Teaching and the Socratic virtues

Three Socratic maxims

The virtues, both intellectual and ethical, first usefully delineated and critically examined by Aristotle, have once again become the subject of considerable interest in general philosophy as well as in the philosophy of education. On this occasion, I want to look at a small, related group of intellectual virtues which I shall call Socratic, not because I am particularly anxious to claim that the historical Socrates invariably exemplifies these but because they are closely associated with a certain familiar and important conception of Socratic teaching. That conception will be suggested to you if you bring to mind certain ideas: following the argument where it leads, the unexamined life not being worth living, and knowing that one does not have knowledge; and if you imagine how the attitudes which lie behind these ideas might infuse an approach to teaching through discussion. The three virtues I shall consider are intimated in these maxims.

Neil Cooper has recently attempted a taxonomy of the intellectual virtues, deriving them from reflection on the nature of inquiry conceived as aiming at the goals of knowledge and understanding. It is a fascinating attempt, albeit ad hoc and provisional as Cooper admits, to map the whole domain showing both the richness of the conceptual framework in this area and the complex interconnectedness of these ideas. His model presents the intellectual virtues as forming five clusters which he labels the inquisitive, forensic, judicial, educative, and all-pervasive. We are invited to explore the framework and to linger a while in savouring it. It is an invitation well worth accepting.

It would be natural perhaps to expect that the virtues I shall be concerned with, since I am interested in the virtues of the teacher, are the ones labelled "educative" by Cooper, but with one exception this is not the case. With respect to the educative cluster, Cooper is thinking primarily of those qualities which ought to influence the transmission
of knowledge, and he rightly calls our attention to intellectual clarity and the related virtue of simplicity. These are important virtues, of course, and students have reason to be grateful to those teachers who are able to express and explain difficult ideas clearly and who can reduce complex thoughts to more simple forms without over-simplification. These virtues, however, tend to characterize the formulation of one's ideas, whereas I propose to focus on certain virtues which more directly address one's general attitudes towards the process of inquiry.

Cooper does, however, include one virtue within the educative cluster which will be of concern to us, but he remarks that it is nameless. I think he is mistaken about this, but one can see how the mistake arises. He observes that "while it is part of intellectual integrity in general to be open to new, and sometimes unwelcome, questions and ideas, it is the virtue of the educator to make himself open to the ideas of his pupil." Clearly, the virtue in question is open-mindedness, which Cooper barely succeeds in naming in his taxonomy at all, though he makes observations in several places which immediately and unmistakably bring it to mind. The apparent absence of a name arises because there isn't a special name for this attitude in the context of teaching but neither is there any reason to expect one. Open-mindedness, as an intellectual virtue, has application in many different contexts, and what is required of the open-minded person will depend upon the nature of the context in question. Listening seriously to the ideas of one's students is one form which open-mindedness takes in the context of teaching. This is the virtue invoked in the Socratic injunction to follow the argument where it leads.

A second intellectual virtue to be considered here I shall call a critical outlook. This virtue, otherwise labelled, makes an appearance in various places in Cooper's taxonomy. For example, in discussing the forensic cluster, he observes that we need to be able to criticize our own convictions, to consider the strongest arguments against our beliefs; in the context of the judicious virtues, he speaks of the attempt to do justice to conflicting arguments, which amounts to critically assessing them. Cooper also points
out that trust is an important virtue in inquiry, about which I shall have more to say later on, but cautions that this is not a matter of blindly and uncritically accepting the word of others. A commitment to living the examined life necessitates a critical outlook.

The third virtue in this family of ideas I shall call a due regard for truth. It is probably best to think of this as an all-pervasive intellectual virtue, a kind of over-arching commitment which is central to the very meaning of serious inquiry itself. In Cooper's account, it is that which explains and underlies the value of certain other virtues as when the search for truth, avoiding the false allure of certainty, requires the virtue of caution. Neil Cooper concludes that his intellectual hero is not the sage who knows that he knows but the person, like Socrates, who is aware of the pitfalls in claiming knowledge. Gregory Vlastos interprets Socratic ignorance as that attitude which rejects the suggestion that any further investigation of a view would be superfluous. This interpretation leads me to regard the third maxim as representing a due regard for truth, since it underlines the point that our attitude towards knowledge must not blind us to the fact that what we regard as true may prove to be mistaken.

Cooper is surely right that the intellectual virtues shade into and merge with one another, but it will be convenient here to distinguish them as I have done for the sake of considering their significance and merits in the context of teaching, as well as various doubts which have been voiced. I believe that these virtues are neglected in a skills-based conception of teacher education which is rapidly becoming influential, that there is a good deal of confusion about these virtues when they are attended to, and finally that there is outright disdain for them in some quarters. My own view is that these virtues are important in teaching just because the teacher who has them, and whose work manifests them, thereby demonstrates to his or her students attitudes which I take to be central to an educated outlook.

