

There are several reasons for introducing VE into the theoretical discourse in education. In the first place, VE has attracted considerable attention in the discipline of philosophy, some going as far as to suggest that it can overcome certain intractable

debates in epistemology.[1] It appears that little has been written on VE in education, however. This is somewhat surprising given our (educational theorists') tendency to draw from sources outside education. Perhaps education's inclination to favor "continental" philosophical sources explains this oversight, or perhaps epistemology is simply too abstracted from educational concerns. Regardless, VE—especially the variety discussed herein—is directly applicable to education in a way that traditional epistemological approaches are not.[2]

A second reason for introducing VE concerns the nature of education. I will argue in this dissertation that education (broadly understood) is a deeply "epistemic" concept. Harvey Siegel offers a similar assessment.

> Education is not only rich in epistemological content and relevance; specific epistemological issues— for example, those concerning ultimate epistemic aims and values, and the evidential status of testimony—are helpfully viewed in the context of education, such that thinking about education promises substantial benefit for the pursuit of standard epistemological questions. This is especially true in the current epistemological climate, in which both virtue epistemology and social epistemology are high on the epistemological agenda.[3]

Given education's implicit connection to epistemological concepts, it seems appropriate to consider what contemporary epistemologists are working on. This is

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1. For examples, see Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1980).

2. I would qualify that statement by noting that I am making a broad generalization about "traditional epistemology"—one that should be taken as such.

3. Harvey Siegel, "Is 'Education' a Thick Epistemic Concept?" *Philosophical Papers* 37, no. 3 (2008): 456.

especially true because it appears that epistemologists have received relatively little attention from educational theorists in recent years.[4] Thus, a secondary aim of this dissertation is to introduce the discipline of epistemology to curriculum and educational theorists whose knowledge may be lacking in this area.

A third reason to pursue a project in VE involves its recognition that belief formation is an important human endeavor. This is discussed at length in Chapters II and V. Very succinctly, VE is aptly referred to as "person-based" epistemology.[5] This is because it centers its philosophical analysis on the character traits and qualities of human beings—those traits that dispose persons to successfully acquire knowledge and other epistemic goods. This is very different from traditional epistemology, where analysis is directed outwardly toward various features of "true belief." Persons are generally neglected in this form of epistemology.[6] For simplicity sake, however, VE recognizes that knowing and other forms of epistemic activity are richly human activities. Thus, VE speaks directly to education as a field ripe with epistemologically significant intellectual activity.

A fourth and final reason to undertake such a project concerns the *epistemic aims* of education. By epistemic aims, I mean the knowledge and belief related goals that education presumably ought to strive for. In this dissertation, I contend that

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4. I found no "source" for this claim—so it is largely based on informed speculation. In truth, this might make an interesting topic for a future project.

5. For further discussion of "person-based" and "belief-based" epistemology, see Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

6. A much fuller treatment of this issue is offered in Chapter II.

education presently focuses overmuch on *knowledge* and *skill*. These are also epistemic aims and important ones, but I claim that *understanding* should be the chief epistemic goal of education.[7] Here I draw mainly from Jonathan Kvanvig's work on epistemic value.[8] Understanding, I maintain, encapsulates these other aims and is regulated and motivated by the intellectual virtues. This observation is important because it offers (yet more) reasons to question current educational policies—and solid philosophical motives for doing so.

The reasons for conducting this study (listed above) are directly tied to its primary purpose. In curriculum theory—and education generally—it appears that little has been written on the topic of intellectual virtue and its relation to the epistemic aims of education. This dissertation attempts to remedy this by focusing on the relationship intellectual virtue shares with education—education as a concept deeply tied to matters of epistemic importance. Presently, there is a growing body of literature on the topic of intellectual virtue in epistemology—what has come to be known as virtue epistemology. In fact, since its emergence in the early 1980s, it has come to occupy a central place in epistemological studies.[9] My main ambition, then, is to bring VE into educational discourse—to see what it might offer theorists in education. This project, however, is based on a presupposition—that epistemology (in general) is important

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7. The concept of understanding is not new to educational discourse. For an excellent example, see William Pinar and others, *Understanding Curriculum: An Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Curriculum Discourses* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002).

8. For further discussion of this issue, see Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

9. Harvey Siegel, "Is Education a 'Thick' Epistemic Concept?" 456.

and worthy of study, especially in the context of education. I consider this assumption in the following section.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EPISTEMOLOGY

Contemporary educational theory is extremely theoretically diverse. This is manifest in the sheer number of research methodologies available to scholars. In his important new volume, *Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies*, Craig Kridel lists 49 distinct theoretical perspectives.[10] It is unsurprising that some of these theoretical standpoints conflict, often quite fundamentally, with one another. One way to explain this diversity would be to evaluate the epistemological assumptions these theories rest upon. If one holds that the external world can be empirically and objectively known (as positivistic researchers believe) this entails a commitment to a particular account of knowledge—a particular epistemology. Likewise, if one is dubious of such claims (as a constructivist might be) and favors the social construction of knowledge—again, a set of epistemological assumptions is operative. However one comes down on these matters, it is undeniable that epistemological assumptions play a significant role in what counts as knowledge in education. Thus, a guiding assumption in this work is that epistemology (theory of knowledge) is fundamental to the scholarly activity and development of the field. In what follows, I offer a specific example that illustrates the significance of having a robust conceptual understanding of knowledge. Following this discussion, I address some further assumptions that undergird this work, the scope and

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10. Craig Kridel, "Reader's Guide," in *Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies, Vol. 2,* ed. Craig Kridel (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications), xvi.

limitations of this study, define some key concepts, and describe the methodology employed. I conclude with a summary of subsequent chapters.

Aaron Pallas has suggested that education programs have failed to prepare future scholars for the "epistemological diversity" that characterizes contemporary theory. He notes, "experienced researchers and novices alike find it hard to keep up with the cacophony of diverse epistemologies."[11] The problem is that range of theoretical positions available to budding and seasoned scholars alike is often overwhelming, and universities often give too little attention to adequately training future professors in basic epistemology. As a result, researchers are sometimes initiated into particular theoretical camps and have little knowledge of the philosophical underpinnings of other perspectives. In other cases, they are given a cursory scan of the major frameworks and accrue only a skin-deep command of any given epistemology. This is problematic, he argues, because an adequate understanding of epistemology is "central to the production and consumption of educational research."[12] In other words, one's understanding of, and capacity to produce, creative research hinges on an ability to identify and understand epistemological commitments. Moreover, the ability to meaningfully communicate with those outside one's tradition entails an understanding of other epistemological frameworks.

Pallas's article illustrates a more general problem in educational research: Within educational theory, there are latent tensions grounded in epistemological

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11. Aaron M. Pallas, "Preparing Education Doctoral Students for Epistemological Diversity," *Educational Researcher* 30, no. 1 (2001): 6.

12. Ibid., 6.

diversity, and too often insufficient understanding of the various paradigms exacerbates these tensions. An implicit goal of this dissertation is to present an epistemological framework that operates comfortably within these contested theoretical spaces—one that can bridge (some) of these theoretical gaps. This is, of course, a lofty goal and one that exceeds the stated objectives of this dissertation. Nevertheless, I believe that VE's future is bright in education and that others will begin to explore its potential.

DEFINITIONS

This dissertation spans two academic disciplines and employs a fair amount of potentially unfamiliar terminology. Here I provide fairly robust list of definitions that should aid the reader in navigating some of the concepts under consideration. I also clarify some phrases that might be confusing.

Epistemology: Nicholas Rescher provides the following succinct definition of epistemology, "The mission of epistemology, the theory of knowledge, is to clarify what the conception of knowledge involves, how it is applied, and to explain why it has the features it does."[13] However, the span of subjects covered under the umbrella of epistemology is quite broad. Issues related to probability, epistemic luck, warrant and justification, the status of testimony, and a host of other related issues are captured by the term—epistemology. In this dissertation, I limit my discussion of epistemology to a set of concerns that arose in the wake of Edmond Gettier's famous three-page bombshell—"Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" These debates concern the *nature*

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13. Nicholas Rescher, *Epistemology: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), xiii.

of justification (externalism vs. internalism) and the *structure* of justification (foundationalism vs. coherentism). Herein, I refer to this kind of epistemology as traditional epistemology.

Educational Epistemology: Educational scholars often use the word epistemology in a much broader sense than philosophers. Usually it refers to a particular theoretical framework(s) or concept of knowledge. In this dissertation I use the plural—epistemologies—in this sense. The reader should bear this in mind when reading Chapter III.

Moral Virtue: In this dissertation, moral virtues are defined as "an acquired base of excellent functioning in some generically human sphere of activity that is challenging and important."[14] Examples of virtue include: honesty, courage, and charity. Moral virtues, as deeply engrained character traits, are manifested in our conduct and behavior—how we comport ourselves in the world, our ethical conduct.

Intellectual Virtue: Like their moral counterparts, intellectual virtues are deep character traits that dispose and motivate us toward excellent thinking. What makes them distinctly intellectual is that they describe the character of our cognitive engagement with the world.

Virtue Epistemology: Virtue epistemology is an approach to the theory of knowledge that emphasizes the character traits and/or the qualities of persons; it is person-based epistemology. There is substantial diversity of thought among virtue

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14. Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 59.

epistemologists, but most theorists adopt either virtue reliabilism and/or virtue responsibilism.

Regulative Epistemology: A regulative epistemology is one that provides guidance for cognizing. It "clarifies the character of the intellectual life in a way that can actually help people live that life."[15]

Virtue Reliabilism: John Greco and John Turri offer the following definition of a *reliable* virtue. "A virtue is a stable and successful disposition: an innate ability or an acquired habit, that allows one to reliably achieve some good. An intellectual virtue will then be a cognitive excellence: an innate ability or acquired habit that allows one to reliably achieve some intellectual good, such as truth in a relevant matter."[16] These include cognitive features like memory, reasoning ability, and the perceptual faculties.

Virtue Responsibilism: Other virtue epistemologists conceive of intellectual virtues in the traditional sense—as character traits and dispositions like intellectual honesty, conscientiousness, and open-mindedness. These virtues are characteristics of the excellent knower.

Coherentism: Coherentism is the theory that our all our beliefs are justified by other beliefs, but that no belief in this system is privileged or foundationally secure. A person's belief is justified when it *coheres* with the larger structure of beliefs.

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15. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues,* 28.

16. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* s.v. "Virtue Epistemology," (by John Greco and John Turri), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/epistemology-virtue, section 5.1 (accessed April 10, 2011).

Foundationalism: Foundationalists hold that justified belief entails a set of bedrock foundational beliefs that require no further justification. This is (in part) a response to the problem of infinite regress. Briefly, the problem infinite regress states that since all our beliefs are justified by other beliefs—ad infinitum—we have no reason to believe any of our beliefs are justified. These foundational beliefs are supposed to block the regress problem.

Externalism: Externalists hold, contrary to Internalists, that justification for belief requires additional components that are external to the mind.

Internalism: Internalists deny that the external world plays any part in justification; it is purely an internal (mental) phenomenon.

DELIMITATIONS

First, this is an interdisciplinary project, drawing from the discipline of philosophy and theoretical work in education. My target audience—educational theorists and epistemologists—will have varying degrees of expertise in epistemology and educational theorizing, respectively. As such, I try to walk a fine line between over-sophistication and over-simplification. Of course, at various points each group will encounter issues or topics that they are already familiar with. This is unavoidable. Nevertheless, I believe that "bridge-making" is important, and my hope for this dissertation is that it provides a line of communication between education and epistemology.

Second, this inquiry into the educational merits of VE is constrained by the scope of the topic itself. Over the course of its short history, several perspectives have

surfaced that occupy a central place in the literature. Some writers, most prominently Ernest Sosa, favor virtue responsibilism,[17] others advocate a form of responsibilism,[18] and still others draw mainly from Aristotle.[19] From these, and the innumerable variations they have spawned, a broad body of literature has emerged. I provide a general account of each, but only give sustained attention to a particular form of VE— a regulative form as found in Roberts and Wood.[20] Thus, I do not discuss the educational benefits of virtue reliabilism, for example. It should be noted, however, that work *could* be done in this area. It would be especially interesting to investigate how both varieties of VE might be brought together in education.

Virtue has a long history in education. From what I have observed thus far, however, this discussion appears to be almost entirely restricted to the moral virtues. Advocates of character and moral education, for example, have long advocated the cultivation of moral virtue. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the distinction between moral and intellectual virtues is not always clear. Linda Zagzebski, for example, has attempted to create a unified account of ethics (moral virtue) and epistemology (intellectual virtue).[21] While this is certainly interesting and plausible, it

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17. See Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1980): 3-26;

18. For an exemplary work in this tradition, see James Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993).

19. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

20. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtue.*

21. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

extends beyond the scope of this dissertation. As noted above, the purpose of this dissertation is primarily to consider the intellectual virtues and their relation to the epistemic goals of education.[22] As such, I have chosen limit my analysis to intellectual virtues and the literature that best explicates them—in short, the literature in VE. I fully intend to explore how VE fits within the moral and character education literature in future work.

Finally, I want to address an important issue that arises in Chapters II and V. Virtue epistemology stems from a distinctly Western intellectual tradition, and the sources and philosophers discussed these chapters are also Western. I have not intentionally omitted the voices of other cultures; I have simply been constrained by what resources are available. To ameliorate this imbalance, I have tried to include as many points-of-view as possible in other chapters. This is not a delimiting factor, precisely, but I do think it is worth noting.

ASSUMPTIONS

Here I wish to acknowledge the presuppositions that govern my philosophical orientation. First, I assume that there is a mind-independent world that is accessible, and from which knowledge can be gained. Put simply, when I speak of seeing a tree branch outside my window, I can reasonably claim that there are such things as tree branches; they exist and I can know things about them. This does not preclude the possibility of error. David Lewis describes a number of skeptical arguments against the possibility of knowledge: "Let your paranoid fantasies rip—CIA plots, hallucinogens

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22. An exception occurs in Chapter IV, where I consider the concept of virtue in other cultural contexts.

in the tap water, conspiracies to deceive, Old Nick himself—soon you find that uneliminated possibilities of error are everywhere. Those possibilities of error are far-fetched, of course, but possibilities all the same."[23] In sum, it is always possible to undermine ordinary knowledge with a little inventiveness, but solving these longstanding skeptical problems is not the aim of this dissertation. Instead, I start with the intuition that what we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell is actually there—is knowable. Given the prevalence of anti-realist epistemologies in education, this fact marks a distinguishing characteristic of this dissertation.

A second assumption is that virtue—be it intellectual or otherwise—is relevant and salutary to the education of children, and should be seriously considered in the context of education. Moreover, I also assume that the intellectual lives of persons can be conducted well or poorly depending upon the intellectual virtues or vices that govern their intellectual conduct. Thus, I assume that intellectual character is evaluable.

METHODOLOGY

It is standard practice in education to articulate the research methodology used in a dissertation. Thus, this dissertation employs a theoretical or philosophical methodology. Specifically, I follow the American Philosophical Association's description of research in philosophy. "Research in philosophy also often takes the form of efforts to refine analyses, develop and advance or criticize interpretations, explore alternative perspectives and new ways of thinking, suggest and apply modified

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23. David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74, no. 4 (1996): 549.

or novel modes of assessment, and, in general to promote new understanding."[24] The operative words in this passage are "explore" and "promote new understanding." The RVE advanced in Chapter V is the product of rigorous and extended exploration in the form of reading, contemplation, discourse with friends and mentors, and writing. It generates new understanding insofar as it represents the first large-scale attempt to position VE within the context of education.

CHAPTER PREVIEWS

In this introductory chapter, I presented an account of how I came to be interested in the topic of VE. I offered several reasons for its importance, an account of the purpose of this dissertation, and a rationale for considering epistemology generally. I then offered a robust list of definitions and acknowledged some delimitations and assumptions that shape this dissertation. Here I want to provide a general overview of what I plan to do in this dissertation.

In Chapter II, I introduce the discipline of epistemology from roughly 1960 to the present day. First, I discuss the traditional definition of knowledge as *justified true belief*. I explain how Edmond Gettier deeply problematized this definition, and offer a summary account of how epistemologists have dealt with the problems that he engendered. In particular, I focus on the problem of "credit"—the view that knowledge has to be somehow creditable to persons rather than the product of mere luck. This problem—among others—represents a key motivator for VE. Thus I begin my discussion of VE with a historical and conceptual overview. I show that there are two

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24. American Philosophical Association, "APA Statement on the Profession: Research in Philosophy,*"* http://www.apaonline.org/governance/statements/research.aspx (accessed December 15, 2010).

broad virtue-based approaches: virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. I discuss each and position myself within the latter category. I then make another distinction between "narrow" and "wide" epistemology—where narrow indicates epistemology that focuses almost exclusively on knowledge, and wide indicates epistemology that concerns itself with additional epistemic goods. Thus, the VE I endorse is both wide and part of the virtue responsibilism tradition. I conclude with a discussion of "regulative" epistemology—another important feature of the theory I advocate.

In Chapter III, I consider how knowledge functions in the context of educational theory. The main purpose of this chapter is to present an epistemological map of theorizing in education—to get the lay of the land, so to speak. I begin with a historical analysis of the *reconceptualization* of curriculum studies—a movement that radically altered the academic study of curriculum. I claim that this signaled an *epistemic shift* away from simplistic accounts of knowledge. Following this discussion, I consider three broad epistemological orientations in education. These include anti-realist epistemologies, critical epistemologies, and realist epistemologies. Within each of these categories, I identify representative theories and explicate their epistemological assumptions. As I progress, I also draw connections between these theoretical orientations and VE. I conclude by drawing attention to an interesting analogy between epistemology and education.

In Chapter IV, I consider the possibility that virtue is a distinctly Western concept. In question form, are character traits like honesty, courage, and compassion valued and encouraged in other cultural contexts? This is an important issue, given the

cultural diversity found in many classrooms across the United States. Thus, I offer analyses of five distinct intellectual and cultural traditions—Confucianism, Buddhism, ancient Greek philosophy, and the Yoruba and Akan peoples of Western Africa. I draw extensively from works of philosophy, traditional proverbs, customary practices, and the like. I show that each group has rich accounts of virtue, but that these accounts are not identical. I consider this asymmetry and suggest that further research should be done to evaluate its bearing on VE.

Finally, in Chapter V, I introduce a regulative virtue theory and consider its implications for education. I begin by suggesting that contemporary education is overly focused on two epistemic goods—knowledge and skill. I reiterate the concept of "wide" virtue epistemology with its emphasis on other epistemic goods. I then discuss three of these epistemic goods—knowledge, acquaintance, and understanding. I argue that understanding is chief among these because it captures or entails these other epistemic goods. Having developed a concept of understanding, I then articulate how the intellectual virtues shape and motivate its acquisition by highlighting three particular intellectual virtues, intellectual honesty, courage and caution, and conscientiousness. This discussion provides conceptual context for applying RVE to the social domain of education, especially via communication. Here I consider how understanding functions as a social epistemic goal, and how the intellectual virtues shape communicative practices. I then consider how RVE shapes practice through two proposals for teaching intellectual virtue. While these respective strategies have their merits, they are also ill suited for contemporary education with its emphasis on high-

stakes testing. I conclude this dissertation with some areas for potential research, and a

few summative remarks.

CHAPTER II

EPISTEMOLOGY:

TWENTIETH CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS

Epistemology, although referenced often in education, is seldom discussed in its native context—that is, within the context of Western philosophical literature. Rather, it is generally understood in the context of learning theories or research paradigms. Thus, this chapter provides a concise overview of epistemology from the mid-twentieth century to the present day. Most readers, I believe, will be unfamiliar with this material. I begin with an explication of the concept of knowledge itself: What sort of thing is it? This is followed by a discussion of Edmond Gettier's important and provocative observations about the "standard" definition of knowledge, and the debates about justification that arose in its wake. Such debates, in fact, provided impetus for the development of virtue-based epistemology—the final section of this chapter. Here I outline two strains of VE that have emerged in the past thirty years. I then make a further distinction between narrow and wide epistemology, followed by a discussion of several commonly cited intellectual virtues. I conclude by positioning myself within this theoretical framework.

WHAT IS EPISTEMOLOGY?

Epistemology derives from the Greek word, *episteme*, which translates as knowledge. Thus epistemology is the systematic study of knowledge. Among the central questions that concern epistemologists are: "What are the necessary and

sufficient conditions of knowledge? What are its sources? What is its structure, and what are its limits" Concerning the issue of justified belief, it answers questions like: "How we are to understand the concept of justification? What makes justified beliefs justified? Is justification internal or external to one's own mind?"[25] Questions of this sort pick out an important feature of traditional epistemology; it is centrally concerned with analyzing various features of justified belief. It does not consider how the character and cognitive traits of persons might influence our understanding of knowledge and its function in our lives. Rather it restricts its analysis to beliefs; it is belief-based. (I will show a little later that some modern movements in epistemology have redirected this analysis away from beliefs, and instead focus on persons as reliable and/or responsible knowers.) In the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to this kind of epistemology—belief-based—as traditional epistemology. This term should not be construed as pejorative; it simply serves as a marker for epistemology that focuses primarily on belief.

WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

Late twentieth-century epistemology can also be understood as reckoning with a particular definition of knowledge—knowledge defined as justified true belief. The justified true belief definition takes the following form (where *P* is a proposition and *S* is a human subject):

S knows that *P* if and only if:

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25. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* s.v. "Epistemology," (by Matthias Steup), http://plato. stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/epistemology, section 1 (accessed June 1, 2011).

P is true

S believes that *P* is true

S is justified in believing that *P* is true

Consider an example. Suppose Sarah sees a bird outside her window. She immediately forms the belief that there is a bird outside her window. Her belief is true because there really is a bird outside her widow. Thus Sarah holds a true belief, but she also must meet the *justification* condition. In other words, Sarah should have good reasons for believing she sees a bird outside her window. In this case, she does—she *sees* the bird. Because she meets all three conditions, Sarah can reasonably claim to *know* that there is a bird outside her window. But suppose she believes there is a bird outside her window, and there is a bird outside her window, but she cannot see the bird clearly or only caught a movement out of the corner of her eye. She holds a true belief, but we might worry that her reasons for believing are not strong enough. In this case, she fails to meet the justification condition and we might hesitate to count her true belief as a case of knowledge. Justified true belief is a useful definition that explains most ordinary cases of knowledge. As I will show a little later, however, justified true belief cannot fully explain knowledge. First, however, I sketch out a history of knowledge in the latter half of the twentieth century.

FOUNDATIONS FOR VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

In 1963, Edmond Gettier, an American epistemologist, penned a landmark paper, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" Here he demonstrated that the traditional definition of knowledge—justified true belief—could be problematized through a

series of cleverly constructed counter-examples.[26] Gettier argued that a person could hold a true belief, and be justified in doing so, yet not be credited with knowledge. Consider the following examples:

1. Fake Barn County

Suppose Mark and Dashiell take a sightseeing trip through Kay County, Oklahoma. Unbeknownst to them, however, the denizens of Kay County have razed all but one barn in the county. They have erected barn facades in their place. From the road these fake barns are indistinguishable from real barns. As they are driving down a dusty county road, Dashiell points excitedly at a barn and exclaims, "That's a beautiful barn!" In fact, he is correct; he has unwittingly pointed to the only real barn in the entire county. He seems to meet all the requirements for justified true belief. It is true that he sees a *real* barn; he has good reason to believe that it is a barn; and he certainly believes he sees a barn.

2. The Blue Suit

Suppose Sarah has seen James wearing a blue suit on numerous occasions and heard him talk about how much he likes it. She comes to believe that he owns a blue suit. Suppose again that she says to herself, "James owns a blue suit, or Kimberly is in Rome." She does not actually know where Kimberly is, but correctly reasons that the first half of the proposition entails the truth of the whole. James, however, does not own a blue suit (perhaps he just sold it) but Kimberly by chance actually is in Rome. Sarah holds a justified true belief.

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26. Edmond Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 no. 6, (1963): 121-123.

In each example, these persons meet all the conditions for knowledge. First, their beliefs are justified: Dashiell clearly *sees* the barn, and Sarah exercises excellent reasoning. Second, their beliefs are actually true. And, third, they each hold these beliefs with little or no misgiving. We would hesitate, however, to call their beliefs knowledge because they seem to have been the recipients of a large measure of good luck.