Before proceeding with this main agenda, however, I must first attend to certain reservations about the general project of trying to state and illuminate ideals of this sort.
"Nothing is so difficult in philosophical writing as to get people to be sympathetic enough to what one is saying to understand what it is." So remarks my distinguished namesake, the moral philosopher R. M. Hare. He too, I feel sure, would endorse Kant's view that it is better to be refuted than to be misunderstood, recognizing the excellent insight of Epicurus that we should be grateful to those who show us that we are mistaken. Aspects of my own position with respect to the virtues of the teacher, however, have been misunderstood and misrepresented, so let me try to set the record straight, and perhaps also forestall certain objections to my discussion of the Socratic virtues.

By way of review

In my recent work, especially in *What Makes A Good Teacher*, I have been concerned to explore a number of virtues or excellences which ought to be associated with the idea of good teaching. I take seriously Socrates' observation that it is crucially important that we inquire about the character of those who will teach our children, and I believe it is an important philosophical task to try to identify, clarify and justify the qualities which are desirable in teachers. I was also concerned to shift attention away from what I see as a preoccupation, in the context of teacher education, with superficial, behavioural criteria towards a renewed concern with more fundamental human excellences. I am gratified that several reviewers have both understood and supported my general position.

It may serve to clarify matters further if I respond briefly to various criticisms made by David Friesen, which rest on a misinterpretation of my position. Friesen concludes his review of my book by saying that *What Makes A Good Teacher* is a valuable contribution to the crucial dialogue on the meaning of good teaching but, happy as I am to read that, I cannot in all honesty see how it could be warranted if the comments
which precede it are accurate and justified. There are three main issues involved, which concern the importance, nature, and applicability of the virtues.

First, the view is ascribed to me that poor teaching is to be blamed entirely, or at least principally, on a deficiency of virtues of the kind examined, such as courage, impartiality and humility. No allowance, it is claimed, is made for "the human struggle involved in becoming a better teacher in situations of increasing uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity." Surely, Friesen urges, "many very dedicated teachers have entered the profession with these ideals but have found themselves extremely vulnerable to the many dilemmas of teaching reported in recent studies." My impression reading this, confirmed by what comes later in the review, is that Friesen essentially believes that it is not the absence of the pedagogical virtues, but the adverse conditions of teaching, which account for whatever weaknesses we observe. Four lines into chapter one, however, I myself remark that "overworked teachers no doubt fear that high-minded idealism will ignore the sober reality of actual working conditions", and I make sympathetic allusion to the compromises which Horace, Sizer's hero, is forced to make, saying that it is irresponsible and unfair to ignore the constraints which he faces in his teaching situation\textsuperscript{16} My point is emphatically not that deficiencies in teaching can be solely or even primarily explained in terms of the teacher's orientation to the virtues; but I do believe that a renewed commitment to the virtues can play a valuable role in the promotion of good teaching.\textsuperscript{17} My position is that teachers would be better for possessing these qualities, and that is much more limited than the reckless claim attributed to me.\textsuperscript{18}

Second, Friesen asserts that "in contrast to the process of becoming a teacher, this book presents the excellences in an either/or fashion which ignores the possibility of their development in teacher education." He points out that professional judgment is something which can develop in the context of suitable experiences which allow one the opportunity to exercise it. I confess that this observation did not come as a surprise to me. In my first book, Open-mindedness and Education, I commented: "Good judgment
and anticipation, like a sense of humour and open-mindedness, is not an all-or-nothing affair....You cannot be more or less dead or pregnant, but you can be more or less open-minded." In short, it has never been my view that teachers either have these virtues in some all-perfect manner or do not have them at all.

Possibly what causes confusion here is that we can and do quite justifiably speak of people as being open-minded, impartial, imaginative and so on. It is important to remember, however, that such ascriptions do not imply an either/or, all-or-nothing, interpretation of the virtues. We are justified in ascribing such traits when we observe a definite tendency to act or react in certain ways in certain contexts, inferring that these actions genuinely reveal a person's attitudes and abilities. Kohlberg, I believe, was also confused about this at times, and it was his awareness that those we call honest are prepared to be dishonest in some situations which led him to denounce the "bag of virtues" as mythical. To think it desirable to try to recruit into teacher education programmes student teachers who are, to some extent, open-minded and imaginative does not entail that these virtues are fixed and incapable of further development in the course of teacher education. My text, in fact, is strewn with references to teachers struggling to be impartial, trying to approach open-mindedness more closely, trying to imagine the difficulties their students are experiencing, and so on.