Unsurprisingly, Gettier's paper prompted a flurry of responses. Solutions were offered and refuted; counter arguments were constructed and new examples composed. Despite this activity (and perhaps because of it) the problem only grew more in entrenched. Michael Huemer claims, "Gettier's refutation started a cottage industry of knowledge-analyzers."[27] With time, however, it became increasingly clear that he had deeply altered the course of epistemology. According to Roberts and Wood: "Epistemologists appeared to think that salvation from Gettier lay in fastidiousness and technical finery, so that epistemology became increasingly ingrown, epicyclical, and irrelevant to broader philosophical and human concerns."[28] An alternative to traditional, belief-based, epistemology has been proposed—one that places persons at the center of philosophical analysis. In the following section, I explore a particular issue that emerges in the literature on Gettier—the issue of epistemic luck. I illustrate how VE is (in part) a response to this issue.

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27. Michael Huemer, ed., *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 436.

28. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtue*, 5.

The preceding counter-examples demonstrate that the conditions of justified true belief can be met, but we might feel reluctant to attribute knowledge to either person. It would seem more a matter of epistemic *luck* than true justification. Consider an analogy offered by Ernest Sosa. Suppose a highly skilled archer takes aim at a target and shoots. The arrow flies straight and true and is going to strike the bull's-eye. Then, suddenly, a rogue gust of wind pulls the arrow from its course. It is no longer going to hit the bull's-eye. Then, by chance, the same wind reverses its course and puts the arrow back in its original trajectory. Once more, it is going to hit the bull's eye.[29] We may question whether the archer is reponsible for his accuracy of his shot; he seems to be merely the recipient of good fortune.

Sosa's example illustrates why some philosophers have defined knowledge as something like "non-accidentally" true belief.[30] There are numerous ways of understanding such beliefs. John Greco, for example, holds non-accidental beliefs to be those for which a person can take *credit*. He writes, "To say that someone knows is to say that his believing the truth can be credited to him. It is to say that the person got things right due to his own abilities, efforts and actions, rather than due to dumb luck, or blind chance, or something else."[31] This is so because having *creditable* reasons for a belief—justification—is thought to improve its worth or standing. If we reconsider the Gettier cases, it appears that Sarah and Dashiell *do not* deserve credit for the

29. Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Volume I*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 22.

30. Duncan Pritchard, "Epistemic Luck," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 29 (2004): 193.

31. Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 111.

accuracy of their beliefs. They were merely lucky or, put differently, they did not obtain true beliefs by virtue of their own intellectual activity. Luck interposed. But suppose Dashiell and his father were driving through an ordinary country landscape—one filled with real barns. In this case, Dashiell's declaration would seem a real case of knowledge—a case believing for which he can take credit. The notion of credit, however, moves us closer to the impulse behind VE. First, it illustrates why virtue epistemologists are centrally concerned with persons; to gain credit for a belief a person should form that belief in the right way, e.g., virtuously. And, second, it demonstrates why VE is sometimes called person-based epistemology. This is because it focuses its analysis on the traits of knowers themselves—on how they form their beliefs and how particular traits contribute to the warrant or justification of beliefs.

SOME FORMS OF VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

We are now positioned to engage with VE directly. Here I provide a brief timeline of the conceptual development of VE. In particular, I analyze the work of key scholars in the field. In the process, I roughly divide VE into two major strains: virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. This discussion provides a conceptual map of the VE terrain. Having explicated these positions, I then describe another distinction: narrow and wide forms of epistemology. Here I suggest that wide accounts have expanded the scope of epistemology, and that this opens the door for an applied VE. Building upon this latter point, I develop my account of VE—a regulative virtue epistemology.

Virtue epistemology is an emerging sub-discipline of epistemology that presents an alternative to traditional belief-based epistemology. Virtue epistemologists maintain that the acquisition of knowledge and other epistemic goods is tied to possession of intellectual virtue. On one account, these virtues include such qualities as intellectual courage, honesty, and inquisitiveness—to name three. Others classify the virtues as cognitive faculties like accurate memory and well-functioning perceptual faculties. Numerous philosophers have endorsed VE, and a vigorous body scholarship has sprung up around it.[32] However, I am working under the assumption that few educational scholars are aware of the work being done in VE. Thus, I begin with by mapping out the conceptual terrain in VE.

Virtue Reliabilism

Ernest Sosa inaugurated virtue epistemology in 1981 with his article, "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge." The aim of this paper was to present a theory of knowledge that could circumvent standard problems in contemporary epistemology. He uses the analogy of a "raft" to refer to coherence theory. Coherentists argue that a justified belief is one that coheres within a larger body of beliefs. Donald Davidson writes, "What distinguishes a coherence theory is simply the claim that nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief."[33] The "pyramid" refers to epistemic foundationalism. This is the view that

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32. For an comprehensive review of this scholarship, see Heather Battaly, "Introduction: Virtue and Vice. *Metaphilosophy,* 41 no. 1-2 (2010): 1-21.

33. Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in *Epistemology: An Anthology*, eds. Ernest Sosa and Jaegwon Kim (Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 156.

some beliefs are foundational and require no further support or justification. Each system—coherentism and foundationalism—argues Sosa, is flawed.[34]

Coherentism stresses the logical connections between our beliefs, but fails to account for beliefs at the periphery of our belief network. Foundationalism seems to present "a multitude of fundamental principles with no unifying ground."[35] Rather, Sosa urges epistemologists to shift their analysis to persons. In particular, he argues for the importance of the intellectual virtues. These virtues are *reliable* truth-conducive characteristics that enable a person to acquire true beliefs. Thus, Sosa's view has been described as *virtue-reliabilism.* Among the virtues cited by Sosa are things like excellent memory and perceptual faculties, and a person possesses a virtue when it functions reliably in their cognitive lives. Furthermore, Sosa defines a justified belief as one that is grounded in the intellectual virtues. This provides a sort of foundation desired by the foundationalist—one rooted in the reliability of the intellectual virtues. It also leaves room for the Coherentist: "Coherence gives rise to justified belief and knowledge precisely because it is the manifestation of intellectual virtue…coherence increases reliability, and therefore constitutes a kind of intellectual virtue in its own right."[36] Thus, Sosa inaugurated a VE on the promise that it could succeed where other theories could not.

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34. "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1980): 3-26.

35. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* s.v. "Virtue Epistemology," (by John Greco and John Turri), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/epistemology-virtue, section 5.1 (accessed April 10, 2011).

36. Ibid., Section 5.1.

Others have followed Sosa's lead. John Greco, for example, defines the intellectual virtues in roughly the same way, as "innate faculties or acquired habits that enable a person to arrive at truth and void error in some relevant field."[37] Like Sosa he cites things like reliable memory, perception, and good reasoning ability. Greco also offers an interesting account of justification. He maintains that a person knows a given proposition when he or she believes it out of an intellectual virtue. This involves three facets. First, a person must be motivated toward the truth and in possession of the right sort of disposition(s) to know. These dispositions are the products of intellectual virtue; they show up when one exercises an intellectual virtue. Second, a person's belief must be the product of intellectual virtue(s)—that is, the epistemic good obtained is the result of exercising an intellectual virtue. And, third, a person's true belief should be creditable to her.[38] Both Greco and Sosa advance virtue-based epistemologies that hinge on the possession of reliable cognitive characteristics, and both hold that VE has much to offer in the way of addressing standard problems in epistemology.

Virtue Responsibilism

Virtue-responsibilism also draws upon the intellectual virtues but defines them differently. Rather than describe them as characteristics of cognition (like reliabilists), they understand the virtues to be traits of character—things like open-mindedness, intellectual honesty, and conscientiousness. As such, they draw attention to the moral

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37. John Greco, "Virtue Epistemology," in *Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. Paul Moser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 287.

38. Ibid., 311.

nature of knowing and knowledge. In this section, I describe the work of two philosophers in this tradition—Lorraine Code and James Montmarquet.

In *Epistemic Responsibility*, Lorraine Code argues for an epistemology based in the recognition that knowledge is a social affair. She believes the chief epistemic virtue is responsibility—recognition that we are responsible for our beliefs and their function in wider society. She writes, "It is only those who, in their knowing, strive to do justice to the *object*—to the *world* they want to know as well as possible—who can aspire to intellectual virtue." [39] Code's account has a strong social justice thread running throughout. As such, her responsibilism begins with the assumption that we all inhabit a knowable world, one in which real problems exists. Knowledge that is gained through intellectual virtue more accurately reflects the true state of affairs in this world. This requires what she calls "normative realism." Thus, "Intellectually virtuous persons value knowing and understanding how things really are."[40] And, finally, unlike Sosa and Greco, Code holds little hope for standard methodologies in epistemology. These, she thinks, are too narrow and have too little to do with the experience of being human.[41] In other words, a central goal of her book is to provide an account of knowledge that accounts for human characteristics and qualities, and the social dimensions in which knowledge exists.

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39. Lorraine Code, *Epistemic Responsibility*, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 59.

40. Ibid., 59.

41. Ibid., 254.

Another important figure in virtue-responsibilism is James Montmarquet. He stresses the moral dimensions in knowledge, giving special attention to the significance of conscientiousness—the desire to gain truth and avoid error. His doctrine of conscientiousness is similar to Code's concept of responsibility in that both emphasize the importance of striving for truth.[42] However, Montmarquet points out that a love of truth is not sufficient; one could possess intellectual vices and still gain truth. Instead, he argues for three other safeguarding categories of virtue. *Impartiality* is "an openness to the ideas of others, the willingness to exchange ideas with and learn form them, the lack of jealousy and personal bias directed at their ideas, and the lively sense of one's own infallibility." *Sobriety* entails a set of related virtues that protect against hastiness in "the excitement of new and unfamiliar ideas, to embrace what is not really warranted, even relative to the limits of his own evidence." And, finally, *courage* includes a "willingness to conceive and examine alternatives to popularly held beliefs, perseverance in the face of opposition from others (until one is convinced that one is mistaken), and the determination required to see such a project through to completion."[43] These three categories of virtue, and the chief virtue of conscientiousness, describe the personal characteristics of the responsible epistemic agent who desires truth belief.

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42. James Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility,* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), 21.

43. Ibid., 23.

Appropriating Aristotle—Linda Zagzebski

Like Lorraine Code and James Montmarquet, Linda Zagzebski believes persons' cognitive character is central to epistemology. Her approach, however, draws much more explicitly from Aristotle. Her most enduring work, *Virtues of the Mind*, is the most widely cited work of VE in the Aristotelian tradition.[44] A central thesis of this book is that traditional epistemology has taken a wrong turn in its disputes over justification, and argues that epistemology can benefit from a virtue theory in the same way that ethics has. First, she claims that the structures of epistemology and ethics are strongly analogous. In ethics, the historically dominant views have been consequentialism and deontological ethics. She calls these "act-based" theories—a term that operates analogously to belief-based theory in epistemology.[45] Of the former, consequentialism, her comments are particularly relevant. Consequentialists argue that what makes an action right can be evaluated by its consequences—whether more good or bad results. She links this theory to reliabilism, claiming that they are structurally identical. "In reliabilist theories the epistemic goal is to bring about true beliefs and to avoid bringing about false beliefs, just as on consequentialist theories the moral goal is to bring about good states of affairs and to avoid bringing about bad states of affairs."[46] What is lost in both theories (consequentialism and reliabilism) is any consideration of

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44. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

45. Ibid., 2-19.

46. Ibid., 7-8.

the motives or intentions of the agent. Reliabilism (like consequentialism) emphasizes maximizing an agent's true beliefs over her false beliefs. This clearly puts her at odds with the likes of Ernest Sosa, whose intellectual virtues she thinks are hardly virtues at all, or are virtues "only by courtesy."[47]

The scope of her project—to bring ethics and epistemology under the same banner of virtue theory—is grand indeed. In her Précis to *Virtues of the Mind*, she writes, "my purpose...was to outline a pure virtue theory that is rich enough to include an account of intellectual virtues within the same theory as moral virtues, and to show how such a theory can generate a way to handle both epistemic evaluation and moral evaluation."[48] A central contention is that the boundaries erected between moral and intellectual virtue are a mistake, although each may have different ends in mind (e.g., moral virtues might strive for moral soundness whereas intellectual virtues promote excellent knowing). In particular, Zagzebski understands the intellectual virtues as possessing two main components—a *motivation* component that impels a person to acquire epistemic goods, and a *success* component wherein a person gets true belief from having believed virtuously.

NARROW AND WIDE VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

Those in the VE tradition face a decision with regard to how they choose to relate to the standard problems of traditional epistemology. Some, Ernest Sosa, John Greco, and Linda Zagzebski, for example, have attempted to apply the concepts of VE

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47. Linda Zagzebski, "Précis of Virtues of the Mind," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60, no. 1 (2000): 172.

48. Ibid., 172

to these issues with debatable success. Such theorists aim to build systems that can deal with standard problems in epistemology—e.g., the aforementioned debates about justification. For example, both Sosa and Zagzebski have given a response to the Gettier problem, and both have offered analyses of knowledge that (although different in direction) attend to the historical dilemmas that have characterized post-Gettier epistemology. Furthermore, these theories can be viewed as viable (if contested) entries into the larger project of epistemology. In other words, they recognize and validate the traditional problems. I refer to these forms of VE as *narrow* accounts.

Others, however, have not been so sanguine about these attempts. Jonathan Kvanvig argues that VE's future look much brighter outside the domain of traditional epistemology and its controversies. He cites the work of Lorraine Code, James Montmarquet, and newer works by figures like Robert C. Roberts and Jay Wood as prime examples of philosophers who have extended the traditional margins of epistemology. This *widening*, of course, creates "an expansion of the issues and problems that become the targets of philosophical reflection of a particularly epistemological sort."[49] Those in this camp draw from a much wider array of sources, and believe that a wider range of epistemic goods is relevant to epistemology, e.g., understanding, wisdom, and acquaintance. They also refrain from creating narrowly focused epistemologies, and stress the importance of flexibility. The regulative virtue epistemology (RVE) advocated in this dissertation falls within this *wide* tradition.

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49. Jonathan Kvanvig, "Virtue Epistemology," in *Routledge Companion to Epistemology,* ed. Duncan Pritchard and Sven Bernecker (New York: Routledge, 2010).

A RATIONALE OF REGULATIVE VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

The rationale for introducing wide virtue epistemology to education is fourfold. First, education is already rife with fully developed learning and educational theories. While it is certainly possible to introduce another fully formed theory—a virtue-based theory—this project extends beyond my present interests. The goal herein is to introduce a form of RVE—one that provides guidance for epistemic practice, but one that is less theoretically polarizing and demanding of existing educational theories. Clearly there are points in this account of RVE that will diverge from existing theories, but this dissertation focuses primarily on the points of mutual points of agreement. It avoids theoretical head butting. It should also be noted that VE emerges out of a very distinct Western tradition and, to my knowledge, it has not been addressed in other cultural contexts. Thus, the lack of resources and theorists from other traditions reflects the relative infancy of VE as a discipline.

Second, because this is the first large-scale attempt to introduce a VE and RVE to education, I believe it is helpful to limit analysis to a general account. The literature in wide VE is particularly rich in this respect, especially in its treatment of specific intellectual virtues.

Third, an often-repeated theme in wide VE is the recognition that knowledge is a multifaceted and deeply human enterprise. So is education. The RVE advocated here recognizes and celebrates the richness of human epistemic activity in a manner that is highly commensurate with contemporary understandings of education.

And, fourth, wide VE has tended to extend the range of epistemic goods under consideration. In the age of No Child Left Behind, where the acquisition of propositional knowledge and skill predominate the curricula, it seems right to return to a more holistic account of the purpose of education.[50] In summary, the choice to advance a wide regulative virtue epistemology does not preclude narrow approaches. Rather, it aims at maximizing analytic flexibility, accords well with education as a highly complex social endeavor, and broadens epistemology to include other epistemic goods.

A REGULATIVE VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

One of the most important works of wide virtue epistemology in recent years is *Intellectual Virtue: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* by Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood. These authors aim to develop a "regulative" virtue epistemology and describe their work in the following way:

> Given the central place of knowledge and understanding in human life, one would expect epistemology to be one of the most fascinating and enriching fields of philosophy and itself an important part of an education for life. We might expect that any bright university student who got all the way to her junior year without dipping her mind in an epistemology course would have to hang her head in shame of her cultural poverty. But the character and preoccupations of much of the epistemology of the twentieth century disappoint this expectation. We think that the new emphasis on the virtues and their relation to epistemic goods has the potential to put epistemology in its rightful place. And we hope that the present book, whatever its many shortcomings in detail, will suggest the rich ways in which epistemology—the study of knowledge and related human goods—connects with ethical and political issues, with the

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50. *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Public Law 107-110, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 1425 (2002).

practice of science and other forms of inquiry, with religion and spirituality, with appreciation of the arts, and with the enterprise of education.[51]

Roberts and Wood aim to widen the boundaries of epistemology, to put it in its right place. But exactly is its right place? In the first place, they note that life itself is rich with epistemic activity. "The intellectual life is characterized through and through by practices, and that the intellectual virtues fit us well to pursue these"[52] Based on our knowledge we drive cars, make hamburgers, play the piano, and reformat hard drives. We think, discuss, interpret, reminisce, ponder, judge, and so forth. In short, our minds are highly active. Despite the constancy of our cognitive activity, the discipline of epistemology has had relatively little to say about these routine cases of thinking.

A regulative epistemology is one that provides insight and guidance into the practice of the intellectual life. Nicolas Wolterstorff distinguishes this kind of epistemology from what he calls, "analytic epistemology," epistemology that deals in theories of knowledge, true-belief, and justification in a systematic fashion.[53] This term is synonymous with "traditional epistemology"—the term I use in this dissertation. Regulative epistemology, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with ethical nature of belief formation (and other epistemic states)—the view that cognizing is subject to ethical/moral evaluation. As such, the actual practices of thinking are subject to

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51. Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8-9.

52. Ibid., 307.

53. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xvi.

normative critique. Regulative epistemology also holds that epistemic practices are important for the health and wellbeing of societies. According to Nicholas Wolterstorff, John Locke's epistemology was regulative in this sense. He writes:

> I think we can best understand what Locke was doing by employing the concept of a *doxastic practice* (Greek *doxa* = belief). Locke was proposing a reform in the doxastic practices of his day. Those practices, he thought, were incapable of coping with the cultural crisis engulfing Europe in general and England in particular; they had, in fact, contributed to that crisis…Locke regarded his fellow citizens as not doing their best, when they should be, and not believing with a firmness appropriate to the results of that endeavor, his proposals had the status of proposals for reform. Locke was urging on his fellows that they reform their doxastic practice.[54]

Locke linked flawed doxastic practices to the social tumult of his day. Only by reforming these practices would society find a way out of its difficulties. Thus regulative epistemology concerns both individuals and societies, and thus—education.

What then is a regulative *virtue* epistemology? It is simply the position that our intellectual practices are evaluable based on the possession of intellectual virtues and vices. It explores how these intellectual virtues work in isolation and collectively to promote excellent thinking. Composing a final "authoritative" list of intellectual virtues, however, is not the aim of the dissertation. If such a list were possible—and I highly doubt that it is—it does not reflect a basic intention of this work. Likewise, the state of affairs in schools across the United States and in many other countries is one of

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54. Ibid., xvii

extreme ethnic and cultural diversity.[55] Thus, this RVE represents an attempt to respect diversity while recognizing that certain epistemic virtues can have salutary effects in educational contexts. In the following section, I consider several of these intellectual virtues by drawing attention to their personal and social significance. I also draw from John Dewey's less well-known work, *How we Think.*[56]

Open-mindedness is perhaps the most commonly cited intellectual virtue in the literature. One who possesses this virtue, according to Montmarquet, "must tend to see others' ideas as having at least a certain initial plausibility. He or she must be more than open, relative to what strikes them as initially plausible; they must have at least some initial tendency to see others' ideas as plausible."[57] The open-minded person demonstrates a kind of epistemic humility or willingness to admit her own fallibility. We all know persons whose ideas are fixed and inflexible, even when contrary evidence presents itself. Such behavior inhibits their capacity to attain epistemic goods like understanding, wisdom, and knowledge because they simply refuse to change their minds or revise their beliefs. Open-minded persons, on the other hand, are disposed to listen to counter-evidence and revise their beliefs if necessary. John Dewey highlights how open-mindedness is integral to the process of intellectual discovery.

> Mental play is open-mindedness, faith in the power of thought to preserve
> its own integrity without external supports and arbitrary restrictions.

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55. In Chapter IV I discuss this diversity in detail. While I do find some important similarities with respect to virtue, it is equally true that there are differences.

56. John Dewey, *How we Think* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1910).

57. James Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility,* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), 24.

> Hence free mental play involves seriousness, the earnest following of the development of subject-matter. It is incompatible with carelessness or flippancy, for it exacts accurate noting of every result reached in order that every conclusion may be put to further use. What is termed the interest in truth for its own sake is certainly a serious matter, yet this pure interest in truth coincides with love of the free play of thought.[58]

For Dewey, an open-minded person is one who gives his mind free reign to explore, and this entails two other intellectual virtues: a love of knowledge and conscientiousness. The lover of knowledge is one who values obtaining deeper understanding, knowledge, and experiences. This is a person who cares about improving the veracity of her beliefs and is serious and is exacting in her study.

Finally, the social significance of open-mindedness is evident when we consider how two societies would differ if one were populated by open-minded citizens and the other with close-minded citizens. Although no earthly domain consists entirely of one or the other, it stands to reason that a society that *listens* to each other, that values open discourse and the exchange of ideas, is a society that probably flourishes intellectually. It is a society wherein solutions to important social issues and problems are honestly addressed.

In our intellectual lives (as with the rest of life) we are sometime faced with real or apparent dangers. We may face dilemmas with respect to what to believe about religion, politics, controversial social issues, and the like. These situations will sometimes put us at odds with other members of our school, community, or family. Such events can be personally challenging a may call for a courageous response, or cautious

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58. John Dewey, *How we Think*, 219.

reservation of judgment. These related intellectual virtues, however, depend upon the right sort of motivation. Roberts and Wood write:

> So courageous actions need not be overall virtuous; they are virtuous insofar as they are courageous, since courage is a virtue; but to be overall virtuous, they need to be motivated by some virtuous motive. And this will mean that some virtue other than courage has to motivate the courageous action: justice, compassion, generosity, love of knowledge.[59]

Courageousness acts in accordance with other—often more fundamental—intellectual virtues. Sometimes the best course of action is to boldly face a threat, and to confront it despite the possibility that we may suffer negative consequences. At other times it might be best to exercise caution and to refrain from committing oneself too quickly.

Again Dewey offers a similar observation about courage and caution in his discussion on the importance of inference: "Since inference goes beyond what is actually present, it involves a leap, a jump, the propriety of which cannot be absolutely warranted in advance, no matter what precautions be taken. Its control is indirect, on the one hand, involving the formation of habits of mind which are at once enterprising and cautious."[60] These habits of mind including an enterprising (open-minded and courageous) spirit, but one constrained by caution and seriousness. He explains, "Since suspended belief, or the postponement of a final conclusion pending further evidence, depends partly upon the presence of rival conjectures as to the best course to pursue…[the] cultivation of a

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59. Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 217.

60. John Dewey, *How we Think*, 75.

variety of alternative suggestions is an important factor in good thinking."[61] Dewey again stresses the importance of open-mindedness by noting that exposure to rival viewpoints is integral to virtuous thinking.

From a societal standpoint, courage and caution are integral to the political process. Taking a stand, holding fast to principles, yet knowing when to back down are characteristics that we look for in political leaders. Likewise, social activists often display intellectual courage when confronting majority opinions. They write songs and poetry, hold demonstrations, and so forth. These bold proclamations involve moral commitments that demand intellectual virtues like courage and caution. The relationship between courage and caution, however, illustrates the importance of another intellectual virtue—practical wisdom.