Nor should we be pessimistic about their development on the grounds that in their ideal form they are strictly unattainable. Dewey reminded us that education will always be in the hands of ordinary men and women, but the intellectual virtues are not reserved for saints and heroes. As Jonathan Kvandvig has recently pointed out: "The intellectual virtues are not extraordinary traits of individuals; they are admirable traits, but not all admirable traits are extraordinary." If we tell ourselves, however, that we cannot expect the members of the teaching profession to rise above the level of "minor technicians", then our own expectations will serve to ensure that the intellectual virtues are rare among teachers.
Although I have not said very much in the book in question about how the virtues are to be developed in student teacher programmes, I would certainly want to stress the influence of teacher educators exemplifying these virtues in their own teaching, the opportunity for student teachers to consider the nature and significance of the virtues in the context of case studies, and the opportunity to have suitable practical experience in schools where these virtues would be exercised and subsequently reflected upon.\textsuperscript{23} I believe, however, that misconceptions about the virtues, and opposition to them, militate against the likelihood of the influences and opportunities just mentioned being as successful as they might be, hence my own primary focus on clarification and justification.

Finally, Friesen believes that there is an assumption in my discussion of a universally shared starting point about what constitutes a good teacher. He characterizes this as modernist essentialism, a world view of sameness and certainty, and recommends instead a postmodern view\textsuperscript{24} which takes issue with any quest for certainty of standards outside and above historical reality. He refers disparagingly to an account that is "somehow supposed to be suited to an infinite range of pedagogical situations."\textsuperscript{25}

Let me respond by saying at once that I do not think that criticism by labelling is very productive. There is not, of course, in fact a universally shared starting point about what constitutes a good teacher; if there were, it would not be as vital as it is that the case for the virtues be made. I observe at the outset that "many do in fact fail to agree that these (virtues) are of any great significance for teachers."\textsuperscript{26} We now know that we can add another name to a list of dissenters. Any reasonably sympathetic reading of my work would reveal that I do not subscribe to a world view of sameness and certainty. Why would such a world view emphasize humility and open-mindedness? I make it clear that my list of virtues does not pretend to be complete or perfect; the claim is that the virtues examined are very important but neglected. As for sameness, there is no suggestion that all teachers must possess all of these virtues, nor possess them to the same degree.
Moreover, and this is crucial, these virtues are such that they are perfectly compatible with, indeed invite, an endless variety of approaches and great diversity of content. What is dismissed as obviously absurd is in fact true, that virtues such as open-mindedness, imagination, and judgment are suited to an infinite range of pedagogical situations; these are the very virtues one requires in uncertain, complex and ambiguous circumstances.

There is no claim, however, that these standards function outside of historical reality. To know whether a teacher's behaviour represents genuine empathy or mean spirited criticism we need to know a great deal about the context. To determine what needs to be done requires that one look critically and imaginatively at one's actual situation. If one subscribed to a world view of sameness, there would hardly be a problem in reducing teaching to rule and routine; following Dewey, however, I argue against such a view of teaching. Friesen misses the point that universal virtues can serve the situational reflection he believes in. This is also true of the Socratic virtues we now turn to examine.

Socratic ignorance

In the early years of the twentieth century, Bertrand Russell's philosophical reflections on education produced a merciless attack on schooling practices. Acutely aware of the extent of state propaganda during the first world war, Russell observed that: "Every state wishes to promote national pride, and is conscious that this cannot be done by unbiased history. The defenceless children are taught by distortions and suppressions and suggestions." Russell gave prominence in his inimitable way to a line of criticism which has continued unabated, one which in our own day school authorities are at last coming to address. When, for example, the California State Department of Education introduced its Standards for Evaluation of Instructional Materials in 1986, designed to detect and remove "erroneous stereotypes" and to promote perceptions among students which are "clear and undistorted" about such matters as race, gender and disability, it was
trying to come to grips with the problem of distortions, suppressions and suggestions in curriculum materials.30 "Accurate portrayal" was the watchword.

Incidentally, there is a surprisingly close, yet often overlooked, link between Russell's general philosophical and epistemological views and his attitude towards education and teaching. Russell saw philosophy, like science, as piecemeal and provisional; final truth, he said, belongs to heaven, not to this world. To be a good philosopher one must have a strong desire to know, combined with a great caution in believing that one knows. Philosophy, he thought, could help us to see the deficiencies in what passes for knowledge, not in order to foster a lazy skepticism, but to substitute an amended kind of knowledge, itself still tentative and capable of improvement.31 A very characteristic expression of his epistemological position is the claim that we need to consider each piece of apparent knowledge on its merits and retain whatever still appears to be knowledge when this consideration is completed.32 Russell, as I see it, was trying to mark out a position which would keep both skepticism and dogmatism at bay.

These philosophical views are directly reflected in Russell's proposal that educators need to strive for truthfulness in teaching. By this he meant "the habit of forming our opinions on the evidence and holding them with that degree of conviction which the evidence warrants."33 You may recall that Hume thought this habit an indication of wisdom.34 Russell drew a pointed contrast between the will to believe and the wish to find out, and said that "education ought to foster the wish for truth, not the conviction that some particular creed is the truth."35 While truth, in Russell's view, is not attainable in any final sense, what education can do is to fit us for the nearest approach to truth.36 Education, that is, should seek to develop in students, a due regard for truth.

I imagine, however, that despite his clear rejection of apodeictic certainty, many would nowadays regard Russell's view as quaint. I shall mention some general doubts about truth as an educationally relevant ideal and indicate some possible responses. First, it may be suggested that a due regard for truth is itself a bias. Richard Paul and Joel
Rudinow, for example, begin their discussion of bias by admitting that they are biased in
favour of truth. 37 I believe that such an "admission" can only generate confusion about
the educationally relevant sense of bias, and collapses in paradox. Misgivings about a
concern for truth can only arise if we forget that we are concerned about bias precisely
because it distorts and misrepresents the truth in some way. 38 A due regard for truth
involves trying to reduce or remove bias; it is this which impels us to identify and
remove erroneous stereotypes. The notion of bias which concerns educators derives its
meaning from a fundamental contrast with truth, and thus the pursuit of truth is not itself
a bias but a commitment to try to avoid bias. Any accusation of having a bias in favour
of truth is a self-defeating complaint since any concern about bias which would fuel such
an accusation presupposes a commitment to the search for truth. Moreover, it is not an
inclination itself which is indicative of bias, but whether or not one's inclination reflects
an assessment of relevant considerations.

We also encounter the skeptical view that all knowledge is "inscribed with bias". 39 Such
remarks admit of weak and strong interpretations. 40 If what is meant is that any claim to
knowledge runs the risk of being distorted by bias, this is nevertheless compatible with
being resolved to guard against the intrusion of bias using whatever critical skills we can
muster. The threat of bias, which we may allow to be ever-present, does not undermine
the value of a due regard for truth. If, however, the claim is the stronger one that all
pretensions to knowledge are necessarily infected with bias, such that any claim merely
reflects one's bias, then it is not clear what a concern for truth could amount to. Revising
one's ideas would come to no more than exchanging one bias for another. Since we could
never have any confidence that we had made any progress towards truth, a concern for
truth would seem idle. The problem with this view, however, is that it purports to know
what the view itself disallows, namely that it is true that each and every view is biased.
There is, as has often been pointed out, a self-inconsistency in trying to show that it is
ture that attempts to show that something is true are misguided. 41
We may finally, albeit briefly, mention the familiar, relativistic view that our judgments are "filtered" through our own contextuality of time and place. Earlier philosophers, like Susan Stebbing, saw this as something of a truism, but increasingly it is thought to imply a relativistic view of knowledge. It is not clear, however, why we should think that a plurality of views implies that all are equally meritorious, or that comparative assessment is meaningless. The problem of incoherence emerges again because if all views have equal merit, then the view that all views do not have equal merit is just as acceptable. That point, of course, was first clearly made by Socrates, in the context of teaching, when he observed that if we hold that everyone's opinion is true, then we would at the same time have to think this very thesis false if someone were to deny it.\(^{43}\) When we are tempted to say, along with the relativist, that something is "true for me", we need to ask what this means if not "I think that this true". In that case, of course, one can still wonder if it \textit{is} true.\(^{44}\)

We may gain a clearer insight into a due regard for truth if we consider the following claim made recently by David Cooper: "Whatever one's criticisms of Bellarmine, and of Plato, these should not include a charge of indifference towards the truth."\(^{45}\) This way of characterizing the virtue, however, proves to be too broad,\(^{46}\) and reflection on the example offered may help provide the qualification needed. Since Plato has enjoyed a good deal of the philosophical spotlight, let us take up the case of Cardinal, now Saint, Roberto Bellarmino (1542-1621) who exercised enormous influence in the Roman Catholic Church in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and who gained notoriety in the events leading up to, and including, the Galileo affair of 1616.

There is a great deal of scholarly discussion and controversy about Bellarmine's exact role in the affair, but David Cooper makes only a passing reference to the episode and does not go into any of the details.\(^{47}\) Presumably, therefore, the point of the allusion is that Bellarmine, despite being prepared to place restrictions on Galileo with respect to Copernicanism, should be seen as having a due regard for truth, the unerring truth of
Scripture. In a famous letter written in 1615, Bellarmine had declared the Copernican theory "a very dangerous thing not only because it irritates all the philosophers and scholastic theologians but also because it is damaging to the Holy Faith by making the Sacred Scriptures false." In one respect, then, David Cooper is quite correct. Bellarmine is far from indifferent concerning the preservation of Scriptural truth from heresy. That was a life-long passion. To appreciate, however, that, and why, Bellarmine's claim to have a due regard for truth needs some qualification, we must look at the case rather more carefully.