Practical wisdom is a crucial epistemic virtue, but one not normally treated as such. Joseph Dunne explains,

> [*Phronesis*] is eccentric first of all in not lying comfortably on either side of the division that Aristotle himself makes between 'intellectual' and 'ethical' virtues. It is officially designated an intellectual virtue, but its deep involvement with the other side of the divide is evident from the fact that not only is it required to complete each ethical virtue by providing the element of judgment indispensable to the concrete exercise of the latter, but conversely…ethical virtue is itself required for *phronesis*. If a clever person is not good, neither will he be a *phronimos* (practically wise person).[62]

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61. Ibid., 75.

62. Joseph Dunne, "Virtue, *Phronesis* and Learning," in *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education,* eds. David Carr and Jan Steutel (London: Routledge, 1999), 50.

Despite its "deep involvement" with moral virtues (indeed, its necessity) it has largely been ignored in the context of intellectual virtues. Linda Zagzebski, however, argues that it has implications for the intellectual life as well. In particular, she argues that *phronesis* is integral to moral virtue *and* intellectual virtue.[63] It is a "higher order, mediating virtue, operating over the entire range of moral and intellectual virtues."[64] Roberts and Wood go one step further, claiming "The distinction…between the intellectual (theoretical versus practical reason, contemplative versus practical wisdom) is ill-drawn, because the intellectual life is fully as much a matter of practices as any other part of life."[65] This seems correct and the notion of "practice" draws attention to the need for practical wisdom. We routinely make intellectual choices; we lead discussions, respond to criticisms, interpret, and so forth. To do these things well, I maintain, involves an ability to skillfully and wisely adjudicate.

Indeed, a regulative virtue epistemology is one that depends upon the ability to adjudicate *wisely*—to discern the best course action with respect to one's cognitive life. This is not always easy. For example, two intellectual virtues might produce conflicting motivations. My motive to arrive at a just conclusion might conflict with my sense of compassion. Practical wisdom helps an individuals discern the proper intellectual course of action. This may involve assessing the entirety of a situation, drawing from experience and previous knowledge, making judgments and acting upon those judgments

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63. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 228-229.

64. Ibid., 78.

65. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 114.

in a manner that bears the stamp of practical wisdom. Thus, a practically wise person is one who consistently does this, and a practically wise society is one in which community members judiciously negotiate their intellectual differences.

What the intellectual virtues just discussed share in common is that they describe dispositions that excellent knowers possess—dispositions that are personally and communally valuable. Although some will recoil at the binary relationship between virtue and vice (the repudiation of binaries is a common theme in postmodern thought), it is instructive to consider the difference between the two. Consider the following passage from Jane Goodall's biography. Here she describes her apprenticeship to Louis Leakey—a fellow primatologist and a man she deeply respected for his personal scholarship.

> How could I possibly be considered suitable for such an important study? I had no training, no degree. But Louis didn't care about academic credentials. In fact, he told me, he preferred that his chosen researcher should go into the field with a mind unbiased by scientific theory. What he had been looking for was someone with an open mind, with a passion for knowledge, with a love of animals, and with monumental patience. Someone, moreover, who was hardworking and would be able to stay long periods away from civilization, for he believed the study would take several years.[66]

In this short passage, Goodall lauds several intellectual virtues. Among these, she includes open-mindedness, love of knowledge, compassion, patience, and diligence. These are traits Goodall deems important for scholarly (epistemic) activity. If, however, we alter this passage to include *vices* (traits descriptive of poor epistemic agents) a

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66. Jane Goodall, *Through a Window: My Thirty Years with the Chimpanzees of Gombe* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), 55, quoted in Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 320.

different picture emerges—one in which Leaky seeks a biased, close-minded, apathetic and lazy researcher who despises animals and is monumentally impatient. It is doubtful that any scholar would actively seek out such a person. The reason is simple: On multiple levels this person would *fail* in her epistemic duties because she does not possess the right character traits and appropriate motivations for serious scholarship. In short—we might doubt her trustworthiness.

Finally, the intellectual virtues are more than a handbook for thinking or a sort of reference guide. Although they can provide this sort of referential guidance, it is important to remember that the virtues are character traits that are deeply embedded within persons. They describe something about us, and have a *motivational* component; they energize us to cognize in certain ways. Zagzebski explains, "[Intellectual virtues] are forms of motivation to have cognitive contact with reality, where this includes more than what is usually expressed by saying that people desire truth."[67] She extends motivation to include other epistemic goods like achieving understanding, and notes that some intellectual virtues may aim specifically at targets other than truth. Roberts and Wood make similar remarks. They argue that the intellectual virtue of love of knowledge, for example, has a strong motivational basis. Referring to it as a "disposition of the will," they define love of knowledge as "an interest in understanding, an eagerness for acquaintance, a desire for significant

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67. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 167.

information and the solid support of actual or possible beliefs."[68] Love of knowledge compels persons to seek out and acquire knowledge, understanding, and acquaintance. In this respect, like other intellectual virtues, it motivates persons.

CONCLUSION

Regulative virtue epistemology emerges out of a particular intellectual and cultural context—as noted, the Western intellectual tradition. Following Edmund Gettier's influential article, debates about the nature and structure of justification grew increasing narrow and sophisticated. Some, including Ernest Sosa and Linda Zagzebski, attempted to circumvent these apparent impasses by shifting their philosophical analyses from beliefs to persons. Others followed their lead and the discipline of VE became, I believe, an important sub-discipline in epistemology. These virtue-based theories attempted to understand knowledge and related epistemic goods in roughly two ways—narrow and wide approaches. The RVE advanced in this dissertation develops out of this latter tradition. Several intellectual virtues were considered as well, and it was argued that these have both personal and social significance. Finally, it was noted that intellectual virtues have a motivational component; they drive us to think and act in virtuous ways. In the following chapter, I consider how knowledge has been understood in education and, in the final chapter, I return to the concept of RVE and consider how it might clarify our thinking about the epistemic purposes of education.

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68. Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 132.

CHAPTER III

KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION:

HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS*

In the preceding chapter, I covered the field of epistemology from approximately 1960 to present day work in virtue epistemology (VE). In this chapter, I consider how knowledge has been discussed in education during roughly the same time frame. In fact, knowledge has garnered considerable attention in contemporary educational theory. Theorists have drawn from traditions as diverse as positivism and postmodernism, and debates—sometimes quite lively—have served notice that there is little agreement across theoretical borders. Despite this variety (and the sometimes-contentious nature of these disagreements) most scholars would likely agree that knowledge continues to be an important topic in education. I begin by identify a key turning point in educational theorizing about knowledge—the reconceptualization. Here I analyze the historical and conceptual development of present-day educational theory, noting that an *epistemic shift* has taken place in curriculum studies. This discussion also serves as a foundation for explicating three important educational theories that espouse an "epistemology"—that is, a theory of knowledge. This conceptual analysis provides brief but accurate picture of present day "theory" in education. Along the way I note some points-of-contact between these theoretical

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orientations and VE. This account—along with Chapter II—will serve as a foundation for understanding how RVE clarifies the epistemic purposes of education. I conclude by noting some analogous developments in the fields of curriculum studies and epistemology.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND THE RECONCEPTUALIZATION

Curriculum development—as a distinct field within education—begins in the early 20th century with the work of John Franklin Bobbitt. Bobbitt sought to link school curriculum to the daily lives of students through a technique called activity analysis.[69] Briefly, activity analysis involved monitoring the daily routines of high performing professionals. What they do (and how they do it) becomes a form of data from which curricula can be derived. Others followed Bobbitt's lead and the field of curriculum development slowly emerged as a distinct discipline in education. By the time Ralph Tyler published his curriculum development manifesto in 1949, it seemed the field has truly emerged as a central field of study in education, and for the next couple of decades the bulk of curriculum literature built upon or revolved around Tyler's foundation.

However, the 1960s and 70s were a tumultuous time in curriculum studies—a period that represents a radical shift away from the traditional understanding of the curriculum scholar's work. The first shot rang out in 1969 with Joseph Schwab's incendiary piece, "The Practical: A Language for Curriculum." Here he offered two

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69. Peter Hlebowitsh, "Curriculum Development," in *Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies, Vol. 2,* ed. Craig Kridel (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications), 203.

criticisms of the curriculum field and a prediction. First, he evocatively declared the field "...moribund, unable to present methods and principles to continue its work and desperately in search of new and more effective principles and methods."[70] In 1976, Dwayne Huebner endorsed Schwab's assessment, claiming that the so-called unifying banner of *curriculum development* was no longer sustainable. He writes, "Let us acknowledge its demise, gather at the wake, celebrate joyously what our forebears made possible—and then disperse to do our work, because we are no longer members of one household."[71] William Pinar suggests that field attained this ineffectual state (in part) due to the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957. Fear that the United States was losing its position of dominance in the world prompted the Kennedy administration to initiate the curriculum reform movement. Curriculum specialists were passed over in favor of Discipline-specific specialists. Pinar claims that "by the late 1960s curriculum as a field, weakened by being overlooked by federal curriculum reform efforts and affected by declining enrollments, was vulnerable to attack."[72]

Second, Schwab claimed the field was stubbornly wedded to the Tyler Rationale, such that research had come to be little more than a regurgitation of inadequate and worn out methods. For decades, curriculum specialists worked to build

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70. Joseph J. Schwab, "The Practical: A Language for Curriculum," *The School Review* 78, no. 1 (1969): 1.

71. Dwayne Huebner, "The Moribund Curriculum Field: Its Wake and Our Work," *Curriculum Inquiry* 6, no. 2 (1976): 154.

72. William F. Pinar, *Contemporary Curriculum Discourses: Twenty Years of JCT* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), 484.

upon the foundation laid in 1949 by Ralph Tyler in his highly influential book, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*.[73] Here he stressed a rational approach to developing curriculum, what has come to be known as the Tyler rationale. This approach emphasized setting learning objectives, designing curriculum, establishing scopes and sequences, and the development of objective evaluation methods. The role of the curriculum developer in this scheme was that of advisor; scholars should work hand-in-hand with practitioners and schools to develop comprehensive plans of action.

Following these critiques of the curriculum development, Schwab predicted that the curriculum field would undergo a renaissance. Perhaps not in the way he imagined, nevertheless, his prophecy certainly came true in the academy. During the late 1960s and early 1970s a new generation of curriculum *theorists*—including James McDonald, Paul Klohr, Bill Pinar, Janet Miller, and Dwayne Heubner—began to call for a large-scale *reconceptualization* of curriculum studies. Janet Miller identifies the beginning of the reconceptualization movement with the "Curriculum Theory Frontiers" at Ohio State University in 1967, and roots its ongoing influence in the establishment of the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* (JCT) and the "Bergamo" conference in Dayton, Ohio.[74] With new venues in which to publish and present work, the curriculum field saw an explosion of theoretically diverse attempts re-think curriculum. Drawing from a range of disciples (e.g., literary theory, hermeneutics, neo-

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73. Ralph W. Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, (1950).

74. Janet L. Miller, *Sounds of Silence Breaking: Women, Autobiography, Curriculum* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), 36.

Marxism, and autobiography), many scholars shifted their focus from development and implementation, to a resolve to understand the deeper theoretical issues underpinning the once-straightforward business of curriculum.

The legacy of the reconceptualization of curriculum studies has largely been confined to the university setting. This much is evident from recent legislation, including Goals 2000 (1994), No Child Left Behind (2001), and president Obama's "Race to the Top" (2010). These modern-day instantiations of the Tyler Rationale indicate that the curriculum development model is thoroughly entrenched in the American concept of education. Nevertheless, recent reconceptualist work has attempted to reclaim curriculum development. Patrick Slattery, Joe Kincheloe, and Shirley Steinberg, contributed to a volume that aimed at precisely this. They describe a reconceptualized curriculum development model in the following way:

> We recommend an inclusive, contextual and autobiographical model for teaching, learning and assessment because we believe that the context of education can no longer be minimized, as traditional programs have done. We support the reconceptualized definition of curriculum and instruction that values all of the experiences teachers and students bring to bear on institutional schooling: classroom activities, extracurricular clubs and teams, cocurricular events, family experiences, peer group initiations….[75]

Although some schools have embraced a reconceptualized curriculum and instruction model of this sort, the authors are quick to note that such attempts are controversial.

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75. Joe L. Kincheloe, Patrick Slattery, and Shirley R. Steinberg, *Contextualizing Teaching: Introduction to Education and Educational Foundations*, (New York: Addison-Wesley Longman Publishers, Inc., 2000), 301.

As noted above, however, the reconceptualization has had its greatest impact on academic study of curriculum. Janet Miller writes:

> Many people associated with the reconceptualizing of the US curriculum field have worked for more than twenty-five years to move the field away from its long-standing managerial, technocratic, and positivist orientation, and toward multivocal, multiperspectival theorizings of curriculum. Contemporary curriculum theorists have moved from either neo-Marxist or phenomenological and existential orientations that characterized much of early reconceptualist inquiry into a riotous array of theoretical perspective that point to expansive and complex conceptions of curriculum reconceptualized.[76]

The early work of the reconceptualists, then, promulgated a new *zeitgeist* in university-based curriculum studies—one in which intellectual exploration has become the norm. It is "riotous" in that the sheer scope of topics, theories, and perspectives under consideration resist easy categorization. Terms like "postmodern," "constructive," and "critical" may hint at an orientation, but they also mask enormous perspectival variety. In summary, the reconceptualization was (and continues to be) a monumental shift from practical/bureaucratic attempts to structure a curriculum "that works," to a theoretical model that aims for political, ideological, and philosophical *understanding*. But the reconceptualization had another effect: it signaled an epistemic shift in curriculum theorizing.

EPISTEMIC SHIFTS IN EDUCATIONAL THEORY

The dramatic shift initiated by the reconceptualization was, in fact, an epistemic shift. Knowledge had been conceived of in largely instrumental language; it was the content, the subject matter, the body of relevant information deemed worthy of

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76. Ibid., 28.

study by curriculum specialists. Maxine Greene notes that scholars like Bloom, Schwab, and Tyler (among others) adopted "a type of scientism or positivism" in their work.[77] Their theories and "rationales," in other words, assumed that knowledge is (1) the product of rational systematic (read: scientific) investigation, and (2) reliable insofar as it is securely fastened to a proper epistemic foundation (empirical observation). While many still endorse a view of knowledge of this sort (e.g., advocates of quantitative research) Green is quick to point out that "Changing epistemological orientations, now increasingly evident in research institutes and organizations, are generating new reflectiveness about the constructs in use in particular situations and about what can be conceptualized and can expand the areas in which research is done."[78] These new epistemological "orientations" were partially noted earlier—phenomenology, critical theory, existentialism, and the like—and they continue to be "conceptualized" in contemporary curriculum theory. The following discussion addresses some specific theories that have emerged in the post-reconceptualization era.

Over the past few decades, several epistemological orientations have garnered considerable attention. These are divisible into three broad categories: Anti-realist epistemologies, critical epistemologies, and realist epistemologies—although boundary

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77. Maxine Greene, "Epistemology and Educational Research: The Influence of Recent Approaches to Knowledge," *Review of Research in Education* 20, (1994): 450.

78. Ibid., 450.

crossing does occur.[79] The goal is to clarify the theories of knowledge endorsed by several theoretical orientations that fall roughly under these categories. The aim is to provide a straightforward account of their epistemological assumptions.

Anti-realist Educational Epistemologies

The term, anti-realist, is far-reaching. One can be an anti-realist about some or all of the following: physical entities, morals, the past, the future, other minds, universals, and so on. Alvin Plantinga provides the follow concise description of anti-realism:

> The core of…anti-realism is the idea that objects in the world owe their fundamental structure—and, if they couldn't exist without displaying that structure, their existence—to our creative activity. The world as it is in itself, apart from this structuring activity, doesn't display any of these features. The idea is that if there were no persons (or if there were some and they didn't structure the world in the way in which we do in fact structure it) then there would be no objects in space or time, none displaying object property structure, no *number* of things of any sort, and the like.[80]

Plantinga makes two relevant observations here: (1) the mind is responsible for structuring and ordering experience, and (2) without this mental activity these objects would have no fundamental ordering or structure whatsoever. Each position outlined below is (according to its own logic) anti-realist; each is dubious of "objective" knowledge claims about the actual state-of-affairs outside the activity of the mind.

Constructivism

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79. For example, postmodern approaches are always anti-realist, but are often critical as well.

80. Alvin Plantinga, "How to be an Anti-Realist," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 56, no. 1 (1982): 50.

Although constructivism takes many forms—some quite radical, others relatively moderate—it usually denies the traditional conception of knowledge as justified true belief. Instead, most constructivists endorse an explicitly anti-realist thesis that (1) knowledge is constructed by an individual or society, because (2) there is no shared *reality* to which our beliefs about the world correspond. Put differently, individuals interpret and give meaning to the world around them. A socially constructed reality emerges when persons share their realities with one another. Thus, the apparently well-ordered world we inhabit is the product of collective social construction. However, both (1) and (2) are subject to multiple interpretations. In what follows I consider two varieties of constructivism: moderate and radical.

In its moderate form, constructivism stresses the subjective nature of experience; learners are encouraged to construct their own representations of reality. Several important figures in the history of education have endorsed a variety of moderate constructivism, e.g., Jerome Bruner, John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky. Piaget, for example, has been particularly influential in educational theory. He argued that knowledge is internalized by way of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation refers to the process whereby new experiences are integrated into our existing knowledge framework.[81] Suppose I read a novel by Tolstoy. As I work through the text, I encounter new ideas and interesting passages. These are assimilated into my pre-existing network of knowledge. My mind then takes a further step to accommodate this new knowledge. Thus, accommodation is a "re-framing" of my

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81. For a more detailed discussion of Piaget's thought, see William E. Doll, "Piagetian Thought," in *Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies, Vol. 2,* ed. Craig Kridel (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications).

"mental representations of the external world."[82] It follows that one's mind is always in the process of changing. I would quibble with some of the moderate constructivist's conclusions, especially the strain of moral relativism some endorse. Nevertheless, the basic observation that persons are consciously and subconsciously altering their understandings of the world is a powerful concept for education.

Moderate constructivism is also divisible into two rough varieties. Cognitive constructivism is the view that our mental structures are responsible for actively creating knowledge. As such, constructivist educators are particularly interested in cognitive development, and the *process* of learning—not its product.[83] Social constructivists, on the other hand, are concerned with the role of language and culture. They assert that education ought to "challenge learners to question, draw connections, reflect, communicate, negotiate, evaluate viewpoints, outline problems, acquire and use evidence, and generate new knowledge…."—each of these in the context of local and global community. Indeed, some believe that social constructivism holds the potential to improve society.[84] Here we see the influence of John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy of education on constructivist (and postmodern) theories of knowledge construction.

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82. Patrick Slattery, "Annotated Glossary for Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era" (student handout, Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture, Texas A &M University, 2010), 5.

83. Mustafa Yunus Eryaman and Salih Zeki Genc, "Learning Theories," in *Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies, Vol. 2,* ed. Craig Kridel (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2010), 536.

84. Ibid., 5.

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey writes, "In schools, those under instruction are too customarily looked upon as acquiring knowledge as theoretical spectators, minds which appropriate knowledge by direct energy of intellect. The very word pupil has almost come to mean one who is engaged not in having fruitful experiences but in absorbing knowledge directly. Something which is called mind or consciousness is severed from the physical organs of activity."[85] Dewey, like constructivists, views the acquisition of knowledge as a constructive and ongoing process. One does not simply *learn,* but one is always *learning.* As noted in the previous chapter, however, Dewey is also concerned with the habits of the mind—characteristics like open-mindedness, courage, caution, and love of knowledge. Here we see an important connection between Deweyan constructivism and regulative virtue epistemology: our cognitive character shapes our constructive activities. Fruitful discussion can and ought to be had concerning these connections.

In its radical and overtly more philosophical form, however, constructivism denies the existence of a mind-independent external world to which any knowledge claims correspond. In other words, the radical constructivist holds that we do not co-inhabit a physical world that exists independently of our minds. Rather, we literally create the world of objects (and persons) that present themselves to our perceptual faculties. Von Glasersfeld is among the most influential advocates of this view. He writes:

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85. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 164.

> With the construction of permanent objects, the cognitive subject crystallizes some of the repeatable items it has constructed and treats them as external and independent. Thus a distinction arises that covers much of the organism/environment distinction by creating a 'subjective' environment. The externalized permanent objects now 'exist' in an external world structured by the spatial and temporal relations that have been abstracted from the objects as they were experienced.[86]

First, there is no independently existing, extra-mental world from which these mental representations derive their form and content. The immense panorama of our reality (persons, places, things, etc.) is constituted solely by our minds.[87] Persons *make* the external world; they make other persons. For example, the keyboard upon which I am typing is clearly and distinctly before me. I see it and know that I see it, but this is only so because at some point I willed, thought, or endorsed the keyboard into existence. It now inhabits *my* external world. Second, von Glasersfeld's position is necessarily a form of relativism. This is the logical consequence of removing the possibility that we share a common world. Both points warrant scrutiny.

First, the view that there is not a knowable external world creates a problem for the radical constructivist: How is it possible that our minds have any content at all? If we reject the notion that the mind engages with an external reality, the radical constructivist needs to explain where the content of our minds comes from (e.g., ideas, opinions, memories, visual representations etc.). In other words, how does a mind born

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86. Ernst von Glasersfeld, *Radical Constructivism: A Way of Knowing and Learning* , (Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press, 1995), 124.

87. Concerning von Glasersfeld, it may be unsurprising to learn that he was heavily influenced by George Berkeley—hence the implicit idealism.

in complete darkness and isolation understand light? Furthermore, in cutting off access to the external world, we cut ourselves off from much more than trees, rocks, and birds; we cut ourselves off from other people. Why, then, should I concern myself with the suffering of others who putatively are little more than ideas or mental projections? In this respect, Von Glasersfeld's constructivism is also profoundly relativistic. It is difficult to see how it could be otherwise because he adopts "fact-constructivism"—a distinction made by Paul Boghossian.[88] Boghossian maintains that if we rid ourselves of an external set of facts, then the content of even the most banal propositions (e.g., There are mountains in Africa.) are utterly contingent. This is extremely problematic, especially when our propositions concern the wellbeing of others: For example, "Rape of children is morally wrong." The usual arguments made by relativists to condemn such heinous acts do not aid von Glasersfeld. Other children, he is forced to say, do not even exist.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism, often used interchangeably with Poststructuralism and methodologically tied to deconstructionism, is another anti-realist theory that has garnered considerable attention in education over the past few decades. Two of the foremost contemporary curriculum theorists—Patrick Slattery and William Doll—have endorsed poststructural approaches as modes of inquiry that open new possibilities for

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88. Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

understanding the present-day educational landscape.[89] Doll, for example, predicts that a "new sense of educational order will emerge, as will new relations between teachers and students, culminating in a new concept of curriculum."[90] Reeder elaborates on the postmodern turn in education. "Postmodern thinking promulgates a new paradigm of holism, one imbued with concepts of relationship, self-organization, recursion, order emerging from chaos, and meaning making."[91] But Usher and Edwards are careful to note that postmodernism resists easy explanation. "There is a sense, anyhow, in which it is impossible to fully define the postmodern since the very attempt to do so confers upon it a status and identity which it must necessarily oppose."[92] Rather, the terms postmodern, postmodernism, and postmodernity are "loose umbrella term[s] under whose broad cover can be encompassed at one and the same time a condition, a set of practices, a cultural discourse, an attitude and a mode of analysis."[93] In short, to systematize postmodernism is to miss the point of postmodernism. Thus, the following analysis aims only at approximation—fully aware that codification reifies exactly that which postmodernity repudiates. Nevertheless, if, as its advocates maintain,

89. Patrick Slattery, *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era*, (New York: Routledge, 2006); William E. Doll, Jr., *A Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum,* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).

90. Ibid., 3.

91. Stacy Reeder, "Classroom Dynamic and Emerent Curriculum," in *Chaos, Complexity, Curriculum, and Culture* ed. William Doll and others, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 249.

92. Robin Usher and Richard Edwards, *Postmodernism and Education*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.

93. Ibid., 7.

postmodernism is a new way of thinking about education, what does it have to say about knowledge?