It is tempting, if the discussion remains at a very general level, to see Bellarmine and Galileo as respective champions of the version of truth to which each subscribed, i.e. scriptural truth versus the truth of natural science, an interpretation favourable to the relativistic thesis just mentioned. It was Bellarmine's view that Sacred Scripture, interpreted by the Church as to its true meaning, could not be in error, whatever the subject matter, since it constituted the immediately revealed word of God. In his own words: "There can be no error in Scripture, whether it deals with faith or morals, or whether it states something general and common to the whole Church or something particular and pertaining to only one person....we believe that not one word in Scripture is useless or not used correctly." Not surprisingly, he subscribed to the view advanced by the Council of Trent that the Church was to be the sole and supreme judge of the meaning of Scripture.

Bellarmine also admitted, however, that theology and natural science demanded different sorts of expertise. As early as 1572 he had pointed out that theologians were not to be expected to pronounce on scientific questions especially when the controversies were still lively among astronomers. Where controversy did exist, one could pick the theory which best corresponded with Scripture. If, however, one theory were to become "the ascertained truth," one would need to find an interpretation of Scripture which would
agree with that view, "for it is certain that the true meaning of Scripture cannot be in contrast with any other truth, philosophical or astronomical."\(^{52}\)

Even more tellingly, in his reply to Foscarini in 1615, Bellarmine conceded this point: "Whenever a true demonstration would be produced that the sun stands in the centre of the world and the earth in the third heaven, and that the sun does not rotate around the earth but the earth around the sun, then at that time it would be necessary to proceed with great caution in interpreting the Scriptures which seem to be contrary, and it would be better to say that we do not understand them than to say that what has been demonstrated is false. But I do not believe that there is such a demonstration, for it has not been shown to me."\(^{53}\) He went on to say that he had "the greatest doubts" that the Copernican theory could be demonstrated to be true. The important point, however, is that while such doubts would warrant the conclusion that Copernicanism was not known to be true in 1615, they would not preclude the possibility of a proof at some future time. And such a demonstration, on Bellarmine's own view, would demand an interpretation of Scripture compatible with it.

The problem with David Cooper's remark is this. If Bellarmine is thought to have merely advised Galileo in 1616 that Copernican theory could not be held or defended at that time as certainly true, in view of its controversial status in science and its inconsistency with prevailing interpretations of Scripture, we might well condemn his restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression, yet accept as plausible the verdict that he was not indifferent to truth. A sympathetic reading of his position, given this analysis, might be that a doubtful or controversial scientific theory should not be regarded as overturning what we believe the Scriptures to teach.\(^{54}\) If, on the other hand, Bellarmine is associated with the alleged injunction that Galileo not hold, teach or defend Copernicanism in any way, which would rule out all further speculation and inquiry with respect to heliocentrism, then surely we cannot say that he shows a due regard for truth because the injunction would seek to preclude the possibility of scientists trying to
discover if what might be true is true. Bellarmine would, on this analysis, have sacrificed the pursuit of truth, in a matter which he himself had admitted to be controversial, in favour of preserving the authority of the Church and traditional views.

What emerges, I think, is an important distinction between a concern for truth which would amount to trying to protect and preserve what is regarded as true, and a concern for truth which is prepared to consider the possibility that what one regards as true may not be true, or not the whole truth. It is this latter attitude which is captured in the Socratic idea that we may not know what we think we know, and the attitude we should hope to find in teachers who want to engage their students in inquiry. Consider this point. Jim Keegstra began his classes each year with a presentation on the nature of truth and its importance; in one sense we could say of him also that he was not indifferent to truth. In his case, however, the will to believe, and to have his students believe, completely destroyed the wish to find out. Let us now ask if there are intellectual virtues which would help sustain an educationally responsible concern for truth.55

**Following the argument**

If we are genuinely concerned about bias in teaching and in teaching materials, then we need teachers who are able to convey to their students the idea that the ideal of truth is as important as it is remote: the former so that we do not become complacent about bias; the latter so that we do not minimize the problems in addressing it. In the course of schooling, a great number of ideas will be communicated as true. Indeed, philosophers like Richard Rorty maintain that the whole function of primary and secondary education is to familiarize the young with what their elders take to be true.56 Even if we think this a distortion of what schooling should be, nevertheless students do come to hold a great number of beliefs as a result of teaching. Inevitably, much of what they come to believe is false, or at least in need of serious qualification. Moreover, it is all too easy in the
circumstances of schooling for students to acquire, by way of the hidden curriculum, the master belief that they should believe whatever they are taught.

Anthony Quinton remarks that "non-dogmatic teaching, which goes beyond the dictated recital of propositions to be memorized for later regurgitation, should provide those to whom it is given with something that will protect them against its inadequacies, at least its inadequacies of detail." The basic idea here is that teaching needs to be conducted in such a way that its inevitable weaknesses will not turn into irreparable harm. Quinton characterizes such teaching as non-dogmatic, and suggests that teachers can offset the danger of unreflective belief in their students by attaching "a critical question mark" to the beliefs which they are passing on to their students. But how is this to be done?

My own view is that the challenge here is not so much a matter of teachers learning how to do something, in the manner of acquiring a skill, but more a matter of being seen by one's students as a certain sort of person, having appropriate traits of intellect and character which pervade one's entire approach. As Dewey reminded us, everything we do as teachers, and the manner in which we do it, has the potential to create expectations, attitudes and beliefs in our students. We do not get to the heart of the problem if we think in terms of simplistic recipes for change, such as teachers talking less. This may or may not be a good thing, but to equate "teacher-talk" with authoritarianism, as some commentators do, blinds us to the fact that it is the attitudes which come through in what we say which really matter.

We need to show our students consistently that we are more interested in what is right than in showing that we are right, that we are willing to attend to fresh evidence and relevant arguments and to concede a position we had once defended if need be, that many of our views have a tentative and vulnerable character. What distinguishes the dogmatist, Russell claimed, is not that he or she holds certain beliefs but that the beliefs are grounded and held in a certain way. For the dogmatist, that which is supposed to
support the belief has been made immune to any sort of challenge, and the belief itself is held in such a way that it may not be revised or rejected. Keegstra's belief in a worldwide Jewish conspiracy is a paradigm example of dogmatic belief. Perhaps predictably, I shall say that what teachers need, if their teaching is to be non-dogmatic, is an attitude of open-mindedness which permeates their entire work.

Philosophers of education have generally regarded open-mindedness as a central aim of education, and as connected intimately with a concern for truth. Russell, for example, pointed out the latter connection when he said that "open-mindedness is a quality which will always exist when desire for knowledge is genuine." More recently, James Montmarquet has remarked that certain intellectual virtues, such as an openness to the ideas of others, are in effect ways of being conscientious about truth. Some virtues serve to regulate that more general virtue, and are in turn themselves inspired by it. They balance and nourish each other. Agreement about the value of open-mindedness, however, has not always meant agreement as to what it is, or what it involves, and these disagreements have at times led to doubts about its value in education.

Montmarquet presents a dilemma with respect to the virtue of being open to others' ideas, which we might express as follows. If we say that someone has the virtue in so far as he or she is open to ideas which are in fact likely to be true, there will be no way to distinguish openness and gullibility. An individual might be open to ideas which have a high truth probability without being in any position to reasonably believe this. If, on the other hand, we say that someone has the virtue if open to ideas which he or she takes to be true, this account cannot exclude the dogmatist, like Keegstra, who is after all open to ideas which he takes to be true. My own suggestion would be to say that the virtue operates in so far as the person is prepared to critically examine the possibility that the ideas are true, and willing to revise or reject his or her views if that is warranted. Keegstra fails this test because the possibility of anything counting against his theory is excluded in advance.
To appreciate the difference between Keegstra's attitude and genuine open-mindedness, consider the recent review by Stephen Jay Gould of the controversial book by Herrnstein and Murray entitled *The Bell Curve*. Gould finds the book fallacious, disingenuous, one-dimensional, suspect in its use of statistics, grotesquely inadequate, and containing no compelling arguments. In short, it is a devastating review, but towards the end Gould writes: "I applaud the publication of unpopular views that some find dangerous. I am delighted that *The Bell Curve* was written - so that its errors could be exposed."

Now immediately, and obviously, there is one striking difference between Gould and someone like Keegstra, and Bellarmine too, for Gould will not try to prevent his students from reading books which contain views contrary to his own. Any open-minded teacher should concur. But what more should we say about open-mindedness here, especially in light of Gould's comment about being pleased to see the book appear so that its errors could be exposed? Clearly, and as we know from his own earlier writings, Gould has a very definite and firmly held point of view on the issues discussed in this book; and if we were inclined to think that open-mindedness required neutrality or suspended judgment, we would have to rule out the ascription of this virtue to Gould. I believe, however, that what is most relevant is that Gould attends seriously to the evidence and argumentation offered in the book. He can only properly claim to know that these are deficient if he has seriously considered them - and the review demonstrates conclusively that he has. He has followed the argument where it leads, and it leads back to the position he began with. The mere fact that he holds certain beliefs cannot in itself prevent him from considering contrary views, or people could never be rationally persuaded to change their minds; and open-mindedness cannot require him to change his mind, or the virtue would force people to embrace views which they judge to be false.