At root postmodernism is deeply suspicious of so-called modernist *meta* or *grand* narratives about knowing and knowledge. It is argued that these narratives describe or frame the world in a static unchanging language that simply cannot represent the shifting nature of reality. Instead, postmodern thought starts with the assumption that the structures, systems, and relationships that underpin modernist accounts of reality are wholly contingent and fluid. Richard Rorty, for example, presents a postmodern theory of knowledge that denies that we have direct access to reality—that is, the way things are independent of the mind. Rather, he argues that knowledge (and epistemology) ought to be replaced with "hope" in better ways of believing. He warns, "One should stop worrying about whether what one believes is well grounded and start worrying about whether one has been imaginative enough to think up interesting alternatives to one's present beliefs"[94]

Once we abandon the fruitless search for objective reality, we can devote ourselves to making our beliefs more efficacious than they were before. We can do this because we have given up *truth-as-correspondence*, and have embraced the claim that what makes a belief right is just that experience has taught us that it works. In short, because our claims to truth (and thus knowledge) refer to utter contingent accounts of reality, it follows that they are only contextually true. As such, any claim to an invariant *foundation* (an objectively knowable external world, for example) for

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94. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 34.

knowledge is met with skepticism. Instead, knowledge ought to be concerned with the local and specific (contextual) rather than the context-free and totalizing general.

There are, of course, numerous postmodern perspectives in educational theory. Patti Lather has argued for the method of deconstruction in approaching educational issues and research. According to Lather, the goal of deconstruction "is to keep things in process, to disrupt, to keep the system in play, to set up procedures to continuously demystify the realities we create, to fight the tendency for our categories to congeal."[95] Many, if not all, postmodernists would agree with Lather's insistence that we deconstruct the binaries and categories that permeate education. Nevertheless, some have called for "constructive" elements in postmodernism. Patrick Slattery describes his own constructive approach that "seeks to integrate the best features of premodern rural, agrarian societies (such as spirituality, cosmology, and family/tribal community values) in order to construct a more balanced and ecologically sustainable global community."[96] And still others address educational issues through a postmodern reading of scientific development. William Doll's work in chaos theory typifies this approach.[97] Likewise, others have focused their attentions on ecological issues. Chet bowers, for example, works to create a postmodern theory of ecological justice rooted

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95. Patti Lather, "Critical Frames in Educational Research: Feminist and Post-Structural Perspectives," *Theory into Practice* 31, no. 2 (1992): 96.

96. Patrick Slattery, *Curriculum Development*, 28.

97. For further discussion of this issue, see William Doll, *Chaos, Complexity, Curriculum and Culture*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006).

in a sense of generational and biotic connectedness.[98] I sum, there are innumerable positions available to the postmodern theorist. What binds many of them together is a strong sense of *justice*: ecological justice, economic justice, and social justice. Virtue epistemologists also give place to justice, counting it among the intellectual virtues.

Postmodernists question correspondence theories about the nature of reality, but they also de-centered conventional wisdom about the *self*. Michel Foucault writes, "Where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning—numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by a historical eye."[99] For Foucault, what one knows is not the product of a single curious soul, but knowledge is filtered through a fragmented set of identities. This point is echoed in Deborah's Britzman's feminist critique of fixed concepts of self. She argues, "Identity is examined as a discursive effect of the social, constituted through identifications."[100] Society, as such, plays the key role in the constitution of these multiple identifications. She goes on to note, "because identification is a partial, contradictory, and ambivalent relation with aspects

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98. For further discussion of this issue, see Chet Bowers, *Education, Cultural Myths, and the Ecological Crisis: Toward Deep Changes,* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993).

99. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader,* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 81.

100. Deborah Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning,* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 83.

of objects or dynamics of others, it may be thought of as a means to make and direct desire."[101] Two important points emerge from this assessment.

First, there is no single self-identity, but a whole host of identities in constant negotiation with the social world. Queer theorists and feminists have found this observation particularly helpful in their respective studies of gender and sexuality. The concept of an "essential self"—one that is gendered male or female—is traded for self that is socially constituted. This leads to the second point. For postmodernists, knowledge and power are intimately linked in the self-identification process. Again, queer theorists and feminists argue that powerful social forces bracket what counts as a legitimate self-identity. Thus, attempts are made to transgress these social constructions—to decenter the power/knowledge relationship. What (even how) one comes to know something becomes extremely ambiguous. But far from unnerving postmodernist, this ambiguity about reality and self-identity is celebrated for its liberatory force.

Finally, while virtue epistemologists might not share the postmodernists metaphysical commitments, many *wide* virtue epistemologists are also unimpressed by attempts to build logical systems. Lorrain Code's feminist virtue epistemology,[102] and

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101. Ibid., 83.

102. Lorraine Code, *Epistemic Responsibility*, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987).

Roberts and Woods regulative epistemology are prime examples.[103] Wood, for example, claims that many themes in postmodern thought are echoed in VE. He writes,

> Any suitably chastened epistemology for a postmodern age must reckon not just with the limitations imposed upon reason by time, place, and language, but also with those darker forces of pride, power, economic advantage, and idolatry that subvert reason and keep us from the truth and other desirable ends of intellectual activity. Of course, such concerns are not incidental to virtue epistemology, but integral to it.[104]

Virtue epistemology of this sort recognizes that the world is a complex place—a place full of conflicting and competing ideas. It also assumes that intellectual character directly shapes how this world is perceived. I contend that the open-minded, intellectually courageous and honest person—in short, the virtuous knower—is better equipped to handle the rigors of intellectual life in the 21st century.

Critical Epistemologies

The Frankfurt and Birmingham Schools of Critical Theory

Several important theoretical orientations fall under the *critical* category—a term first coined by Max Horkheimer. The goal of critical theory, according to Horkheimer is "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them."[105] This description is wide enough to cover all the perspectives under consideration here;

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103. Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

104. W. Jay Wood, "On the Uses and Advantages of an Epistemology for Life," in *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought*, ed. Merold Westphal (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 18.

105. Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 244.

however, each of these has its own distinctive characteristics that are worth discussing. It is also important to keep in mind that critical approaches emphasize the binding of theory and action. That is, a person's theorizing is also a call to action, and thus critical approaches are generally overtly political in nature. I begin this section with a brief introduction to two forms of traditional critical theory, followed by a discussion of critical race theory and critical feminist epistemology.

Steeped in its Marxist roots, traditional critical theory is divisible into two broad foci: the critical social theory of the Frankfurt School, and approaches centered on the study hegemony vis-à-vis the Birmingham School. The Frankfurt School of critical theory designates several generations of social theorists and philosophers. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno originated critical theory. Their main concern was that the "systematic pursuit of enlightened reason and freedom had the ironic long-term effect of engendering new forms of irrationality and repression."[106] These pathologies, or mass distortions of rationality, made it impossible for members of society to realize their own potential and freedom. Stephen K. White points out that, while large audiences never embraced early critical theory, their trenchant critique did undermine the "prevailing interpretations of reason, progress, nature, and subjectivity,"[107] and engendered suspicion and a greater degree of questioning. Instead, Horkheimer and Adorno sought to "to transform contemporary capitalism into a

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106. Stephen K. White, "Reason, Modernity, and Democracy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas,* ed. Stephen K. White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

107. Ibid., 3.

consensual form of social life."[108] This involved illuminating the repressive ideologies responsible for this wholesale blindness, and providing an alternative paradigm based on social rationality. In its current iteration, Jürgen Habermas argues for the creation of a democratic public sphere of discourse reminiscent of the salons and coffee houses of 18th century London. Habermas' public sphere is a "conceptual resource…in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk."[109] It is a site where persons can deliberate about important matters outside the purview of the state, indeed, where the state can be held up for critical analysis. In the language of virtue—it is a sphere in which discussants engage in *open-minded* discourse.

The Birmingham School of critical theory, like the Frankfurt School, takes Marxism as its point of departure. The aim of Birmingham School critical theory, however, differs from the Frankfurt School. Following Antonio Gramsci, scholars in this tradition explore how cultural productions (e.g., film, political discourse, music, and so forth) serve to subjugate persons—what Gramsci calls hegemony. "For Gramsci, this was necessary because the ruling classes occupied a hegemonic position; that is, through their control of social, cultural, and political forces, the ruling classes were able to attain the consent of the working classes to capitalism and thus to their own domination."[110]

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108. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* s.v. "Critical Theory," (by James Bohman), http://plato. stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/critical-theory, section 1 (accessed May 15, 2011).

109. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1999), 519.

110. Matt Matravers, "Twentieth-Century Political Philosophy," in *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy,* ed. Dermot Moran (New York: Routledge, 2008), 887.

Just as Marxists were concerned with the distribution of the means of production, Gramsci and his followers saw similar nefarious forces at work in the production of culture.

Gramsci's social theory was adopted by several notable figures associated with the University of Birmingham's *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* (1964-2002)—a collective of persons working in the area of critical theory, including Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Richard Dyer, and Paul Willis. Binding them together was a common belief that cultural hegemony needed to be exposed. The themes addressed by those in this critical tradition are multiple. Slattery notes, "Birmingham School scholars work with hegemony as a lens for understanding working class lives and speech, resistances in youth culture, meanings of alternative cultural styles, and dominant (yet invisible) white, heterosexual, and masculine cultural representations."[111] The Birmingham School has to varying degrees influenced numerous educational theorists, e.g., Henry Giroux, Jean Anyon, and Michael Apple. The most influential of these is Paulo Freire, whose book—*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—remains one of the most cited works in educational literature.[112] Each of these theorists has employed a critical approach, often under the moniker "critical pedagogy," in their scholarly work. Paul Willis' seminal ethnographical book, *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs,* is an excellent and illustrative example critical theory applied to educational issues.

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111. Patrick Slattery, *Glossary*, 6.

112. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York: Continuum, 2000).

The aim of Willis' study was to understand how the pattern of educational failure was maintained within this educational community. Thus, he analyzed the lives of 12 working-class "lads," attending "Hammertown School." Stanley Aronowitz provides the following summary of his findings:

> [Willis] shows how kids, through their won activity and ideological development, reproduce themselves as working class. The mechanism is their opposition to authority, their refusal to submit to the imperatives of a curriculum that encourages social mobility through acquisition of credentials. Thus, Willis opposes the manipulation thesis of radical critiques with the finding, based upon careful ethnographic methodology, that working class "lads" create their own culture of resistance to school knowledge. Or, to be more exact, truancy, counterculture, and disruption of the intended reproductive outcomes of the curriculum and pedagogy of schools yield an ironic effect: the "lads" *disqualify* themselves from the opportunity to enter middle class jobs…the student produce themselves as rebellious, "uneducated" workers whose single choice is the unskilled and semi-skilled occupations found in manual labor.[113]

Even through their own attempts at resistance, these students effectively reified a cultural narrative about their own "place" in the world. Willis notes, "This hegemony of commonsense surrounds them all the time. It is partly self-created and partly produced by confirmatory ideological messages downwards."[114] They are constantly reminded of the inevitability of "work"—that is, the hard a dreary life of the factory

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113. Stanley Aronowitz, "Preface to the Morningside Edition," in Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), xi-xii.

114. Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 162.

worker. This is partly the result of self-creation and partly the product of a hegemonic logic that makes escape *seem* impossible.

Undergirding both forms of critical theory is a particular account of knowledge. Habermas, for example, recognizes that the social sciences—concerned with subjectivities as they are—require more than the typical positivistic epistemology. Rather, he advocated the use of positivistic "technical" inquiry for descriptive purposes, and a "practical" (interpretive or hermeneutic) approach that sought *understanding.*[115] Together these modes of inquiry provide the epistemic basis to pursue emancipatory ends. Habermas' appropriation of Freudian psychoanalysis illustrates how critical theory attends both subjective and empirical consideration.[116] For example, the analysand is studied both empirically (for her symptoms and conditions) and subjectively via dialog. Importantly, effective psychoanalysis ideally ends with the analysand possessing reflective self-knowledge and greater self-control—and thus, emancipation.

Critical Race Theory

Over the past 15 years increasing attention has been given to critical race theory (CRT) in education. Gloria Ladson-Billings, William Tate, Jim Scheurich, Garret Duncan, and Adrienne Dixson have each used a CRT framework for understanding race issues in U.S. education. Originating in the critical legal studies movement of the 1980s, but in presaged in the works of W.E.B. Dubois, critical race theorists are deeply

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115. John S. Dryzek, "Critical Theory as a Research Program," in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas,* ed. Stephen K. White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 98.

116. Ibid., 99.

suspicious of the structure of legal systems in the United States. Authors like Patricia Williams, Richard Delgado, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Derrick Bell have each maintained that White supremacy and racial power have been (and continue to be) reproduced through U.S. laws and policies. Derrick Bell, for example, writes:

> My position is that the legal rules regarding racial discrimination have become not only *reified* (that is, ascribing material existence and power to what really just ideas)—as the modern inheritor of realism, critical legal studies, would say—but *deified*. The worship of equality rules as having absolute power benefits whites by preserving a benevolent but fictional self-image, and such worship benefits blacks by preserving hope. But I think we've arrived at a place in history where the harms of such worship outweigh its benefits.[117]

The problem, as Bell suggests, is that we are living under a confortable illusion—one that offers Whites the scapegoat of specious sympathy, and people of color false promises. The truth of matters (that non-Whites remain targets of racial prejudice) is hidden under a number of systemic "guises." Unsurprisingly, these guises are also present in education.

Consider the issue of colorblindness. Gloria Ladson-Billings explains that the "colorblind" position is "evident in the way the curriculum presents people of color, presumes a homogenized 'we' in a celebration of diversity."[118] On the surface the argument for colorblindness appear innocuous, however, Ladson-Billings continues: "Thus, students are taught erroneously that 'we are all immigrants,' and, as a result,

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117. Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 101.

118. Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education?," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 11 no. 1 (1998): 18.

African American, Indigenous, and Chicano students are left with the guilt of failing to rise above their immigrant status like 'every other group.'"[119] Far from putting persons on an equal footing, the reduction of all person to colorless collective hides the deeper issues that foster racism.

The preceding case illustrates how, embedded within the curriculum, one can arguably find racist structures. This has implications for a CRT theory of knowledge. Critical race theorists maintain that the dominant epistemology in the U.S. public schools is Eurocentric. They are quick to point out that there many other ways of knowing outside the context of the Western intellectual tradition. These include indigenous ways of knowing associated with tribal populations, somatic knowledge, and epistemologies generated in Eastern, African, or South American contexts, to name a few. According to CRT scholars, failing to recognize and respect these other forms of knowing and knowledge amounts to epistemological racism. Zamudio et al. explain that our unstated epistemological assumptions "guide and inform the societal ethos. That is, what the dominant society believes…about learning, teaching, and assessment, is nested within an epistemological assumption about how knowledge is acquired, whose knowledge is valued, how knowledge is share, and how knowledge is assessed."[120] A central task for CRT, then, is to advocate for a pluralistic account of knowledge in education.

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119. Ibid., 18.

120. Margaret Zamudio and others, *Critical Race Theory Matters: Education and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 99.

Realist Epistemologies

Realist epistemologies make up the final category considered in this chapter. Herein, a realist epistemology is one that holds that the external world is—to one degree or another—objectively knowable. As such, educational scholarship in the realist tradition aims to describe external phenomena in objective terms. They begin with the assumption that our senses and cognitive abilities are generally reliable and trustworthy, and that beliefs supported by sufficient evidence are should be counted as knowledge. The standard-bearers of realist epistemology are those in the quantitative research tradition.

Research methodologies are an ongoing and hotly debated issue in education. On one side, researchers in the quantitative tradition continue to argue for the primacy of scientifically based research. They contend that scientific methodology grants researchers a foundation from which to make verifiable claims about phenomena related to teaching and learning. Indeed, they have been critical of qualitative research, claiming it is incomprehensible, counter-intuitive, and ineffective for gaining genuinely useful knowledge of educational phenomena. Diane Ravitch typifies this view. An outspoken advocate of scientifically based research, she imagines a scenario in which medical doctors are replaced with doctors of education who cannot agree upon a diagnosis, having no "canon" to draw upon. She concludes: "The thought occurred to me that educators have something to learn from physicians. Medicine, too, has its quacks and charlatans. But unlike educators, physicians have canons of

scientific validity to protect innocent patients from unproven remedies and specious theories."[121]

This view was articulate in the National Research Council's controversial report, *Scientific Research in Education.* Following the No Child Left Behind act (2001) and its mandate to pursue scientifically based research, these authors were given the task of providing a cogent account of what constitutes rigorous, scientifically based research. They identify six guiding scientific principles:[122]

1. Research questions should be significant and empirically investigated.

2. Research should be linked to relevant theories.

3. Only methods that allow direct investigation of a question should be used.

4. The chain of reasoning should be open to evaluation and coherent.

5. The experiment should be replicable and generalizable.

6. Research data and methodologies should be disclosed for evaluation.

Several epistemic assumption are embedded within these principles: objective knowledge-claims are possible via scientific principles of investigation; existing theories are useful insofar as they reliably lead one to knowledge; true beliefs are replicable and thus generalizable; and true research outcomes will display logical cohesiveness. In this respect they locate themselves with a positivistic tradition. In fact, they hold such principles to be crucial to the future of US education:

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121. Dianne Ravitch, "What if Research Really Mattered?," *Education Week* 18, no. 16 (1998): 33.

122. National Research Council, *Scientific Research in Education*, eds. Richard J. Shavelson and Lisa Towne (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2002)

> In today's rapidly changing economic and technological environment, schooling cannot be improved by relying on folk wisdom about how students learning and how schools should be organized. No one would think of designing a rocket to the moon or wiping out a widespread disease by relying on untested hunches; likewise, one cannot expect to improve education without research.[123]

In short, positivistic epistemology is held to be superior to other anti-realist or critical epistemologies, because it resists the invalidating affects of subjectivity. But not all agree.

In a recent issue of *Educational Researcher*, Kenneth Howe provides a critique of education's apparent methodological fixation with positivistic epistemology. "I contend that the education science question, to which the new orthodoxy has been the response, ought to be abandoned as currently framed because it has been addressed within a broad rhetorical context that presupposes a positivist conception of science."[124] His main objection is that the "new orthodoxy"—the notion that valid knowledge is best arrived at via scientific methodologies—presupposes a commitment to positivistic epistemology. The language of the NRC report suggests his assessment is correct.

Most of the criticisms of positivistic/post-positivistic research methodology have come from the qualitative research tradition. Scholars in this tradition have sought to problematize what they understand to be a naïve and ultimately hegemonic

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123. Ibid., 14.

124. Kenneth Howe, "Positivist Dogmas, Rhetoric, and the Education Science Question," *Educational Researcher* 38, no. 6 (2009): 428.

dependence on science. Denzin and Lincoln describe this general sentiment. "Critics of the SBR movement are united on the following points. 'Bush science' and its experimental, evidence-based methodologies represent a racialized, masculinist backlash to the proliferation of qualitative inquiry methods over the past two decades."[125] They go on to provide the following generalization of the qualitative researcher's alternative epistemological commitments:

> Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.[126]

This passage reiterates two standard assumptions about knowledge noted in the discussions about constructivism and critical theory, respectively. First, reality is not a fixed thing, but the product of individual realities in constant negotiation with other realities. What emerges is a kind of *holistic*, socially constructed reality. Knowledge works in much the same way; it is not constrained by an independently existing external world—some fixed entity that limits what is knowable—but by the subjective reality of individuals. Second, the knowledge we have is inseparably tied to our political, cultural, and religious worldviews. This subjective bias precludes the possibility of objective knowledge.

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125. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.,* 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 9.

126. Ibid., 10.

On one hand, I believe most virtue epistemologists and (post) positivists will agree that the external world is some objective sense, knowable. We can make knowledge claims about it and those claims are constrained by how the world presents itself to us. Postmodernists and constructivists will naturally be skeptical of claims that the world presents a "unified" image of itself to persons. They are certainly right insofar as each person is unique and understands the world subjectively. When this thesis is pressed to its limit—when each person's subjective understanding of the world is radically isolated and incommensurate with other subjective understandings— this is where most virtue epistemologist will part company with postmodernism. On the other hand, *wide* virtue epistemologist and (post) positivist will disagree regarding the role of systematic accounts of knowledge. Wide VE is reticent to construct comprehensive logical systems for understanding knowledge.

ANALOGIES IN EDUCATION AND EPISTEMOLOGY

In conclusion, at least two analogies can be drawn curriculum studies and the discipline of epistemology. First, both fields experienced a foundational shift during roughly the same period of time. A notable difference occurs in the initial responses of these fields: where many curriculum theorists almost immediately embraced the intellectual liberty of reconceptualization, many epistemologists attempted defend or refine the traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief. By the 1980s, however, several respected epistemologists had broken ranks with the establishment. For generations, epistemology had limited its analysis to the properties of beliefs and had neglected the characteristics of knowers themselves. The introduction of VE in the

1980s marked a redirection of focus away from the sterile qualities of beliefs and conditions for knowledge, and instead made the characteristics and dispositions of persons the subject of study.[127] A similar and analogous shift occurred in curriculum theory. Maxine Greene's introduction of existential perspective into the scholarly discourse, as well as the new emphasis on autobiographical research and psychoanalysis, typifies the move from outward structural concerns associated with the Tyler Rationale, to the inward-looking emphasis on subjective experience.[128]

In both instances, greater attention is paid to *persons* and far less to systems, whether methodological, epistemological, or bureaucratic. Likewise, both fields broadened the scope of their respective analyses to include new theoretical sources and ideas, which had hitherto been largely neglected. William Pinar, William Reynolds, Patrick Slattery, and Peter Taubman, for example, state clearly their desire to open educational discourse to wider range of voices and perspectives—to generate *understanding*. They write, "We aspire to point to a 'common ground'…in which different traditions and understandings can contribute to a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the present stage of the American curriculum field."[129] This reflects their collective insight that education is richly complex and requires careful and creative reflection. However, this involves open-mindedness to other perspectives.

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127. Heather Battaly, "Introduction: Virtue and Vice. *Metaphilosophy,* 41 no. 1-2 (2010): 1-21.

128. Maxine Greene, *Teacher as Stranger: Educational Philosophy for the Modern Age, (*Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1974).

129. William Pinar and others, *Understanding Curriculum: An Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Curriculum Discourses* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 14-15.

A little later, they write, "We are engaged in an effort to present a detailed portrait of the field in which dissenting and disparate voices and traditions, grounded in history, can contribute to a more profound understanding of the contemporary curriculum field."[130] As such, their now classic curriculum "bible" includes chapters on politics, gender and sexuality, theology, aesthetics, autobiography, and a host of other research areas—conceptual orientations generally unheard of prior to the reconceptualization.[131] It now appears that many contemporary educational theorists have adopted a similar regard for theoretical diversity.

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130. Ibid., 15.

131. Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

VIRTUE IN CONTEXT

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

In Chapter II, I presented an overview of regulative virtue epistemology (RVE) for the theory and practice of education. I noted that the central concept considered by RVE is intellectual virtue. However, the perceptive reader may wonder about the concept of intellectual virtue—may wonder if traits like intellectual honesty, courage, and charity present a distinctly Western understanding of "good" thinking. This is a legitimate concern if RVE is to be endorsed as a viable educational theory. Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman faced similar worries during the early stages of their large-scale empirical and philosophically grounded study of virtue in multiple cultural contexts. They too confronted the possibility that virtues are incommensurate across cultural lines:

> When we undertook our project, we started by creating our own list. With little modesty, we asserted that our list included strengths and virtues valued in all contemporary cultures around the world. But when we showed our list to colleagues, we encountered the frequent objection that there are no strengths and virtues valued across all cultures. Indeed, we were told that the subcultural variations along regional, socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic lines in just the contemporary United States precluded a universal list even for the here and now. We took these criticisms seriously and worried about reifying characteristics valued only at the turn of the new century by upper-middle-class European American academics.[132]

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132. Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 33.

It is fair to assume, I believe, that many scholars in education will express similar uncertainties about this project.