Many are still inclined to sense a contradiction between a person being open-minded (and being seen as open-minded), yet taking a stand on an issue. It is this which
has, more than anything else, fuelled the "teacher neutrality" movement over the years, and created the feeling that non-neutrality amounts to dogmatic teaching and indoctrination. Melinda Fine, examining political discourse in the classroom in the context of contentious issues, is rightly anxious to find a path for teachers between political indoctrination and moral relativism.66 In her concluding remarks, she succeeds in capturing concisely the aim of open-minded teaching as "helping the students to take well-thought-out stands and to listen closely to each other."67 Elsewhere in the paper, however, she inclines towards a view which can only obscure this aim.

The confusion arises because she senses a logical inconsistency in the idea of students valuing open-mindedness in theory yet seeking closure in practice to contentious debate, describing this as contradictory. The matter is further confused because closure is at times equated with being simply told which answer is "right" by some authoritative person.68 That would undermine open-minded inquiry, of course, but open-mindedness itself is not at odds with seeking closure, in the sense of resolving the issue, and such closure does not destroy our open-mindedness.69 In reviewing an issue open-mindedly, we are trying to decide what to believe; moreover, if we hold a belief, we may well review the case against it in an open-minded manner, as Stephen Jay Gould does. This is precisely the force of Russell's point concerning how a view is held.

Certainly, the situation is greatly complicated, when we apply these ideas to the teacher, by the fact that there is an imbalance of power and authority in the classroom, and there are many ways in which the appearance of open-minded discussion may mask the effective silencing of certain points of view. It will be quite impossible, however, for a teacher to present himself or herself as an open-minded individual while holding or defending a particular position, if it is thought that having, or defending, a view simply entails that you are not open-minded. If, on the other hand, it is appreciated that it is not holding, or defending, a view but how this is done which matters, then teachers can at least work at charting a course between indoctrination and relativism. If teachers, fearing
indoctrination, insist on "affirming the legitimacy" of every view expressed, the message conveyed is relativism; and relativism is a false form of open-mindedness because it expressly abandons the ideal of truth.70

An objection to the example of Gould seriously reviewing the case against his own position, as an example of open-mindedness, is that from within a certain framework, a particular point of view may be considered undeserving. Moreover, one might say that from within one's own framework, a certain point of view or objection cannot arise at all because the assumptions behind it are rejected in one's framework. One's time, too, is finite and perhaps one may decide to ignore such arguments altogether. Open-mindedness, it might be said, should not be thought of as requiring that we seriously consider other points of view than one's own without regard for the truth or bias of those views.71

I do not reject these points but I think that certain cautionary remarks need to be appended. First, while we must not waste our time on views which have nothing going for them, we only know that they are worthless because they have been examined, by ourselves or by trusted reviewers, and found wanting. They are not rejected because they are outside our framework; they are outside our framework because they have been rejected. Second, while we cannot be forever reexamining our fundamental beliefs, we do need to recognize that it is possible that objections which arise outside our own framework may, unexpectedly and unpredictably, force us to reexamine some of our basic beliefs. The earlier discussion of Copernicanism illustrates the point very clearly. The fact that we operate of necessity from within some framework does not mean that we are immune from, nor absolutely entitled to ignore, objections from without. Finally, especially in the context of open-minded teaching, it is important that we take great care not to give the impression that one is entitled to simply dismiss views out of hand. The particular issue being discussed in the classroom is important, of course, and we do not want to give undeserved support to fatuous nonsense; but we are also, and inevitably,
teaching a lesson about how to deal with issues in an open-minded way. We need to be careful, then, that our teaching does not suggest an attitude which might tend to foster dogmatic rejection of contrary ideas in other cases. Our students themselves may want to raise the very points we ourselves regard as undeserving. If we ignore, or silence, these, and this is extremely tempting as Melinda Fine shows, it is not clear how we can expect to foster open-minded inquiry.