Sharon Todd expresses similar worries about cosmopolitanism—especially its idealized vision of humanity. In, *Toward an Imperfect Education: Facing Humanity, Rethinking Cosmopolitanism,* she contends that contemporary cosmopolitanism approaches diversity in the language of assimilation rather than exchange. She writes, "Exposure to cultures other than our own is put in the service here of make 'us' better people on 'our' own terms." This language (*us* and *our*) derives from a universalized concept of humanity—a concept she challenges for its concrete inflexibility. She continues, "[This conception of humanity] is evidence of the tendency to *incorporate* diversity, while leaving the main body of reason and moral capacity intact. There is not, therefore, much reflection offered on the very possibility of *exchange* that would actually alter the very content of what counts as reason and moral capacity."[133] Instead, Todd advocates for "reclaiming" universals through Judith Butler's notion of "cultural translation."[134]

According to Todd, Butler argues that universals are self-negating because the very act of abstracting overarching rights or principles eliminates the particular persons and cultures to which those rights refer.[135] This does not mean a lapse into

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133. Sharon Todd, *Toward an Imperfect Education: Facing Humanity, Rethinking Cosmopolitanism* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2009), 30.

134. Sharon Todd, "Universality and the Daunting Task of Cultural Translation: A Response to Penny Enslin and Mary Tjiattas," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. 1 (2009): 22.

135. Ibid., 20.

relativism, however; but a reconceiving of universals as a "struggle for intelligibility."

She describes such a universality as one that is "forever dissatisfied with itself, forever

restless in its search for meaning, and it lives only at the very limits of its own

articulation."[136] Todd's book joins an ongoing critical discourse with the Kantian and

deontological traditions in ethics—one that falls outside the scope of my present

interest in virtue-based theories.[137] Nevertheless, she *does* articulate an important point

with respect to how a concept like virtue might be communicated. I will return to this

in the final section of this chapter.

This chapter explores the concept of virtue from cultural, religious, and

philosophical points of view. Of course, each of these perspectives is deeply complex,

and each appears to inform the other(s). However, this extends well beyond my present

concerns.[138] For the sake of clarity, then, when speaking of the Yoruba and Akan, I am

largely concerned with cultural practices; my discussion of Confucianism and

Buddhism draws largely from religious texts, and Greek notions of virtue are derived

largely from philosophical sources. It is shown that certain ubiquitous virtuous

character traits are valued across cultural lines, and that similar understandings of

virtue emerge in almost all cultural and religious contexts. This is demonstrated

through various religious texts, works of philosophy, and traditional proverbs from

several very important traditions: Chinese, South Asian, Greek philosophy, and

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136. Ibid., 22.

137. Todd's critique of universals—of rights and rules—is a critique of

138. There are numerous ways in which culture and religion inform, shape, even (arguably) collapse into one another. I believe this is a fruitful area for future research—one I will certainly address in future work.

African moral theory. I conclude with a discussion of challenges facing virtue-based theories.

VIRTUE IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS

According to Smart, three world regions have been particularly influential in the history of religion and ideas—China (Taoism and Confucianism), South Asia (Buddhism and Hinduism), and the West (Greek philosophy, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).[139] I follow Smart's lead, but add African culture because of its historical and cultural richness. I survey how virtues are understood and function within several of these philosophical and religious traditions. This discussion, while regrettably brief, provides sufficient ground for making some general observations.

Chinese Virtue – Confucianism

Confucianism was conceived against a backdrop of political turmoil. The Zhou Dynasty (1040? – 256 B. C. E.) had recently disintegrated and the king's authority was severely diminished. What power remained was concentrated in the hands of a number of dukedoms that imposed their own taxes, raised their own armies, and often waged war on each other—and people suffered. Bryan W. Van Norden offers the following interesting quote from a leading minister of Jin:

> Our ruler has here 4,000 chariots of war. Even if he acts contrary to the Way, it is still necessary to fear him; if he, beyond that, is acting in accordance with the Way, who can prove his opponent? An ox may be meager; but if it fall upon a pig, would you not fear the pig would die? … If we lead on the multitudes of Jin, using also the forces of the other

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139. Ninian Smart, *World Philosophies* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2.

states? … if we come thus to punish Lu for its offenses … what can we seek that we shall not get?[140]

Although the minister was cognizant of the Way (*Dao*)—the principles that govern the meditative life—other concerns clearly trumped it. In fact, brute reality showed that leaders depended more upon force and cunning strategy for prosperity than adherence to the Way. This sort of thinking was out of tune with the general regard ordinary people had for the Way. These person looked to a distant past when "Heaven" granted Kings power and success based on their possession of *dé* (virtue) and their respect of the Way. This bifurcation generated deep social tension.

It was this chaos into which Confucius was born. The son of a once prosperous family, he made the study and teaching of the old traditions his life's work. Needless to say, his teaching took root. Confucianism is undoubtedly the most instrumental system of thought to emerge from China. According to Norden, Confucius "provided the intellectual background against which all later thinkers react, and he started a movement that continues to be socially and philosophically influential more than two thousand years later."[141] Confucianism's influence soon spread out across East Asian and eventually spanned continents. However, Confucianism is a misleading term. Confucius did not "invent" a brand new religion or system of thought. Rather he expanded on a centuries-old Chinese tradition. Xinzhong Yao explains:

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140. Bryan W. Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 66.

141. Ibid., 65.

It is true that as a distinctive 'school' Confucianism began with Confucius. It was Confucius who explored deeply and elaborated extensively on the basic principles of what was to become Confucianism, and it was Confucius and his disciples who succeeded in transmitting and trans- forming their ancient culture. But it would go too far to suggest that Confucianism was 'created' solely by Confucius and Confucianism was sustained exclusively by the faith in Confucius. In this sense, the word 'Confucianism' is a misnomer for the tradition that is normally referred to as ru jia, ru jiao, ru xue or simply as ru in China and other East Asian countries.[142]

Nevertheless, Confucius' role was crucial. By virtue of clearly articulating the central tenets of *ru,* and doing so in a compelling and clear way, Confucius revitalized the tradition. What, then, did he have to say?

Confucius was primarily concerned with humans and the principles that shaped humanity. In particular, he believed that healthy social relationships were essential for a prosperous society.[143] To this end, he advanced two especially important theses: Persons can teach and learn goodness, and a peaceful society is only possible when it is ruled by wisdom.[144] From these theses, Confucius eventually developed his four key ideas—those that would eventually become the foundation for the Confucian tradition. First, Confucius continued to promote *dao*, which literally translates as "path," "road," or "way." Following *dao* was the basis for moral and peaceful social conditions.

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142. Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17.

143. It will be clear by the end of this Chapter that social relationships are critically important for almost all societies. This is yet another reason to study the character of these relationships. The virtues seem to provide the most direct way of doing so.

144. Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26.

Second, Confucius promoted rituals (*li*), which were thought to be instrumental for the cultivation of virtue, and a means of educating persons in the ways of *ru*. Third, he stressed the importance of humaneness (*ren*). Those who practiced *ren* would demonstrate a concern for the wellbeing of others and an avoidance of self-aggrandizement. And, fourth, Confucius promoted general virtue (*dé*). Confucian virtue was understood as a deeply held moral authority that granted persons power to act righteously. Confucius was especially concerned with the cultivation of *dé* among the aristocracy who were ultimately responsible for the prosperity of society.[145] Taken together these four components roughly describe the tenets of Confucianism. Of course, generations of scholars and religious leaders have expanded and transformed classical Confucianism. In the following section, I focus largely on primary sources—the works of Confucius themselves and the five virtues they advance.

The central virtue and one of the guiding principles for Confucius is *ren*. *Ren* functions as a kind of moral attitude and is comprised of various "building block" virtues. When these blocks are fitted together a person will display what Confucius calls "humanity." This is *compassionate* humanity (a concerned regard for the dignity of humans) and is central to the Confucius' social philosophy. The person who possesses *ren* is "a man [sic] who is strong, resolute, simple, and slow to speak is near to humanity."[146] He seems to suggest that rashness and loquaciousness impede one's

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145. Ibid., 26.

146. Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation*, trans. Robert Eno (2010), bk. 1, chap. 14, http://www.iub.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_(Eno-2010).pdf (accessed April 15, 2011).

ability to understand the human condition. As noted, however, *ren* is made up of

several other virtues (*dé*). These are described in the analects:

> Zizhang asked about ren. The Master said, "He who can enact five things in the world is ren." When asked for details, he went on, "Reverence, tolerance, trustworthiness, quickness, and generosity. He is reverent, hence he receives no insults; he is tolerant, hence he gains the multitudes; he is trustworthy, hence others entrust him with responsibilities; he is quick, hence he has accomplishments; he is generous, hence he is capable of being placed in charge of others."[147]

These virtues work together and are dependent on each other. One's generosity should

be characterized by earnestness; one's truthfulness prompts diligence, and so forth.

Confucius never talks about the virtues in isolation. Virtue epistemologists have noted

this interrelationship between virtues, although the issue is a "thorny" one.[148] Finally,

the moral virtues (*dé*) culminating in (*ren*) are expressed via ritual (*li*).[149] In fact, the

cultivation of virtue is directly tied to ritual and education.

Cultivation of Virtue

Confucians believe that virtues are acquired through cultivation and education,

and/or some mixture of both. "Its chief aim is to educate the learner to be fully human

and to become a qualified member of the community of trust, and its primary approach

is to enhance self-cultivation and develop students' capabilities of fulfilling their

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147. Ibid., bk. 17, chap. 6.

148. How the virtues fit together is a difficult and debated issue. For further information, see Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 156.

149. Lee Dian Rainey, *Confucius & Confucianism* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 34-35.

responsibilities for themselves, for their families and for society at large."[150] The goal

of Confucian education (which is true of many cultures) is ultimately tied to the social

prosperity of the community. Confucius writes, "Cultivate yourself to bring comfort to

the people."[151] Learning begins with oneself but extends to others. Confucius takes this

one step forward, arguing that a love of learning is requisite for many of the virtues.

> If, you love *ren*, but you do not love learning, the flaw is ignorance. If
> you love knowledge but you do not love learning, the flaw is unruliness.
> If you love faithfulness but do not love learning, the flaw is harming
> others. If you love straightforwardness but you do not love learning, the
> flaw is offensiveness. If you love valor but you do not love learning, the
> flaw is causing chaos. If you love incorruptibility but you do not love
> learning, the flaw is recklessness.[152]

The desire to learn—that is, to take an active hand in acquiring new understanding—

plays an important role for Confucius. Students who train their minds have the tools

available to achieve positive ethical outcomes; they have the necessary know-how and

know-that to exercise virtue. Moreover, learning itself refines and strengthens these

virtues. Without learning, however, the impulse to behave virtuously may never obtain

or (worse still) may result in vicious behavior. There is another important point to be

made: "love of knowledge" is also an *intellectual virtue*—one that plays a very

important role in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. Roberts and Wood,

150. Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 283.

151. Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation*, trans. Robert Eno (2010), bk. 14, chap. 42, http://www.iub.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_(Eno-2010).pdf (accessed April 15, 2011).

152. Ibid., bk. 17, chap. 8.

for example, argue that the love of knowledge is a central epistemic virtue. Those who love knowledge are prone toward fact checking, persistence, and open-mindedness. In short, those who love learning also love knowledge.[153]

Finally, I wish to note a few important features of traditional Confucian education—features that putatively nurture the aforementioned virtues. Educators in the Confucian tradition stress deep reflection, which involves intense study and careful analysis of the subject matter. The ultimate goal of this educational activity—at least on the traditional account—is the perfection of the person. Quite contrary to the Christian view of "original sin" and essential wickedness of human nature, Confucius held that persons were fundamentally good. Education, then, provided a way to move toward this perfection. Chinese students have amassed a well-deserved (almost stereo typical) reputation for being extremely diligent and hardworking. This might be attributable to the philosophical (and educational) foundation laid by Confucius and his followers. The very first lines of the *Analects* illustrate how important study was to Confucius: "The Master said: To study and at due times practice what one has studied, is this not a pleasure?" For Confucians, education is a lifelong process of self-cultivation that emphasizes strength of will and determination. Timothy Bergen explains that Chinese emphases on "perfectibility, learning, rationality, effort, and will-power" are closely related to one another in Confucian literature, and that "this fact sheds light upon how Eastern learners view education and explains why effort is

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153. Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 153-182

seen as important in the process of human perfectibility."[154] In the language of virtue: Chinese educational culture values diligence and steadfastness with respect to learning.

South Asian Virtue – Buddhism

Buddhism is among the largest and most influential religions in the world. Its primary concentration is in the region of South Asia, which includes India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Burma. Leslie Alldritt estimates that there are approximately 360 million Buddhists in the world, making it the third largest religion in the world after Christianity and Islam.[155] It has been estimated that over half of the world's population lives in areas significantly influenced by Buddhism.[156] Numerous varieties of Buddhism exist, although three broad schools are dominate: the Southern variety where Theravada Buddhism is prevalent, the Eastern version which mixes Chinese religious tradition with Buddhism, and the Northern variety found in Tibetan culture—the modern inheritors of ancient Indian Buddhism.[157] The following analysis draws from the sacred canons of each of these schools with the intention of providing a general account of Buddhist understandings of virtue.

The founder of Buddhism, Siddhārtha Gautama (500? – 350? B.C.E.) was born and taught near the Ganges River in Northeastern India. However, the historical facts

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154. Timothy J. Bergen, "An Analysis and Review of Confucian Philosophy as the Basis for Chinese Education," *International Education* 24, vol. 2 (1995): 45.

155. Leslie D. Alldritt, *Religions of the World: Buddhism* (Langhorne, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005), 4.

156. Brian Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.

157. Ibid., 4.

about his life remain contested. Most accounts, though, assert that he was born into a wealthy family and with the prospect of hold power. Michael Carrithers offers the following sketch:

> The Buddha was born the son of a king, and so grew up with wealth, pleasure and the prospect of power, all goods commonly desired by human beings. As he reached manhood, however, he was confronted with a sick man, an old man and a corpse. He had lived a sheltered life, and these affected him profoundly, for he realized that no wealth or power could prevent him too from experiencing illness, old age and death. He also saw a wandering ascetic, bent on escaping these sufferings. Reflecting on what he had seen, he reached the first great turning-point of his life: against the wishes of his family he renounced home, wife, child and position to become a homeless wanderer, seeking release from this apparently inevitable pain.[158]

Despite Carrithers own admission that his account is only roughly true, it nevertheless explains an important feature of the Buddhist religion. The Buddha's path to enlightenment originated in his confrontation with the existence of pain and suffering. Carrithers goes on to describe how the Buddha began his spiritual journey by practicing meditation and self-mortification. These proved ineffective until one day he determined to quietly reflect upon the human plight. From this tranquil contemplation he achieved an awakening—solving the "enigma" of suffering. For the next forty-five years he spread his message of enlightenment, and a world religion was born.[159]

To grasp how Buddhists understand the concept virtue, it is necessary to cover the basic teaching of Buddhism. According to Stephen Laumakis, the most important

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158. Michael Carrithers, *The Buddha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 2.

159. Ibid., 3.

concept in all Buddhist thought is the notion that who we are is product of our thinking. Just as the body is shaped by food and exercise (or lack thereof), so too can we "maintain, shape, transform, and indeed, strengthen" our minds' "powers by meditative practices and exercises."[160] To control the mind and thus perception is the goal of Buddhist religious experience. Bearing this insight in mind, let us briefly consider the tenets and practices of Buddhism as manifest in the Middle Way, Four Noble Truths, and Eightfold Path.

The Three Teachings

The Buddha taught that a way between extreme asceticism and hedonism existed—what came to be known as the Middle Way. The Buddha discovered that self-denial and mortification produced debilitating emotional and physical suffering, and failed to live up to its promises. While, on the other hand, hedonistic enjoyment of life's pleasures failed to fulfill his desire for peace, worldly pleasure was too fleeting to bring lasting joy. The Middle Way, however, "gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment…"[161] Metaphysically, the implications of the Middle Way are that human souls are not fixed and eternal, nor are they destined for ultimate annihilation. Instead, they are *annatta*—

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160. Stephen J. Laumakis, *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 40.

161. Ibid., 47.

lacking a fixed self.[162] Epistemologically, the Middle Way suggests cautious path between naïve certainty and total skepticism about our beliefs.

The Four Noble Truths capture the basic teachings of the Buddha and are modeled on Indian medical science: confirming that patient is sick, diagnosing the sickness, prescribing treatment, and implementing the cure. The Truths follow this pattern. The first noble truth simply states that *dukkha* (suffering and pain) exists—both existential and physical *dukkha*. This is the starting point of the Buddha's thought. The second Noble Truth is more complex. It states that the causes of *dukkha* are linked in a causal chain that begins with "contact" with the world, others, and ourselves. This contact produces sensation, which in turn producing craving, and craving produces suffering when it is unrequited. The third Noble truth states that the cessation of these causes of *dukkha* is possible. Finally, the fourth Noble Truth prescribes the *Way* to overcome *dukkha*—the Eightfold Path.[163]

The specifics of the Buddha's Middle Way are laid out in the Eightfold path. These steps are:[164]

Right View or Understanding

Right Thought or Purpose

Right Speech

162. Ibid., 270

163. Stephen J. Laumakis, *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 52-60.

164. Carl Olson, *The Different Paths of Buddhism: A Narrative-Historical Introduction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 54.

Right Behavior

Right Livelihood

Right Effort

Right Mindfulness

Right Concentration

The term "path" suggests that one takes consecutive and linear steps toward enlightenment. This is a misunderstanding as these steps occur simultaneously. Moreover, the word "right" indicates that one correctly perceives the true state of affairs or reality. These steps are also divisible into three main categories: Wisdom, Meditation, and Moral Action. The first category—Wisdom—indicates that one grasps the Four Noble Truths and their implications for life. "This is the greatest wisdom that one can achieve in this life. These are skillful, useful, and beneficial views. If you attain this wisdom, you are liberated from the cycle of pain and sorrow."[165] Grasping this Wisdom recommends one take steps toward addressing the existence of *dukkha*. Meditation, the second category, explicates this massive mental struggle to free the mind of evil states. Controlling the mind and cultivating strength of will are essential because the mind defaults to craving and grasping for things that lead to suffering. The final category—Moral Action—involves our conduct in speech, behavior, and livelihood. Here Buddhists believe that the reduction of *dukkha* depends upon our willingness resist participating in the causal chain of suffering. Put differently, when

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165. Ibid., 55.

we resist repaying an evil with another evil we stop the chain reaction that promulgates further suffering. This final category gets us closer to a Buddhist theory of virtue.

Buddhism and Virtue

Three steps on the Eightfold Path deal explicitly with moral action. It is not surprising that Buddhists have written extensively on moral character. According to Damien Keown, "There is more to the Buddhist moral life than following rules. Rules must not only be followed, but followed for the right reasons and with the correct motivation. It is here that the role of the virtues becomes important." He goes on to claim that the precepts (rules) and virtues are two sides of the same coin. Precepts are essentially "a list of things a virtuous person would never do."[166] Like many other religious traditions, Buddhist virtues are supposed to be habituated so that they come forth naturally from a person's character. This corresponds with Zagzebski's observations about the motivational component of intellectual and moral virtues—the view that they impel us to act and think in particular ways.[167] Likewise, the virtues counteract their *dukkha* producing opposites—*klesas* (what we call vices in the West). In other words, those who are virtuous are less prone toward generating more suffering in the world.

Perhaps the most influential list of virtues was composed in the Mahayana tradition. In this tradition, the bodhisattva (an enlightened person or being) practices

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166. Damien Keown, *Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.

167. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 167.

six core virtues—referred to as the *paramita* or Six Perfections. These include generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, meditation, and insight.[168] However, earlier it was noted that followers of the Buddha must struggle to avoid negative thinking. This fact directly affects the way that such virtues are practiced. Suppose an enlightened Buddhist monk decides to minister to the needs of homeless people. He discovers an alley where the homeless are living in cardboard boxes. They are dirty, underfed, and sickly. A natural human response would to be to place oneself in these persons shoes, and to be filled with despair.

> To become emotionally identified with her would be like a person without any ability to swim jumping into a lake to save a drowning child, which would result in a double drowning. It is necessary for a compassionate person to be cool-headed and emotionally self-controlled, a posture similar to that of a medical doctor analyzing a patient and prescribing a remedy in a detached manner—which does not mean a cold-hearted, uncaring way. The Buddhist goal is to strive for the spontaneous exercise of compassion.[169]

Thus the monk has learned to control his mind. He understands (insight) the situation and feels appropriate amounts of compassion and generosity. He also understands that his ministrations—while good and noble—will make only a small difference. And he perseveres; he returns to that ally each day, all the while refusing to succumb to *dukkha*.

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168. Damien Keown, *Buddhist Ethics*, 17.

169. Carl Olson, *The Different Paths of Buddhism: A Narrative-Historical Introduction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 69.

Virtue is taught via the Five Precepts that *lay* Buddhists are encouraged to follow in both the Mahayana and Theravada traditions. These include a respect for life, avoidance of theft, abstinence from sexual misconduct, avoidance of untruthfulness, and avoidance of drunkenness. The precepts "are meant to be followed by Buddhists at all times, the object being to establish a habit-formation of virtuous and restrained conduct, in opposition to the unwholesome tendencies of greed, hatred, and delusion…."[170] Living by these principles not only encourages self-control and moral behavior, but also places a person in a positive—habit forming—state of mind that affects deep change. Helmut Klar offers several methods for inculcating the Five Precepts into a child's education. First, he notes that imitation (of parents and teachers) is of central importance. When parents take their dharmic responsibilities seriously, and live those convictions out, children will imitate them. Klar also encourages parents to celebrate Buddhism with their children. This can be done by keeping images of the Buddha in the home, and celebrating festival days. Finally, he notes the importance of reading and discussing Buddhist texts with children, especially the Five Precepts.[171] Taken together, such activities are foundations for "learning by heart"—that is, fostering a deep regard and love of Buddhism from a very early age.

Cultivation of virtue is integral to following the Middle Way of the Buddha, and thus assumes privileged place in Buddhist monastic education. Future monks are

170. Francis Story, "Buddhist Lay Ethics," *Bodhi Leaves* 59 (2009), http://bps.lk/olib/bl/bl059-p.html (accessed April 15, 2011).

171. Helmut Klar, "How to Teach Buddhism to Children," *Bodhi Leaves* 9 (2011), http:// www.bps.lk /olib/bl/bl009.pdf (accessed April 15, 2011).

taught the necessity of cultivating inward virtues in both ritual-based education and their philosophical training. George B. J. Dryfuss, a Westerner who studied in the Dalai Lama's temple for 15 years, describes several ways this is done. First, he points out that newly arrived monks are immersed in rigorous ritual life. New monks, for example, are encouraged to recite texts with specific and highly precise inflection.[172] This is thought to preserve textual meaning, but it is also thought to cultivate the virtues of conscientiousness and carefulness.[173] If monks decide to pursue scholarship in the monastery, their training regimen intensifies significantly. They continue to memorize large portions of text (largely philosophical texts) but add to this education training in debate—the primary method of teaching for many monastic teachers. The central goal of which is to produce perspicuity of thought and critical reasoning skills. As noted earlier, however, the skills (or virtues) do not operate in isolation from other virtues. The monk, whose thoughts penetrate truth, is one whose character is deeply virtuous.[174]

Greek Philosophy

Virtue has a long history in Western (European) thought—particularly through the influence of Greek philosophy and Christianity—and one could fill several volumes tracing its extensive influence. Instead, I provide a very rough sketch of virtue

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172. George B. J. Dryfuss, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 86-87.

173. Ibid., 88.

174. Ibid., 170.

by highlighting some key concepts that emerge from Greek philosophy and contemporary virtue ethics. It should also be noted that the RVE advocated in Chapter II traces its intellectual genealogy to Aristotle—a fact that will be clear in the following paragraphs.

The two key concepts that preoccupied ancient Greek moral theory were virtue (*arête*) and happiness (*eudaimonia*). Prior to Plato and Aristotle, however, the two concepts were nearly synonymous. "[Virtue] amounts, roughly, to success in life, where such success is measured largely if not entirely in external terms—in the extent to which one has acquired the typically recognized good things in life: wealth, power, friends, and the like."[175] The distinction between virtue and happiness on this account is blurry. Virtue is understood almost exclusively by its external manifestation, e.g., one is virtuous when one is obviously successful. In Plato and Aristotle, however, virtue is redefined as an internal characteristic or trait.[176] One might act courageously, for example, but one is courageous only insofar as courage is a deeply engrained character trait.

Aristotle is probably the most influential Greek philosopher to articulate a concept of virtue. He begins by noting that our actions generally have a goal (*telos*)—a reason for having done them. "Every skill and every inquiry, and similarly every action

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175. Susan Sauve Meyer, *Ancient Ethics: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 3.

176. Ibid., 3-4

and rational choice, is thought to aim at some good."[177] Indeed, if our actions lacked some sort of goal they would be essentially meaningless. Aristotle also distinguishes between to forms of *tele*: there are goals that facilitate achieving other goals, and there are goals that we pursue *for their own sake*. Consider the act of making cookies. There are a whole series of steps I must take in order to make (and eat) a batch of cookies. I have to run to the market and purchase the ingredients, prepare the batter, kneed the dough, pre-heat the oven, and so forth. Each of these steps is a *telos*—but each points toward a greater *telos*: to enjoy a batch of fresh cookies. This greater *telos*—enjoying cookies—explains the steps I took along the way. "The ubiquitous human phenomenon of doing things for reasons, therefore, depends on there being at least one thing we pursue for its own sake."[178] Of course, there are many things we pursue for their own sake—friends, lovers, children, prosperity, pleasure, and so on. But, as Aristotle notes, "we choose them also for the sake of happiness, on the assumption that through them we shall live a life of happiness; whereas happiness no one chooses for the sake of any of these nor indeed for the sake of anything else."[179] In short, for Aristotle happiness is the ultimate good and the *telos* for which we should all strive.

What role do virtues like courage, honesty, and practical wisdom play in the acquisition of happiness? To address this question, two points need to be clarified.

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177. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

178. Susan Sauve Meyer, *Ancient Ethics: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 52.

179. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 11.

First, Aristotle tells us that our basic function—that which makes us distinctly human—is our capacity to reason. Roger Crisp offers an interesting and helpful analogy. "It is worth remembering that in Greek a horse that ran fast could be said to have a 'virtue' or excellence, in so far as it performed well its characteristic activity."[180] A horse has a virtue when it performs well in one of its basic functions. Many take Aristotle to be endorsing what has come to be known as the "function argument, which takes the following form:[181]

1. Happiness is "doing well."

2. Doing well means performing our human function well.

3. Our human function is reasoning.

4. Therefore, happiness consists in using our reason well.

5. Therefore, happiness is activity of excellence of reason.

When persons reason well—*the* basic function—they do so because they exercise virtue. Nafsika Athanassoulis elaborates: "If the function of man [sic] is reason, then the good man is the man who reasons well. This is the life of excellence or of *eudaimonia. Eudaimonia* is the life of virtue—activity in accordance with reason, man's highest function."[182] Thus happiness is the byproduct of reasoning well—of virtuous reasoning. This leads to a second consideration.

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180. Roger Crisp, "Introduction," in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xiv.

181. Susan Sauve Meyer, *Ancient Ethics*, 63.

182. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* s.v. "Virtue Ethics," (by Nafsika Athanassoulis), http:// www. iep.utm.edu/virtue/#SH4a (accessed May 15, 2011).

Second, the *nature* of reason is tied to Aristotle's understanding of the bipartite soul. Briefly, the soul is divisible into rational and non-rational parts.[183] The rational segment is the source of the *intellectual virtues*—the chief of which is practical wisdom. It is less obvious how the non-rational part of the soul relates to reason. Once more a division is created—this time into a part concerned with things like nutrition, but also a part that has "more in common with reason, and is capable both of opposing it (in the case of a weak- willed person, for instance) and of obeying it. The virtues of this second sub-part are the virtues of character: courage, generosity, and so on."[184] Thus, excellent (virtuous) reasoning is tied to both virtues of character and intellectual virtues. As a consequence, those who are morally and intellectually virtuous experience *eudaimonia*.

How, then, are the (moral and intellectual) virtues acquired? In the first place, Aristotle thinks they are acquired through different and separate means: "intellectual virtue owes its origin and development mainly to teaching, for which reason its attainment requires experience and time; virtue of character (ēthos) is a result of habituation (ethos), for which reason it has acquired its name through a small variation on '*ethos*.'"[185] Thus Aristotle's virtues are acquired in two ways—through teaching (intellectual virtues) and habituation (moral virtues). Let us consider intellectual virtues first.

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183. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 103-104.

184. Roger Crisp, "Introduction," xiv.

185. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 23.

Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of intellectual virtue: the contemplative and the calculative. According to Dunne, contemplative virtues are learned deductively—that is, one starts with the general and moves toward the specific.[186] These virtues include *episteme* (scientific knowledge), *nous* (intuitive reason), and *Sophia* (philosophical wisdom). *Episteme* or "scientific knowledge" provides a good example. One can (putatively) only acquire this virtue deductively— that is, by listening to descriptions, considering explanations, and studying the arguments of one's instructors. The upshot is that it is acquired through teaching, *not habituation*. The calculative virtues, on the other hand, are more difficult to restrict to the result of teaching alone. In brief, the calculative virtues include *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *techne* (skill). These virtues "enable one to attain 'variable' (contingent) truths that are 'in agreement with right desire.'"[187] Moreover, each is acquire via inductive and deductive teaching. Practical wisdom, for example, is obtained through listening and considering lectures about "what is noble and just."[188] Thus one learns practical wisdom via deduction. But induction is also important. This entails learning through practice—e.g., practice adjudicating and considering particulars—which begins to look very similar to *habituation*. I consider this point in more depth in the following chapter.

186. Joseph Dunne, "Virtue, Phronesis, and Learning," in *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education*, ed. David Carr and Jan Steutel (New York: Routledge, 1999), 49-63.

187. Heather Battaly, "Teaching Intellectual Virtues: Applying virtue Epistemology in the Classroom, " *Teaching Philosophy* 29 no. 3 (2006): 202.

188. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 6.

The moral virtues, as noted above, are acquired through habituation. "We become builders by building, and lyre-players by playing the lyre. So too we become just by doing just actions, temperate by temperate actions, and courageous by courageous actions."[189] In short, we become virtuous by *practicing* virtue, which has the clear implication that the moral upbringing of students cannot be taught by instruction alone. It requires that children consistently practice virtuous acts thereby acquiring truly virtuous character traits. The matter is complicated, however, by Aristotle's claim that one cannot become truly morally virtuous without the presence of the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom.

> It is clear from what we have said, then, that we cannot be really good without practical wisdom, or practically wise without virtue of character. Moreover, on these lines one might also meet the dialectical argument that could be used to suggest that the virtues exist in isolation from one another. The same person, it might be argued, is not best suited by nature for all the virtues, so that he will already have acquired one before he has acquired another. This is possible in respect of the natural virtues, but not in respect of those on the basis of which a person is said to be really good; for he will possess all of them as soon as he acquires the one, practical wisdom.[190]

This is because the complexities of life often demand we discern a how to act properly. This interdependence of intellectual and moral virtues is at the heart of Aristotle's argument for the unity of the virtues.

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189. Ibid., 23.

190. Ibid., 118.

African Concepts of Virtue

There is a vibrant philosophical community on the African continent. For example, in *A Companion to African Philosophy,* Kwasi Wiredu assembles an impressively diverse collection of essays addressing topics like the philosophy of mind, history of African philosophy, logic, and moral philosophy—all from a distinctly African perspective. But what is African philosophy? Somewhat simplified, there are presently two general perspectives on African philosophy—the traditional and the anti-ethnophilosophical. According to Wiredu, "Traditionalists have tended…to restrict the concerns of modern African philosophy to issues having some connection with traditional African thought and culture." On the other hand, the anti-ethnophilosophers argue that "the modern world presents intellectual challenges which may not all admit of such a derivation, and to abstain from involvement with them on the grounds of a non-African origination is unlikely to prove a blessing to Africa in the modern world."[191] The division, then, centers on the role of Western thought. This issue extends beyond the concerns of this chapter. I would note, however, that the notion of virtue advanced here draws from traditional African philosophy.

It is also worth noting that the term "African Philosophy" is equivalent to using the term "Western philosophy;" each encompasses innumerable philosophical perspectives colored by a larger cultural milieu. Sensitive to this, I have tried to restrict my generalizations to those made by Africans doing philosophy. There is good reason

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191. Kwasi Wiredu, "Introduction: African Philosophy in Our Time," in *A Companion to African Philosophy,* ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 4.

for this. Africa is in the midst of crisis of self-identity—the consequence of having been aggressively colonized for centuries. It is for those whose lives are tied to the African continent, whose futures are (literally) at stake, to generalize about the nature of that self-identity.

Foundations for Moral Thought in Africa

In most African cultures, the foundation of ethics is twofold: a respect for the individual appropriately balanced with the needs of the community. But this is a tenuous balance as Segun Gbadegesin notes:

> From this it follows that there need not be any tension between individuality and community since it is possible for an individual to freely give up his/her own perceived interest for the survival of the community. But in giving up one's interests thus, one is also sure that the community will not disown one and that one's well being will be its concern…. The idea of individual rights, based on a conception of individuals as atoms, is therefore bound to be foreign to this system. For community is founded on notions of an intrinsic and enduring relationship among its members. [192]

To understand the virtues, one first needs to grasp the interdependent relationship between the individual and the community, and the mutual demands engendered by this relationship. Gbadegesin uses the term "survival" quite deliberately; many African communities have extremely limited access to natural resources. The individual that fails to grasp her obligations to community risk expulsion. What, then, is the character of this bond between the person and her community? Traditionally, this connection has been understood as fundamentally rooted in religion—that is, that the basis for

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192. Segun Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary Realities* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991), 66-67.

morality is inextricably tied to the deeply religious nature of African culture. Several notable African scholars have propagated this view, including Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, and J. O. Awolala. Unfortunately, this view also misses an important point: "These authors fail to understand what makes religion important in African life, namely, the welfare of the individual and that of society."[193] African people are not—in the pejorative sense—so deeply religious as to have no regard for human welfare outside of religious systems of thought. Indeed, religion serves as a means of discharging their responsibilities to maintain human welfare. Devotion and worship of deities is performed genuinely, but not for the sake of the deity. Rather religious worship is offered for the benefit of society. When a deity fails to serve (or bless) the interests of the society, people are free to sever that relationship.[194] In short, African people *value* human life for its own sake—not as the product of blind religiosity.

African Virtue

Bearing these contextualizing remarks in mind, we can now turn our attention to African notions of virtue. Kwame Gyekye notes, "Good character is the essence of the African moral system, the linchpin of the moral wheel." [195] Indeed, he goes on to claim, "Many writers have made the observation that despite the indisputable cultural diversity that arises from Africa's ethnic pluralism, there are underlying affinities in

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193. John Ayotunde Isola Bewaji, "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture," in *A Companion to African Philosophy,* ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 397.

194. Ibid., 399.

195. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* s.v. "African Ethics," (by Kwame Gyekye http://plato. stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/african-ethics, section 1 (accessed April 15, 2011).

many areas of the African life; this is surely true in the African religious and moral outlook. There are some features of the moral life and thought of various African societies that…are common or shared features." Following Gyekye's assertion that "good character" is the basis for moral reasoning in African society, I examine the two largest ethnic populations in Western Africa—the Yoruba and Akan people.

Bewaji notes that the Yoruba hold to a set of pervasive ethical norms that regulate the behavior of both persons and the gods. Those who live uprightly—whose character exhibit virtue with respect to themselves, tribal elders, and others in general are variously called *oniwa rere, oniwa tutu, and Omoluwabi.*[196] These terms denote persons that are esteemed in their respective societies for their virtuous character. Bolatito Lanre-Abass highlights six core virtues in Yoruba society. These include integrity (*iwa*), justice (*iwa eto*), trust (*igbagbo*), accountability (*akoyawo*), sensitivity (*iyara ni imo*), and service (*ise iranse*). [197] The importance of cultivating such virtues is caught up in the Yoruba proverb, "The adornment of a smile is white teeth; the adornment of a person is good character."[198] Such proverbs are illustrative: they succinctly encapsulate the rooted cultural wisdom about the importance of virtue. As noted above, Africa societies emphasize the individual's responsibility to the community and vice versa; the Yoruba are no different. The good or virtuous

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196. Bewaji, 399.

197. Bolatito Lanre-Abass, "The Crisis of Leadership in Nigeria and the Imperative of a Virtue Ethics," *Philosophia Africana* 11, no. 2 (2008), 132.

198. Oyekan Owomoyela, *Yoruba Proverbs* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 268.

community member values and speaks highly of her town. "Whoever says the town is not pleasant should pack his or her luggage and head for the bush."[199] Indeed, numerous proverbs recommend that loyal community members should be recognized and rewarded for their faithfulness to community.

The Akan people of Western Africa echo similar sentiments. "When virtue founds a town, the town thrives and abides." The Akan link the success of a town to its character—or rather, the character of its people. This reiterates the social nature of African moral thought and central place of character. Indeed, individual happiness is only achieved when one is in right standing with his fellows: "The well-being of man depends on his fellow man."[200] Among the several virtues valued by the Akan are goodwill, sympathy, compassion, and altruism. But this raises another question: How are the virtues acquired or learned?

Personhood and the Acquisition of Virtuous Character

Becoming virtuous is an ongoing process social education in which persons continually evolve. In fact, the relationship between character and education is the basis for understanding personhood in African thought. Ifeanyi Menkiti explains:

> The various societies found in traditional Africa routinely accept this fact that personhood is the sort of thing which has to be attained, and is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's stations. It is the carrying out of these obligations that transforms one

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199. Ibid., 314.

200. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* s.v. "African Ethics," (by Kwame Gyekye), http://plato. stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/african-ethics, section 8 (accessed April 1, 2011).

from the it-status of early child-hood, marked by an absence of moral function, into the person-status of later years, marked by a widened maturity of ethical sense—an ethical maturity without which personhood is conceived as eluding one.[201]

According to Menkiti we begin our life-journey with *it-status*—that is, without a secure identity. Over time, however, through responsible participation in the life of the community we obtain *person-status.* D. A. Masolo argues that personhood is actually "attained through an educational process that intensifies at every stage in one's growth and development."[202] He offers the example of message carrying. Children in many African communities are tasked with carrying message from one person to another. While seemingly innocuous, such task are designed to train children "in the virtue of obedience and serve to others while also bring them to the knowledge of close and distant relatives, an obvious attempt to fit children into the larger social system…"[203] As children mature into adolescence and then to adulthood, their social obligations increase (as does their status as persons). Ideally, their character develops in similar proportion. Of course, both good and bad character traits may emerge. One Akan proverb states that "one is not born with a bad head, but one takes it on from the

201. Ifeanyi Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," in *African Philosophy: An Introduction,* ed. Richard A. Wright (Lanham, MD: University Press of American, 1984), 176.

202. D. A. Masolo, "Western and African Communitarianism: A Comparison," in *A Companion to African Philosophy,* ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 491.

203. Ibid., 492.

earth."[204] In short, persons are not born with intrinsic character traits and habits, but obtain them through time, training, and experience.

POINTS OF CONTACT AND DIVERGENCE

It goes without saying that the intellectual traditions discussed are radically different in many ways: their religions, cultural traditions, even their moral practices and laws. Certain Asian cultures, for example, believe it is perfectly ordinary and unproblematic to give monetary gifts to potential clients in order to gain their business. In the United States such practices are illegal. Likewise, the sacrifice of animals is an act of worship for many cultures, but a cause for horror in many European cultures. This highlights the fact that, although two cultures may value similar virtues, the manner in which these virtues shape customs and practices leaves a lot of room for difference.

The Confucian notion of *Ren*—the sum total of virtues leading to compassion— is a crucial component of Confucian ethics. Both Buddhist and African traditions also have place great emphasis on an empathetic stance toward others. Indeed, the stability of African communities hinges on a concern for the wellbeing of other members of the community. Although Aristotle was primarily concerned with individual happiness, he also believed that those who were virtuous would display attitudes of friendliness, generosity, and justice.

Buddhism's emphasis on enlightenment is founded on controlling and

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204. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* s.v. "African Ethics," (by Kwame Gyekye), http://plato. stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/african-ethics, section 3 (accessed April 1, 2011).

modifying one's cognitive life. A similar thrust is evident in Confucianism's emphasis on the importance of education. Recall that Confucius believed a love of knowledge central to the acquisition of virtue. In fact, he believed that one would become vicious without knowledge.[205] This partially explains why both traditions emphasize diligence and hard work with respect to learning. Aristotle also stressed the importance of the cognitive life, believing that our most basic function is reason. Those who reason well embody the virtues. They also experience happiness and Aristotle tells us "happiness, therefore, will be some form of contemplation."[206]

With respect to the virtues of character, Aristotle argued that they are obtained through habituation and practice. This insight is echoed in African moral thought. Children are given multi-layered tasks that develop character, and initiate them into to the larger community. The latter is intended to cultivate a concern for the wellbeing of the community at large. This is a form of habituation, or learning by practice and repetition, and a feature that African societies share with the other traditions discussed. The rigorous memory training undergone by Buddhist monks, for example, teaches diligence, conscientiousness and carefulness (recall, they must inflect perfectly). Furthermore, Confucians, Buddhists, and Aristotelians share a regard for rules and/or precepts. These do not replace the cultivation of virtue. Rather, they provide a

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205. Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation*, trans. Robert Eno (2010), bk. 14, chap. 42, http://www.iub.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_(Eno-2010).pdf (accessed April 15, 2011).

206. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 198.

framework that enables persons to mature into virtue.

A devotion to community is a central feature of many African societies. Indeed, one's personhood hinges on maturing into a responsible (virtuous) adult. For the Yoruba this involves cultivating integrity, justice, trustworthiness, accountability, sensitivity, and service. These community-directed virtues are echoed in each of the traditions considered. This is evident in Confucian idea of *ren*—of becoming "near to humanity."[207] The person who has *ren* has a deep concern for other members of the community. Buddhists also practice community-directed virtues. For example, the custom of giving is an ancient practice intended bring the negative craving for personal possessions under control, but it is also practiced for the sake of the wellbeing and unity of the community.[208] Finally, in a passage on the virtue of friendship, Aristotle states clearly that a concern for community is tied a person's honor: "The person who contributes nothing to the community is not honored, since what is common is given to the person who benefits the community, and honor is something common."[209]

Clearly positive accounts of virtue a present in each of the traditions considered. In this respect, the concept of virtue putatively transcends cultural "borders" and religious traditions. But this does not diminish the fact that cultures also

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207. Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation*, trans. Robert Eno (2010), bk. 1, chap. 14, http://www.iub.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_(Eno-2010).pdf (accessed April 15, 2011).

208. Carl Olson, *The Different Paths of Buddhism: A Narrative-Historical Introduction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 104.

209. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 163.

differ in terms of the virtues. Martin and Seligman conducted a survey of 15,000

persons from numerous distinct cultural contexts, and undertook a large-scale

historical survey of ancient traditions to determine how virtues function in multiple

contexts. They found that, despite these variations, six core virtues were present in

every cultural context.

> When data collection was complete, analysis involved condensing each
> list by locating thematically similar virtues and classifying them under
> an obviously emerging core virtue. By that term, we mean an abstract
> ideal encompassing a number of other, more specific virtues that
> reliably converge to the recognizable higher-order category.[210]

These higher-order categories included: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice,

temperance, and transcendence. Twenty-four additional and more specific virtues were

then categorized under each of these headings. Here there was a greater degree of

variety between cultures. It is also important to note that these higher-order virtues did

not share a one-to-one relationship across cultures. Martin and Seligman explain:

> Furthermore, to say that certain virtues—*across traditions*—converge
> onto a core virtue likewise does not mean that we argue for a one-to-one
> mapping of a virtue across cultures. Certainly an abstraction such as
> justice will mean slightly different things—and will be valued for
> different reasons—from one culture to another. Again what we suggest
> is coherent resemblance: The higher order meaning behind a particular
> core virtue will line up better with its cross-cultural counterpart than it
> will with any other core virtue.[211]

Thus the core virtues are not *universal* in the sense that they are understood exactly the

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210. Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 35.

211. Ibid., 35.

same or are appreciated for the same reasons. Rather, they bear a family resemblance to on another and function in generally the same way across cultures. In sum, persons from different cultures value the same general character traits. Even if greater emphasis is placed on a particular virtue in one culture, it does not stand to reason that this nullifies virtue as a useful concept. It simply means that more work needs to be done to improve cross-cultural understanding.

This brings us back to Sharon Todd's observations about the "struggle for intelligibility." Recall, she argues that the concept of humanity, as articulated in most accounts of cosmopolitanism, is one-side and eliminates the possibility of mutual "exchange."[212] As such, those whose experiences do not match the majority are marginalized and effectively silenced. I believe that virtue—or more precisely— virtuous communication might aid in ameliorating this issue. David Carr has pointed out that the strength of virtue ethics (and VE) is that the language it employs cuts across cultural divides:

> To be sure, we can see that people from different parts of the world have very different—even contradictorily opposed—moral beliefs, but we are nevertheless able to recognize certain cross-cultural criteria of moral attitude and conduct. The Moslem [sic] shopkeeper down the road has different beliefs from me, but I am well able to appreciate his honesty, integrity, courage and industry; on the other hand, I may have no trouble recognizing the racist bigots who persecute him—albeit in the name of my own culture—for the liars and cowards that they are. It is also clearly important that some such cross-cultural criteria of moral value are recognizable if there is to be the possibility of holding some cultures to moral account precisely for their injustice, mendacity, intemperateness or cruelty. From this viewpoint, it seems a mistake to

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212. Sharon Todd, *Toward an Imperfect Education*, 30.

index virtues to rival moral traditions in the manner of some recent neo-idealist moral and social theories—for the language of virtue is arguably the cross-cultural ethical currency of humankind.[213]

The evidence presented thus far suggests that Carr is correct; talk of courage, honesty, and justice are not foreign concepts to those of diverse backgrounds. Carr does not mention, however, that the cross-cultural "language of virtue" is predicated on a *disposition* and *willingness* to communicate. Likewise, Todd's "struggle for intelligibility" depends upon an inclination and willing to strive for deeper cultural exchanges. I suggest, then, that certain character traits are crucial if cultural exchange and understanding is to be achieved. An individual and society should be open-minded and epistemically humble. An open-minded person or society is receptive to other ideas and customs; it values and thus strives to understand others. It is also a person or society that displays epistemic humility—an acknowledgement that what we *know* and *understand* about other people groups is potentially wrong-headed, limited, or misguided. It does not arrogantly cling to its own final and fixed understanding of others. When Todd speaks of a society "forever dissatisfied with itself, forever restless in its search for meaning…" she is, I contend, speaking of an open-minded and epistemically humble society.[214]

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213. David Carr, "Character and Moral Choice in the Cultivation of Virtue," *Philosophy* 78, no. 304 (2003): 231.

214. Sharon Todd, "Universality and the Daunting Task of Cultural Translation," 22.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: CONCERNING THE APPLICATION OF VIRTUE

EPISTEMOLOGY TO THEORY AND PRACTICE OF EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter II, I advanced a "wide" regulative virtue epistemology (RVE)—the view that the intellectual virtues are of central importance in the acquisition of a broad array of epistemic goods: knowledge, understanding, and acquaintance among them. In the following chapter, I considered how knowledge has been understood in educational theory. I demonstrated that education is rife with diverse theories of knowledge, and that many of these are at least partially compatible with a virtue perspective. I then considered the concept of virtue itself, how it functions in multiple cultural contexts. The intention here was to allay important worries about the applicability of virtue in diverse educational settings and to illustrate that virtue provides a cross-cultural language.

Herein, I argue that an RVE provides important insight into the theory and practice of education. To this end, I focus on a fundamental issue in education: the *epistemic* purposes of education. I maintain that the present *knowledge* and *skill* focused approach in education is overly narrow. Jonathan Kvanvig makes similar remarks about the discipline of epistemology,

> Epistemology is often taken to be the theory of knowledge, but that conception is too narrow. At the most general level of characterization, epistemology is the study of certain aspects of our cognitive endeavors.

> In particular, it aims to investigate successful cognition. Within its purview, then, are various kinds of cognizing, including processes such as thinking, inquiring, and reasoning; events such as changes in one's world view or the adoption of a different perspective on things; and states such as beliefs, assumptions, presuppositions, tents, working hypotheses and the like. Also within its purview is the variety of cognitive successes, including true beliefs and opinions, viewpoints that make sense of the course of experience, tents that are empirically adequate, knowledge, understanding, theoretical wisdom, rational presuppositions, justified assumptions, working hypotheses likely to be true, responsible inquiry, and the like.[215]

The cognitive successes Kvanvig describes are epistemic goals; they are states that persons strive to obtain. As such, they are sometimes called *epistemic goods*. In what follows, I introduce two additional epistemic goals of education that are worthy of consideration—acquaintance and understanding. These were selected because of their importance for education.[216] Moreover, I suggest that understanding ought to stand as chief among these because it provides a more inclusive and comprehensive account of the aims of cognizing—one that entails these other epistemic goods.

I consider this matter in light of recent work on *value* in epistemology. This discourse on value focuses (in part) on answering the following question: Why is knowledge more valuable than true belief? I suggest that a slight alteration to this question suggests new ways of thinking about epistemology and education. This discussion aims to show how understanding—the chief epistemic good—entails other

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215. Jonathan Kvanvig, "Truth is Not the Primary Epistemic Goal," in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, eds. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 286.

216. Their "importance" for education is derived from my own broad assessment of educational theory. Knowledge, of course, is routinely discussed. Acquaintance, as the product of experience, is also given considerable attention, e.g., place-based and project-based learning.

epistemic goods and is shaped by the intellectual virtues. I then consider how RVE handles the social dimensions of education through consideration of *communication*. I maintain that virtuous communication is critical for the development of understanding. And, finally, I consider two proposals for teaching intellectual virtue, highlighting some of the challenges of teaching these virtues in the current educational landscape. I conclude with a speculative discussion of potential areas for future research in RVE.

THE EPISTEMIC PURPOSES OF EDUCATION

Educators of all stripes have attempted clarify the purpose of education. For some, education is a means of political and social emancipation.[217] Others view education in instrumental terms as a form of cultural preservation or a route to creating good citizens.[218] And still others understand education as a means of promoting human flourishing and wellbeing, or an ethic of care.[219] These competing visions of education will sometimes conflict and sometimes abet each other. In this section, I consider the purpose of education from a slightly different perspective: What are the *epistemic* purposes of education? In other words, what intellectual outcomes should educators strive for with their students? Roberts and Woods identify three "large" epistemic

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217. Peter McLaren, "Revolutionary Critical Pedagogy," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 6, no. 2 (2010).

218. William Bennett, *The De-valuing of America: The Fight for our Culture and our Children*, (New York: Touchstone, 1992); Frederick C. Risinger, "Citizenship Education: 'The' Goal of Education" *Social Education* 73, no. 7 (2009).

219. Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, (New York: Penguin, 1992); Nel Noddings, *Caring, a Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

goods: knowledge, acquaintance, and understanding.[220] Once more, epistemic goods are positive outcomes of cognizing—outcomes that are regarded as beneficial to a person's intellectual life. In this section, I provide a brief analysis of the familiar concept knowledge, and a more extensive treatment of acquaintance and understanding.

Knowledge

Propositional knowledge is an important epistemic good—not only for education but also for life. We know all sorts of important things about traffic rules, safety procedures, exercise, and nutrition. Knowledge of this sort is the basis for a safe and functional life. In schools students acquire a body of knowledge deemed important for their future success. In Chapter II, I discussed the traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief. Education policy today is primarily focused on the dissemination of just this sort of knowledge. One need look no further than the current implementation of standards based curricula for evidence.[221] Here the emphasis is on imparting propositional knowledge—testable facts—that will indicate learning has taken place.[222] A proposition is a declarative sentence that is either true or false. Students are taught, for example, that George Washington was the first president of the United States. This statement is either true or false; in cannot be both true and false.

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220. Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 34.

221. David Hursh, "Assessing No Child Left Behind and the Rise of Neoliberal Education Policies," *American Educational Research Journal* 44, no. 3 (2007): 494-496.

222. *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Public Law 107-110, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 1425 (2002).

When these facts are placed in relationship to other related facts, one is said to have acquired a body of knowledge. While I hold that propositional knowledge is essential to education, I maintain that possessing a body of knowledge is not as important as generating understanding with respect to those facts. Regardless, the important point is that formal schooling traditionally emphasizes the acquisition of propositional knowledge. However, as I will show in this chapter, this emphasis is too narrow.

Acquaintance

Our experiential encounters with the world around us leave important marks on intellectual lives. Acquaintance is an epistemic good achieved through experience. Roberts and Wood describe it as follows:

> When we say that someone is acquainted with something, we do not mean that she is currently in immediate cognitive contact with it. We mean that she *has had* such contact and carries within her, via memory, aptitudes of recognition, belief formation, and understanding that are consequent on that earlier contact. This is the kind of cognitive advantage that we ascribe to someone by saying that she has had 'a lot of experience'—with, say, deep-sea fishing or the financial markets.[223]

Acquaintance is especially important in the context of education. For example, in recent years IQ tests have come under scrutiny because they are claimed to be culturally biased in favor of White middle-class and upper-class children. They fail to take into account the extent to which experience shapes a person's understanding of the world. Thus, students whose experiences do not fit the *White experience* are at a

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223. Ibid., 51

disadvantage.[224] This is an unfortunate example of how misunderstanding the role of acquaintance in education can sustain injustice. It also highlights the importance of experience.

There is little doubt that most (if not all) persons derive pleasure from certain kinds of experience. Seasoned travelers are quite committed to the life-enriching benefits of globetrotting. These exhortations often include such language as, "words cannot describe" and "you had to be there." Aesthetes will, as their panegyrics illustrate, eloquently describe their encounters with particular works of art, while eschewing any notion that their praise is adequately descriptive. Even in infancy, children express a desire for sensory input. They put objects in their mouths, swivel their little heads to follow a movement or sound, and so forth. In adulthood, such first-hand experiences enrich and deepen understanding, add color and three-dimensionality to knowledge. For this reason, we are apt to seek acquaintance with the world around us, but the value of these acquaintances does not necessarily derive from their belief-producing ability. I may form a belief about the little bird outside my window, but the rich perceptual encounter—the backdrop of a gray sky, the sound of the wind, the stirring of the bird's feathers, its song—is valuable (I believe) for its own sake.[225] Likewise, one may be able to give a highly detailed description of the Hagia Sophia, but this hardly replaces physically standing beneath its enormous golden dome, taking

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224. For further discussion of this problem, see Asa G. Hilliard, "Standardization and Cultural Bias Impediments to the Scientific Study and Validation of 'Intelligence,'" *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 12, no. 2 (1979).

225. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 51.

in its sights, sounds, and smells. Neither do news reports replace first-hand encounter with the grizzly horrors of wars. Acquaintance furnishes the mind with additional points of connection and adds color and three-dimensionality.

Acquaintance is different from propositional knowledge in that involves some sort of first-hand encounter. For example, when I claim to know Mr. Obama—and I have never met him personally—I am effectively saying that I know things about him. I know that he is the president of the United States, that he was born in Hawaii (poor example, perhaps), and that his mother wrote a dissertation. These are facts or propositions about Obama. If, on the other hand, the president and I have a history of interacting with one other—if we are *acquainted*—the claim that I know Mr. Obama takes on richer meaning. I still may know many facts about him, but I have also had many experiences with him. Roberts and Wood point out that the French have two distinct words for the verb, *to know*. "Here we are reminded of the distinction in French between *savoir* and *connaitre*. To *connaitre* something is to have personal, direct experience of it in some way; the word is particularly used of knowing people, and the person who *connait* another does not just know about him or her (have lots of warranted beliefs about him), but knows him, usually by having met and interacted with him."[226] This form of knowing describes first-hand experience—an intimate encounter with some person, place, thing, or idea. In short, it describe what I have been calling, acquaintance.

Understanding

Understanding is the final and chief epistemic good. Understanding is achieved

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226. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 34.

through an active process of connection making. Here the focus is on merging together various pieces of knowledge, acquaintances, and other understandings into a comprehensible portrait of reality.[227] In the following section, I develop the concept of understanding, and describe how it encompasses both knowledge and acquaintance.[228]

In recent years, epistemologists have begun to explore what is being called the "value-turn" in epistemology.[229] A central issue in these explorations concerns the question: "Why is knowledge more valuable than true belief?" Plato first drew attention to this issue in Meno, wherein Socrates asks Meno if a man who has been to the town of Larisa would make a good guide. Meno, of course, answers affirmatively. He then asks Meno if a man who had a true belief (having never been there) about the way to Larisa would also make a good guide. Again, Meno agrees that he would. Socrates then says, "Then correct opinion is no less useful than knowledge."[230] True belief, in this case, would seem just as useful as knowledge, but this does not explain why knowledge is more valuable. He goes on to argue that what makes knowledge

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227. Constructivists say very similar things about the construction of knowledge. I note a little later that this connection deserves further attention.

228. Recall that understanding is not a new concept in education. Pinar and others have called for a deepening and widening of theoretical consideration. While I agree with their line of reasoning and the sentiment behind it, the form of understanding discussed in this chapter is distinct yet commensurate with their formulation. This will be clear in the following passages. For a more detailed account of their claims, see William Pinar and other, *Understanding Curriculum: An Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Curriculum Discourses* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002).

229. For an extended discussion of this issue, see Duncan Pritchard, "Recent Work on Epistemic Value," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2007).

230. Plato, *The Meno of Plato*, trans. Johann Georg Baiter (London: Simpkin, Marshal, & Co., 1880), 57.

more valuable than true belief is that it is anchored by some cause, whereas true belief is unstable.[231] Its value is derived from its constancy.

Not satisfied with Socrates response, epistemologists have rallied to their respective theories to show that they can offer a substantive response to this question.[232] I do not intend to address all the ways they have done this. Rather, I want to draw attention to a particular interpretation of the Meno passage. Jonathan Kvanvig has claimed that Socrates might be asking a slightly different question: Is true belief as valuable as *understanding*? [233]According to Kvanvig, shifting focus from knowledge to understanding has a number of advantages—a potential solution to the Meno problem among them. His central point, however, is that understanding is valuable to persons in a way that knowledge is not.[234] In the following, I offer an explication of the concept of understanding—a concept I contend should be the chief epistemic aim of education. I demonstrate that a broader emphasis on understanding in education (rather than knowledge and/or skill) has advantages. When combined with an RVE, it presents an alternative paradigm for thinking about educational matters.

Understanding, in its common usages has various meanings and functions. For example, we sometimes specify that we understand as way of hedging—as in, "I

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231. Ibid., 58.

232. For further discussion of this issue, see Duncan Pritchard, "Recent Work on Epistemic Value," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2007).

233. Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 185.

234. Ibid., 204.

understand you feel angry with me." The intention here might be to demur, to effectively say: "Hold on! I know your angry but…" We also say such things when we feel uncertain about our interlocutors' true feelings and desire clarification.[235] These usages do not describe the sort of understanding in question here. Rather, we will consider understanding as a term indicating a "cognitive success" in which a person moves from mystification to clarity.[236] Understanding of this sort is a process wherein a person succeeds in making connections. Representative usages would include: "I understand the concept of monarchy," or "I understand the AIDS epidemic in South Africa." These declarations indicate that one has grasped connection between various beliefs, experiences, understandings, and so forth. Thus, when a person moves from confusion or ignorance to understanding, he or she has succeeded in fitting various epistemic goods together.

Kvanvig distinguishes between two varieties of understanding: one can have a factive understanding or a non-factive understanding.[237] When Ava claims to (factively) understand that Pluto is no longer counted a planet, her understanding takes on a propositional character, and is either true or false. In such cases, however, the distinction between "understanding that..." and "knowing that..." is difficult to discern. It would be just as comprehensible for her to claim to *know that* Pluto is no longer counted a planet. Thus, the unit of analysis in factive understanding is a single true

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235. Ibid., 190.

236. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 34.

237. Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge*, 190-191.

belief; this is largely indistinct from knowledge. Non-factive understanding is different. Non-factive understanding draws attention to the interrelationship between beliefs (and other epistemic goods) and the comprehensive picture that emerges—what Kvanvig calls an "informational chunk."[238] If Ava claims to non-factively understand, this suggests she has considered her larger body of beliefs about the matter and has made relevant connections. We can extend this definition of understanding to include other epistemic goods too. Ava may have seen an episode of NOVA or read an article in Popular Science (previous knowledge), or she may have built a model of the solar system in an earlier grade (acquaintance). These other goods contribute to and enrich her understanding. When her teacher asks her elaborate she will be able to place her knowledge of Pluto within a larger context. Only non-factive understanding will be consider hereafter.

Non-factive understanding (just "understanding," hereafter) has two distinctive qualities. First, understanding requires *connection making*—the ability to link various relevant beliefs, other understandings, and acquaintances together.[239] Suppose Ruby, an 11th grade student, has studied the conditions that led to the First World War. When tested, she may perform quite well on the multiple-choice section; her propositional knowledge is very good. Such knowledge does not necessarily stipulate that she understands the causes of the First World War, although it *might* be a good indicator of understanding. Suppose Ruby is then given an essay question asking her to describe

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238. Ibid., 192.

239. Ibid., 193.

how these causes relate to one another. Her success will depend upon her ability to tie these facts together coherently and to articulate explanatory relationships. For example, she may recall a conversation with her grandfather, a film or image, a passage from a textbook, or her teacher's lecture. *Her* understanding emerges when she *connects* these disparate components together.

Second, while Ruby may understand the causes of the First World War, it is also likely that her teacher's understanding surpasses her own. Likewise, a historian of the First World War would undoubtedly understand the subject better than Ruby or her teacher. The point is simply that understanding is achieved by degrees. Unlike knowledge (justified true belief) understanding can accommodate a degree of false belief—as long as that belief falls along the periphery and is not central.[240] This is evident in Ruby's case. Her essay might have been well reasoned and largely correct, but it might have included some minor false assertions. One or two erroneous claims, however, do not eliminate the possibility that she understands. Piaget's notion of assimilation and accommodation lend support to this claim. As noted in Chapter III, Piaget argued that persons are capable and indeed need to assimilate new idea into their cognitive schema.[241] Let us now consider how the other epistemic goods, knowledge and acquaintance, fall within the purview of understanding.

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240. Ibid., 196.

241. William E. Doll, "Piagetian Thought," in *Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies, Vol. 2,* ed. Craig Kridel (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications), 653.

Understanding as Connection Making

Earlier I suggested that understanding is achieved through a connection making process. Ruby's case (above) is a good example. This is what Kvanvig has in mind when he writes, "For understanding requires, in its very nature, the grasping of explanatory connections between items of information…"[242] Here, however, he is focused on the process of connecting facts (knowledge) together. I believe we can extend his definition to include other epistemic goods, which will generate an even richer account of understanding.

Thus far I have considered how knowledge and acquaintance are important epistemic goods. There are numerous other potential epistemic goods—things like wisdom, wellbeing, and truth.[243] Understanding is achieved when we link these epistemic goods together. But this is only a partial view. My understanding (or lack thereof) consists of many other factors: I have untested opinions, justified and unwarranted assumptions, biases and prejudices, hypotheses, fears and hopes, likes and dislikes, and so forth. Some of these might qualify as epistemic good in their own right; others we might think detrimental to understanding—even vicious (vice). Each, however, has a bearing on my pursuit of understanding. Thus, connection making is complex process that entails reckoning with various features of cognition. When successful, "Such understanding gives one a vantage point from which to assess

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242. Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193.

243. With the "widening" of epistemology numerous epistemic goods have been proposed. For a fuller treatment, see Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 185.

evidence, organize and make use of new information, and thus have a certain ownership of the contents of one's mind."[244] Let us consider an example of complex connection making.

Several weeks ago, I was driving to the grocery store when a large moving truck passed me. Plastered on the sides and back of the truck, were several extremely graphic and enormous photos of aborted fetuses. One photo showed a tiny severed hand laying on a U.S. coin. I was shocked and revolted and, for a split-second, did not even understand what I was seeing. The otherness of these images shocked my senses; I was forced to grapple with the moral implications of posting such images, as well as my own position on the abortion issue. I also recall thinking about the first amendment and the possibility that children would see these images. In short, to understand this experience, I had to reckon with a host of (true and likely false as well) interrelated beliefs, experiences with babies, religious convictions, and so on. I did not have a tidy category for this encounter. Of course, I think I understand something about this person's motives. I have talked with many ardent opponents of abortion issue, and have noted similar themes in their arguments. I also have a degree of knowledge about the abortion issue, having read about and considered the issue for many years. Likewise, as a parent, I am familiar with the desire to protect children from unseemly images, and am intimately acquainted with babies. I have drawn connections between these various factors and others, but my understanding of this experience is limited by its multifaceted complexity. I could, however, improve my understanding by drawing

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244. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 264.

new connections. This might entail working for a time at an abortion clinic or crisis pregnancy center, reading books about the abortion issue, talking with my wife, my friends, or simply thinking upon it some more. The main point is that understanding involves connection making, comes in degrees, and can be enriched with further study.

Thus far I have argued that understanding ought to be the chief epistemic aim of education. In this section, I argue that the intellectual virtues shape (regulate or guide) our understandings, and demonstrate that obtaining understanding depends in part upon the possession of virtuous intellectual character traits. I highlight three intellectual virtues—love of knowledge, intellectual honesty and courage, and conscientiousness—and show how each contributes to and motivates understanding.

LOVE OF KNOWLEDGE

In Chapter IV, I described how Confucius placed the love of learning at the center of his ethics, claiming that it is requisite for the possession of other virtues.[245] He may be overstating his case; nevertheless, others in the history of philosophy have made similar claims. Aristotle, for example, open his *Metaphysics* with the claim that,

> All men by nature desire to know. 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 seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this,

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245. Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation*, trans. Robert Eno (2010), bk. 14, chap. 42, http://www.iub.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_(Eno-2010).pdf (accessed April 15, 2011).

> most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences among things.[246]

According to Aristotle, we value our perceptual faculties because they make the world around us accessible; they make knowledge possible. Love of knowledge involves more than a desire for new facts and information; it also involves a love of experience.

My daughter loves dinosaurs. She draws pictures of them, reads books and watches documentaries; she makes up stories and pretends to be a dinosaur. The possible causes of dinosaur extinction drive her imagination wild. Ava is simply fascinated by dinosaurs, and few things bring her more joy than learning about them. But how does this love of knowledge regulate her understanding? First, she wants *true* beliefs about dinosaurs and this shapes the sorts of questions that matter to her. Such questions usually begin with, "Is it true that…" or "Do you think that..." and "Why would...?" Even at seven years old, she weighs and measures our responses, and will object to or seek clarification for answers that fail to satisfy her understanding. Likewise, she enjoys going to natural history museums and looking at dinosaur exhibits. The sheer size of these creatures, their bones, fossilized fragments of skin— these sights color her imagination. All of these details enrich her understanding of dinosaurs. We see, too, the value of cultivating our students' interests, and providing them with substantial first-hand educational experiences.

While Ava's desire to understand dinosaurs is certainly childlike, it is not dissimilar from the mature love of knowledge illustrated by adults. Scholarly work is a

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246. Aristotle, *Metaphysics I*, trans. W. D. Ross, in *Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 689.

good example. Scientists strive to understand the external world and prize accuracy; psychologists are deeply concerned with the workings of the psyche and believe such insights are valuable; economists are fascinated by inter-workings of monetary systems. Gaining new or improved understanding is a deeply satisfying feeling and fuels further pursuit. It provides motivation to seek out new knowledge, acquaintance, and understanding.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY AND COURAGE

Intellectual honesty and courage are often counted among the intellectual virtues. The virtue of honesty is a disposition to tell the truth—both as honest self-appraisal and to others. It is a trait that is particularly valued in academic contexts. Most course syllabi at universities contain a passage on plagiarism and academic integrity. Violation of these policies is considered a grave academic offence and is generally punished quite severely. Intellectual honesty also indicates a willingness to be fully disclosed to oneself. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes an *akratic* (weak willed) gambler who sincerely commits to quitting his ruinous habit.[247] A day comes, however, when the opportunity to gamble presents. His earlier commitment has faded and he gives into temptation. This is a common scenario. It is easy to imagine, though, that if he had been fully honest with himself from the beginning, he would have acknowledged that his commitment was only halfhearted. This illustrates the intellectual virtue of honesty, and it leads us to the second virtue—intellectual courage.

247. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology* (New York: Kensington Publishing, 1956), 32-33.

Self-evaluation of the sort neglected by the gambler is not easy. It takes courage to face our weaknesses and oftentimes even more courage to do something about them. Intellectual courage describes a disposition to face our fears, to take intellectual risks, to revise deeply held beliefs, and the like. We find an interesting example of both virtues in the person and pedagogy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. [248]

Former students, Douglas Gasking and A. C. Jackson, offer an interesting assessment of Ludwig Wittgenstein's pedagogical approach. They note that he was an unpredictable and sometimes awkward teacher. "At times Wittgenstein would break off, saying 'Just a minute, let me think!' and would sit for minutes on end, crouched forward on the edge of a chair, staring down at his upturned palm. Or he would exclaim with vehement sincerity: 'This is as difficult as hell!'"[249] This is not, perhaps, what one would expect from one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century. Rather, we might expect controlled, polished, and sophisticated lectures and perfectly executed answers. But we can view Wittgenstein's unpredictability and willingness to stretch out long silences during a class another way: it models a manner of thinking about difficult problems; it illustrates his willingness to *honestly* acknowledge his lack of clarity. Burbules points out the Wittgenstein asks in the order of 800 questions in the *Philosophical Investigations*, answers about 100 of them, and

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248. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) is a famous Austrian philosopher.

249. Douglas Gasking and A. Cameron Jackson, "Wittgenstein as a Teacher," in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Man and his Philosophy*, ed. K. T. Fann (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Harvester Press, 1967), 52.

rejects 70 of these answers.[250] It also takes a measure of intellectual *courage* to proclaim ignorance.

Wittgenstein also demonstrates how these virtues (and other, of course) regulate understanding. In matters of uncertainty, those questions that resist easy explanation, Wittgenstein models a willingness to suspend judgment. In virtue-terms, he models intellectual caution and courage. Likewise, his radical philosophical shift in his latter career, demonstrates open-mindedness to new interpretations and a love of learning and knowledge.[251] Thus, his philosophical quest for a deeper grasp language and logic—a deeper understanding—was shaped and guided by these deep character traits. Although it is mere speculation, it seems unlikely that Wittgenstein the intellectual coward and liar could or would have written the *Tractatus* or *Philosophical Investigations.*[252] Young people face similar challenges that require intellectual courage and honesty. Consider the matter of religious belief.

Students, especially those in high school and college, will sometimes enter periods of religious conflict. They may have been raised in a very religious home, and these feeling of uncertainty can produce a great deal of stress. Intellectual honesty demands that they attend to this dilemma, but it does not necessitate a particular

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250. Burbules, "Tacit Teaching," 668.

251. For further discussion on this shift, see *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* s.v. "Ludwig Wittgenstein," (by Anat Biletzki), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/Wittgenstein (accessed June 1, 2011).

252. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (New York: Humanities Press, 1961); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations (PI)*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953).

response—that is, it does not demand that they regard faith as irrational *or* warranted. Rather, it merely disposes them to confront the issue squarely. In such cases, no easy formula will dictate how they should respond; they must give due consideration to their emotional state, the consequences of choosing one way or the other, and the relative importance of arriving at a conclusion. Often this will result in withhold judgment until they have had time to reflect further. The main point is that these virtues provide guidance and motivation for the pursuit of understanding.

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

Understanding is complex and requires attention and willingness to sort through untested assumptions, motives, and ethical commitments and formative experiences. When, for example, we encounter a new idea or situation, especially one that challenges our presuppositions, (like Wittgenstein) we ought to carefully assess the matter. Sometimes this might involve collecting further evidence and (if necessary) revising our beliefs or questioning our motives. A number of positive character traits encourage this activity. As noted, it sometimes takes courage and honesty to subject our beliefs and motives to critique. There is, however, a less obvious but equally important intellectual virtue that motivates this evaluative activity. In short, we ought to be *conscientious* with respect to our understanding. "Conscientiousness is an aptitude for getting certain actions performed, not under conditions of fear, as in the case of courage, but under conditions of insufficient intrinsic motivation."[253] When we lack motivation (something most teachers are familiar with) conscientiousness reminds

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253. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 79.

us of our epistemic responsibilities. In this section, I consider several ways that the virtue of conscientiousness regulates understanding.

Many of our assumptions are perfectly reasonable. We assume that putting gas in the car will ensure that we arrive at our destination. We assume that chairs will hold our weight. We assume that (at least some of) our students will come to classes in the morning. These are ordinary and trivial assumptions that we ordinarily take for granted. Of course, it is always possible that we might have car trouble, select a defective chair, or that inclement weather might result in a cancellation of classes. Experience has taught us that these events are anomalous. Thus our epistemic responsibility to conscientiously evaluate our assumptions does not reduce to skepticism. Indeed, it is unlikely that a person could live in constant questioning about everything he or she knows. Even if it were possible, such an existence would likely be intolerably unbearable. Nevertheless, some of our assumptions do require conscientious evaluation. In the United States, for example, the population is nearly split down the middle politically. Many of these persons have been initiated into one political camp or the other, simply by virtue of growing up in a particular region. Thus, they may have inherited a set of political assumptions through parents. With the economy in shambles and two protracted wars, an argument might be made that serious reflection is needed if we are to "survive" these crises. Unfortunately, many of these same persons are politically apathetic. Fear of the future consequences is not sufficiently motivating, nor is a desire for accurate beliefs the present state-of-affairs. The intellectual virtue of conscientiousness, however, impels us to consider these

issues in spite of our apathy. In other words, when love of knowledge, open-mindedness, and intellectual honesty fail to properly motivate us, conscientiousness reminds us of our epistemic responsibilities.

INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE AND COMMUNICATION

I have argued that understanding is the chief epistemic aim of education. This discussion focused mainly on *individuals* as responsible epistemic agents. However, I also want to consider how the pursuit of understanding applies in the social context of education—what we might call *social understanding*. Both teachers and students, as educational partners, benefit from understanding each other. Communication is at the heart of education and, in large part, hinges on the concept of understanding. Academic content is delivered via spoken and written word, by demonstration, and tacitly. Worldviews are articulated through conversations, through texts, even through gestures, styles of dress, music, the list goes on. At every point in the course of a school day, something or someone is communicating.

Not surprisingly, academic discussions about the role of communication in education are ongoing. Most (not all) discussants in this conversation agree that education is a two-way process of dialog between interlocutors.[254] Patrick Slattery, Karen Krasny, and Michael O'Malley, for example, resist the search for communicative and interpretative certainty. "Hermeneutics, then, must foreground the interpretive process in the dialogic polyphony that actively undermines consensus and

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254. Gert Biesta, "Education/Communication: The Two Faces of Communicative Pedagogy,"
in *Philosophy of Education 1995*, ed. Alven Neiman (Urbana, Ill.: Philosophy of Education Society, 1996), 192.

concretization."[255] Communication becomes a dynamic, ever shifting, process wherein numerous voices are present. On this view, the quest for communicative certainty is given up in favor of the multitude of intersecting voices—voices that are "aesthetically present" to one another. In short, no one *owns* the conversation or has final interpretive authority. What character traits would their dialogical interpreter need to possess in order to be "aesthetical present to the other," to value "liberatory justice" and "ethical reflection?"[256] From a virtue theoretic perspective, this demands openness—a kind of receptivity to other voices and perspectives. And openness entails conscientious listening, respect for other voices, and cautiousness with respect to one's interpretive judgments. It is difficult to see how this interlocutor could be rash, close-minded, quick to judge, and unwilling to question her own views.

We have all experienced this sort of conversational one-sidedness. One party seems bent on controlling the conversation—seems disinterested in the other person's views, wants only for the other party to stop speaking so she can talk. This close-mindedness makes dialog impossible. Indeed, it limits understanding as well. If social understanding is a form of connection making, then it entails an open disposition to listen—a willingness to encounter others and their ideas. Nicolas Burbules speaks of communicative virtues. These virtues include "tolerance, patience, an openness to give and receive criticism, the inclination to admit that one might be mistaken, the desire to

255. Patrick Slattery, Karen A. Krasny, and Michael P. O'Malley, "Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, and the Quest for Answerability: A Dialogic Possibility for Reconceptualizing the Interpretive Process in Curriculum Studies," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 39, no. 5 (2006): 551.

256. Ibid., 549-555.

reinterpret or translate one's own concerns…the self-imposition of restraint in order that others may have a turn to speak, and…the willingness to listen thoughtfully and attentively."[257] Communicative virtues *regulate* discourse and ensure that others are heard. Thus they are directly tied to the process of education and the acquisition of understanding. In this sense, communicative virtues are also intellectual virtues.

Consider the typical classroom. Twenty-five or thirty unique individuals share a small room with the expressed purpose of learning. Each of these persons has a history, like and dislikes, hopes and fears, attitudes toward learning, and so on. One of these persons, the teacher, is tasked with the responsibility of providing fair and accessible learning environment. To meet his students' needs, however, he needs to know something about them. He needs to communicate with them. Max van Manen terms this process a "pedagogical relation" with students. He writes: "To have a sense of pedagogy implies that one is capable of insights into the child's being or character. But more important pedagogy implies distinguishing between what is appropriate or inappropriate, good or bad, right or wrong, suitable or less suitable for children."[258] What van Manen makes clear is that this form of pedagogy depends upon a deep capacity to see and hear students. And not all educators, he claims, have this capacity in the same degree. "A pedagogue is an educator (teacher, counselor, administrator, etc.) who feels addressed by children, who understands children in a caring way, and

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257. Nicholas Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 42.

258. Max van Manen, "Pedagogy, Virtue, and Narrative Identity in Teaching," *Curriculum Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1994): 139.

who has a personal commitment and interest in children's education and their growth toward mature adulthood."[259] To feel addressed by students suggest that one is receptive to the communicative nature of education. The true pedagogue is one who embraces this relational role. Let us contrast two fictional examples.

1. Mr. Jones

He was tired. As students poured in he went to the chalkboard and wrote a short prompt. "Tell about the best day of your life." This was time killer—a way of burning up the clock and shortening another boring lesson. The students settled down to write; they knew better than cross Mr. Jones. His temper was legendary. They wrote for 10 minutes before he called them to a halt. As usual, he selected three students to share. Jimmy, a troubled boy of 17 described a picnic he had with his mother who was now incarcerated. At one point, another student must have made rude comment, because Jimmy shouted a loud "shut up!" Mr. Jones put it down quickly, "Both of you shut up! Let's move on. Katie, share yours." Jimmy objected, "But I wasn't finished!" "You are now," replied Mr. Jones. Katie and then James shared their memories. He looked at the clock; they'd burned 20 minutes. "Only 30 minutes to go," he thought. "Open your books to page 322. We're reading a story called 'Sonny's Blues.'" They read it. The bell rang and they left.

2. Mr. Smith

Mr. Smith smiled and joked with students as they entered the classroom. On the board he'd written a prompt: "Tell me about the best day of your life." As students

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259. Ibid., 139.

settled down to write, Mr. Smith did too. He always participated. After 10 minutes he asked students to finish up. As usual, Mr. Smith began the exercise, describing his elation at the birth of his son. "What about you? Would anybody like to share?" Jimmy raised his hand. This excited Mr. Smith. He'd been trying to reach out to the boy all semester. As Jimmy began his narrative about a picnic with his now-incarcerated mother, Mr. Smith felt his excitement grow. Just then, he saw John lean forward and whisper something in Jimmy's ear. Jimmy's face darkened and he shouted, "shut up!" Before things could escalate, Mr. Smith gave John "the look"—a look that said: "You can do better that." John looked embarrassed and ashamed. He admired his teacher. "Please continue, Jimmy." Mr. Smith knew today would be a good day—they were reading "Sonny's Blues." "Perfect," he thought.

The most obvious difference between these teachers is that Mr. Smith genuinely cares for his students, while Mr. Jones is simply collecting a paycheck. In virtue terms, Smith was open-minded and compassionate, while Jones displayed several vicious qualities. A less noticeable difference occurs with respect to the use of narrative. Jones clearly thinks of the writing prompt as a time waster—a way of avoiding his responsibilities. Smith, however, sees narrative as a pathway to dialogue—to understanding a trouble young man. Max van Manen explains, "A teacher who does not understand the inner life of a child does not know who it is that he or she is teaching."[260] Through narrative—in this case a very personal story—Smith allows himself to be "addressed" by Jimmy. This openness grants Smith access to

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260. Ibid., 139.

Jimmy. It is also notable that he saw a chance to surreptitiously address the day's lesson to Jimmy. Here we see how communicative understanding links up with the epistemic demands of education. By virtue of his openness and receptivity, and his genuine compassion for Jimmy, Mr. Smith understood (in a limited sense) Jimmy's need for emotional validation. Moreover, this need could be further met through intellectual engagement with a classic work of short fiction. The emotional and intellectual bleed into one another.

PROPOSALS, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this section, I discuss two approaches to teaching intellectual virtue that have been proposed by virtue epistemologists. While there is much to recommend these approaches, I suggest that the current educational climate is not receptive to RVE. I consider this problem and suggest areas for future research with respect to teaching intellectual virtues. I then consider two additional areas for future research, and then conclude this dissertation with some summative remarks.

Two Proposals

In her article on teaching the intellectual virtues, Heather Battaly articulates a view, I assume, many teachers would heartily endorse:

> Many of us not only want our students to learn about better ways of thinking, but to become better thinkers. We want our students to become skilled in deductive and inductive reasoning, to become open-minded, conscientious, and intellectually courageous, and to care about truth for

its own sake. In short, we want our students to become intellectually virtuous.[261]

What is the best way to teach intellectual virtue? Two approaches have been recommended: Linda Zagzebski's recent work on exemplarist virtue theory, and Heather Battaly's practical insights on developing and practicing intellectual virtue in the classroom.

Zagzebski proposes a novel virtue theory based on the observation that we learn by imitation. First, though, she points out that moral theories are generally written for philosophers and philosophy students.

> We produce moral theories first for other philosophers, and secondarily for students in philosophy classes. But we think that theoretical discussions can ultimately influence practice. In this essay I compare a variety of moral theories at the most abstract level of theoretical structure. It is pretty obvious that theory at that level does not influence practice, but one of the issues I am interested in is the path from abstract theory to revisions of practice. I suspect that the path goes through disciplines other than philosophy, publications aimed at the general educated public, the arts and the media, and sometimes the law, and most of the time the path withers before ordinary people are affected, but theory can influence practice. I think that it is an advantage if a theory can link up with moral practice in a plausible way, particularly if it can link up with narratives that capture the imaginations of ordinary people.[262]

One way to follow the path from theory to practice, she argues, is to refine our moral principals and character by referencing *exemplars*—persons whose moral and (for our purposes) intellectual practices are exemplary. Because these persons are observable,

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261. Heather Battaly, "Teaching Intellectual Virtues: Applying virtue Epistemology in the Classroom, " *Teaching Philosophy* 29 no. 3 (2006): 191.

262. Linda Zagzebski, "Exemplarist Virtue Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 41, nos. 1-2 (2010): 44.

she thinks this empirically grounds our understanding of the intellectual virtues. For example, if I want to know what intellectual courage looks like, I can examine the life and work of someone who demonstrates that attribute. We should do more than reference these persons, however, we also ought to imitate them. Two insights undergird her argument.

First, notes that admiration is a very powerful emotion that motivates imitation. Thus we should select exemplars "directly through the emotion of admiration."[263] This is especially notable in the case of students. Students have a penchant for imitating figures in popular culture that embody characteristics that they admire. I am reminded of the hot-tempered basketball player, Charles Barkley, and his infamous denial of "role model" status. Many teachers and parents were outraged because they understood how powerful admiration can be.[264] Thus, teachers should find ways to direct their students' attentions to virtuous exemplars. To this end, Zagzebski advocates studying narrative accounts of fictional and non-fictional characters.[265] With a little guidance (showing them what to look for) students can be encouraged to pursue an autobiographical study of some person (real or fictional) they find admirable. This might lead to an essay or presentation in which they elaborate that individual's positive intellectual character traits.

Heather Battaly agrees with Zagzebski that students learn intellectual virtue

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263. Ibid., 41.

264. Jim Litke, "Barkley Finally a Role Model, Though it's in Jail," *USA Today*, March 9, 2009, http://www.usatoday.com/sports/basketball/nba/2009-03-09-1949622696_x.htm (accessed May 15, 2011).

265. Ibid., 44-45.

through imitation, but she makes a further suggestion: that students also learn intellectual virtue through practice. First, she notes that intellectual virtues "require virtuous motivations"—chief among them, a high regard for truth. She thinks instilling a love of truth is the first step.[266] This can be modeled, discussed, illustrated through exemplars; any number of strategies can be employed. The main point is that students develop a respect for the value of well-grounded belief. To this end, she recommends that teachers discuss and illustrate the differences between "intellectual motivations" and "intellectual actions." According to Battaly, "Intellectual actions are (roughly) actions that one performs in acquiring beliefs; and intellectual motivations are (roughly) one's motivations for performing these actions."[267] Sample intellectual motivations include desire for knowledge, desire to believe what is "easy," desire to maintain already held beliefs, and desire to believe what one "hopes" is true. Thus intellectual motivations can be both positive and negative in nature. These motivations are the reasons for our intellectual actions, which include such things as "jumping to conclusions, suspending belief, entertaining objections to one's own view, constructing replies, defending one's view against objections, conceding that another's view is correct" and the like.[268] What is important (and accurate, I think) about this distinction is that most students will have never thought about the connection between their

266. Heather Battaly, "Teaching Intellectual Virtues: Applying Virtue Epistemology in the Classroom," *Teaching Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (2006): 210.

267. Ibid., 211.

268. Ibid., 211.

intellectual motivations and their intellectual activity in school. Moreover, this suggests that intellectual virtues should play a regulative role in the lives of students—that is, they should provide intellectual guidance. Roberts and Wood claim that a regulative understanding of intellectual virtue "clarifies the character of the intellectual life in a way that can actually help people live that life. Conceptual clarification is an important part of education, and the improvement of intellectual character is a kind of education."[269]

Challenges

A concern facing the application of RVE (and the theories just outlined) in education results from the current emphasis on standards-based education. In 2001, congress passed the landmark *No Child Left Behind* act (NCLB).[270] This act mandated that schools be held accountable to state created educational standards. Repeated failure to meet the standards of Adequate Yearly Progress can lead to disciplinary measures, and ultimately the closing of a school. While the impulse behind this act was commendable, to improve the academic performance of all students, the results have been mixed.[271] One criticism that many teachers offer is that NCLB has created a

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269. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues,* 28.

270. *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Public Law 107-110, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 1425 (2002).

271. Craig A. Mertler, "Teachers' Perceptions of the Influence of *No Child Left Behind* on Classroom Practices," *Current Issues in Education* 13, no. 3 (2011): 3, http://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/ cieatasu/ article/view/392/105 (accessed April 15, 2011).

"teach to the test" culture in schools. Deviating from material not targeted in the standards is sometimes thought to be a dangerous luxury.[272]

Teaching the intellectual virtues in this environment is challenging for a couple reasons. First, the ideal educational setting to teach the virtues is likely a liberal arts environment, understood here as an environment that takes a holistic view of the "educated person." This is a setting wherein students are encouraged to participate multiple discourses from multiple intellectual traditions. It is also an environment that takes a wider view of the epistemic aims of education, as noted above. However, in many public schools the current standardized educational model is a lockstep process of gaining very specific knowledge and skills. Student achievement is a measurable, quantifiable phenomenon. Success is quantified. A holistic view of education, one informed by RVE, expands these boundaries: "The education in question is not just 'technical'—a training in specialized skills—but is also a formation in *human* excellence. The trait products of such an education for life are called virtues."[273] Such an education, however, does match up with the present state-of-affairs. This does not preclude the possibility of inculcating the intellectual virtues, but it does represent a challenge. As such, further research might be done to explore how intellectual virtues can be inculcated into the existing educational milieu.

Two related challenges are found in book II of Aristotle's *Ethics.* He writes, "Virtue, then, is of two kinds: that of the intellect and that of character. Intellectual

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272. Ibid., 3-5.

273. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues,* 64.

virtue owes its origin and development mainly to teaching, for which reason its attainment requires experience and time."[274] If he is correct, then the intellectual virtues have place in the curricula. But, Aristotle also notes two necessary requirements for the cultivation of intellectual virtue—experience and time. The problem of experience describes a disruption that results when a student's experiences at home (and elsewhere) are incommensurate with the values she learns at school. Having taught high school English for three years, I can attest to the frustration many teachers feel when parents neglect their children's homework, tests, and so forth. This neglect often results in students' dismissing the importance of completing these tasks. Similarly, most teachers encourage their students to value hard work and diligence; too often parents undermine this virtue though their own laziness. This poses a question for teachers who wish to promote the intellectual virtues: Can a student learn intellectual virtue despite external corrupting influences? Here we encounter the problem of time: It seems unlikely in the case of older students who have not been properly taught beforehand. However, it may be that with sufficient time, beginning perhaps in the first years of school, students could overcome this disparity of experience. After all, students are in school for hours each day; this might be enough time.

Areas for Future Research

In the course of this study, it became increasingly clear that I would only be able to address a small percentage of the issues germane to teaching intellectual virtue. In this

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274. Ibid., 23.

section, I highlight two areas that warrant further scrutiny—areas I believe are particularly important: the application of VE to existing educational theories, and the issue of cultural diversity.

In Chapter II, I highlighted the issue of epistemological diversity in education. We saw that the educational theories can be roughly divided into three categories: anti-realist, critical, and realist epistemologies. I pointed out several connections between VE and these theories along the way, but I believe that further study is warranted. For example, constructivist epistemologies stress the importance of the constructing new knowledge. In doing so, students make meaning from their experiences and learning. How, then, would the intellectual virtue function in the construction of new knowledge and the meaning-making process? In many respects, this process is analogous to the concept of understanding advocated in this dissertation. If I am right about this, then constructivist literature in education might be a tremendous resource for the application of RVE. This will naturally lead to some interesting differences—especially with respect to more radical forms of constructivism. Nevertheless, work might be done to explore the connections between constructivism and VE.

Likewise, Roberts and Wood argue that VE shares some thematic similarities with postmodern and existential thought. For example, they discuss the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida, and Søren Kierkegaard in great detail, highlighting some interesting (and surprising) points of contact.[275] Lorraine Code is another

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275. For further examples, see Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); W. Jay Wood, "On the Uses and Advantages of an Epistemology for Life," in *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought*, ed. Merold Westphal (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

epistemologist whose work draws upon sources not typically associated with traditional Anglo epistemology.[276] This willingness to draw upon non-traditional—even conventionally antagonistic—sources illustrates how the concept of intellectual virtue is implicitly present or latent in theoretical orientations well outside the traditional scope of epistemology.[277] This is (to me) an exciting feature of VE—one that warrants further investigation. Indeed, it suggests that VE and educational theory will find important points of methodological contact. Finally, attention also might be drawn to critical theories—especially their emphasis on justice—as intellectually virtuous modes of thinking. In other words, does a critical intellectual stance and commitment to justice entail certain epistemic virtues?

A second area that warrants further consideration was highlighted in Chapter IV. There I showed that concepts of virtue are present most cultural contexts. However, a more extensive study of *specific* virtues would improve our understanding of VE's application in diverse educational settings. For example, how should we understand the role of open-mindedness across cultures? Likewise, a worthy research project might look at the "*language of virtue*" already present in various epistemological paradigms.[278] Indeed, I believe virtue-based language is intentionally and *unintentionally* used in a

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276. For an excellent example, see Lorraine Code, *Epistemic Responsibility* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987).

277. By antagonistic, I mean to say sources and thinkers whose work is generally critical of "analytic" approaches to philosophy. I believe that virtue-based approaches to knowledge have potential to fruitfully engage with such works and ideas.

278. This is a term used by David Carr in his argument for the virtues as means of communication. For further information, see David Carr, "Character and Moral Choice in the Cultivation of Virtue," *Philosophy* 78, no. 304 (2003): 231.

variety of theoretical contexts.[279] If correct, how should we understand this and what are the implications? Finally, a curriculum based on the intellectual virtues would have to make specific content choices, e.g., what texts, experiences, films, and so forth best respect this diversity? Thus further work could be done to develop these kinds of curricula.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have developed a regulative virtue epistemology for the theory and practice of education. I deemed this project a worthy undertaking for several reasons. First, virtue epistemology has risen to prominence in philosophy but has been largely neglected in education. Given education's tight connection to issues related to epistemology (e.g., belief formation, knowledge, rationality, truth, and so forth), it seemed to me that further study was merited. Second, whereas traditional epistemology is highly abstract and difficult to apply to education, VE has direct application to education through its analysis of persons. And, third, "wide" VE—the sort advocated herein—broadens its consideration to include other epistemic goals, things like acquaintance and understanding. I believe this is particularly important given the knowledge-and-skills approach that seems to dominate contemporary educational policy.

The RVE discussed in this chapter, however, also provides a more holistic model for thinking knowledge and other epistemic goods. Recall that traditional epistemology, and some forms of "narrow" VE primarily focus on knowledge as the central concept in epistemology. Analogously, educational policy has limited its attentions to the

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279. Here scholars of Alfred N. Whitehead's work might find fruitful points of contact. For example, see Alfred N. Whitehead, *Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: The Free Press, 1967)

acquisition of knowledge and skill, e.g., the standardized testing movement. Both fields have been critical of these limitations (much more so in education), and have taken steps to widen these boundaries. To introduce an RVE, however, it was necessary to address three main areas.

First, I have explicated the basic concepts of epistemology through a discussion of contemporary work in the philosophy. This provided context for discussing knowledge in the rest of the dissertation. I illustrated how VE is a response to certain challenges promulgated after Edmond Gettier published his landmark paper. In the main, virtue epistemologists responded to Gettier's counter-examples by shifting their analysis to the role of persons in the formation of "creditable" true belief—the sort of true belief that a person can take credit for. I then distinguished between a pair of virtue-based approaches: reliabilism and responsibilism. I focused my attention on the latter and developed a particular account that draws heavily from the work Robert Roberts and W. Jay Wood. I termed this "wide" virtue epistemology because it broadens the boundaries of epistemological study to include other epistemic goods like understanding and acquaintance. This final point figured heavily in my final chapter.

Second, I also provided an overview of knowledge in education—that is, how theorists have understood and discussed knowledge. I highlighted three broad epistemological categories: anti-realism, critical approaches, and realism. Most theories of knowledge in education fit in one or more of these categories. Along the way, I highlighted a few points of contact between these educational epistemologies and VE. I then drew attention to some interesting analogies that can be drawn between education

and epistemology. In short, both fields experienced similar internal struggles and transformation.

And, third, RVE depends upon the concept of virtue—a concept that some might worry is distinctly Western. I shared this worry and, as such, investigated the concept of virtue in multiple cultural and religious contexts, including Confucianism, Buddhism, Greek philosophy and contemporary virtue ethics, and African concepts of virtue as found in the cultures of the Yoruba and Akan. Here I determined that, while many differences exists, each of these cultures have concepts of virtue that play an integral role their respective societies. And, finally, I considered how virtues might aid in cross-cultural discourse through a consideration of Sharon Todd's critique of cosmopolitanism.

Bearing these conceptual and contextual factors in mind, in this final chapter, I considered the how an RVE might function in education. I argued that understanding—not knowledge and skill—ought to be the chief epistemic goal of education. This does not mean that knowledge and skill have no value—not at all. Instead, understanding is a connection making process—a broader concept that entails these other epistemic goods. I then examine how three intellectual virtues regulate the acquisition of understanding. This was followed by a consideration of the role of social understanding and intellectual virtue in the social dimensions of education—specifically, through an examination of communication in schools. I argued that intellectual virtues and understanding are integral to the communicative practices. I then introduced two proposals for teaching intellectual virtues. Although these have some merit, I believe that the current

educational milieu is not conducive for the cultivation of intellectual virtue. And, finally,

I introduced several areas that warrant future research.

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