The examined life

The virtues, with the exception perhaps of wisdom itself or integrity, are such that they can be taken to excess, as when tenacity turns into dogmatism, or precision into pedantry. Commentators, however, seem particularly anxious to point this out with respect to open-mindedness, almost as if the virtue were somewhat suspect. Neil Cooper, for example, agrees that one should keep an open mind, but not so open that one's brains fall out.72 John Dewey notes that the open mind is a nuisance if it is merely passively open to allow anything to find its way into a vacuous mind behind the opening.73 And Bertrand Russell warns that there is a degree of open-mindedness which is devastatingly paralyzing.74 What is in danger of being overlooked in these remarks is the fact that open-mindedness would not name an intellectual virtue at all if it were not inspired by the ideal of truth and exercised critically. It is, after all, the attempt to form and/or revise one's views on the basis of evidence and argument.75

Moral philosophers such as R. M. Hare have maintained that a good moral upbringing will induce in us a feeling of compunction should we fail to abide by the moral principles we have been taught. We will be brought up in such a way that we cannot break them "without the greatest repugnance."76 Similarly, Montmarquet points out that we want to have the intellectual virtues engrained in children, so that they become an habitual part of the way they are inclined and disposed to deal with issues, rather than the virtues themselves being the focus of continuing critical scrutiny.77
Nevertheless, as Montmarquet also indicates, we do need to exercise critical judgment in balancing one virtue against another, which might mean, of course, deciding against telling the truth on occasion. We may add that we also need critical judgment to determine whether or not we have reasonably satisfied the demands of a particular virtue in a certain context, such as when a teacher must decide whether or not sufficient time has been spent dealing with a student's objection.

Concerning the critical outlook itself, we may characterize it as involving an ability and a willingness to make judgments in problematic situations where we cannot simply appeal to received ideas: either because the situation does not unambiguously present itself as one covered by established and apparently acceptable rules or information, with the result that we have to draw thoughtfully on what we know, or think we know, in order to arrive at a view which we cannot merely calculate; or because the existing rules and bodies of information are themselves in question and we have to determine whether or not they can be justified. A critical thinker is disposed to examine and evaluate claims to knowledge, value issues, policy recommendations, theories, reports, the merits of individuals, and other matters where judgment is involved; to determine if what is presented as evidence and relevant argument merits being so considered, and to what extent it is biased, inadequate, misleading or in other ways deficient; to resist efforts by others to impose ideas on him or her, and to avoid being imposed upon by ideas which are taken for granted in the prevailing intellectual climate; and to regard situations and issues conventionally deemed to be straightforward as potentially problematic and controversial.

Should we regard it as a virtue in teachers that they display and attempt to foster such critical abilities and dispositions? Critical thinking enjoys such strong support as an educational aim at the moment that we might be tempted to conclude that the answer is self-evident. Surprisingly, perhaps, there is also a good deal of opposition to this ideal,
and to the approach to teaching associated with it, so it will be useful, in conclusion, to mention some of these objections.\textsuperscript{78}

Some make appeal to the wishes of students who are said to "know, better than anyone, which teaching styles are successful, which techniques of learning bring the best out of them." What is it that students know so unerringly? They "know that it is the teacher's central role to explain," and they view their teachers "not as Socratic figures who ask questions and discuss answers, but as people who know and are there to respond to their desire for information."\textsuperscript{79} Leaving aside awkward questions we might ask here about opinion versus knowledge, about unexamined assumptions concerning what is to count as success, and about why students might think that this is the central role of teachers, it is sufficient to point out that we are not faced in practice with a stark choice between teachers who explain and convey information and their Socratic counterparts. There is no reason why information and explanations cannot come with a critical question mark attached, and teachers with the Socratic virtues will seek to do this.

The dichotomy between cultural literacy and critical thinking can be transcended.\textsuperscript{80} We cannot, of course, think critically in the absence of the information we must draw on in forming our judgments. Education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge, and information which is not possessed or accessible obviously cannot be utilized. There can be no serious argument, therefore, about the need to become acquainted with what is thought to be true, though we may properly debate the most effective ways in which this can be achieved. It does not follow, however, that we should assign the task of providing information to the schools, leaving the colleges to promote critical thinking, as some have urged.\textsuperscript{81} A critical outlook on information, i.e. appreciating its limited, tentative, controversial and potentially misleading character, can be developed in the course of giving instruction by teachers who are themselves alive to these constraints.
A second argument which questions the need for a critical outlook derives from the inevitable dependence of students on their teachers. Their relative ignorance and immaturity leave students in no position to assess critically the ideas they encounter. The general philosophical point behind this observation has been developed by John Hardwick in his work on epistemic dependence and the role of trust in knowledge. We may at times have good reason to believe something, not because we ourselves possess, or could even understand, the relevant evidence, but because we have good reason to believe that some expert has good evidence for the belief in question. For students, the relative expertise will often be found in the teachers they trust; for teachers, moreover, the same argument will require their deference to expert opinion on occasion. Hardwick concludes that it can sometimes be irrational to think for oneself, and that rationality may involve uncritically accepting what we are told.

I believe that Harvey Siegel has succeeded in taking the edge off these conclusions. In brief, Siegel maintains that one's acceptance of expert opinion demands considerable critical reasoning. Does the question at issue admit of expert opinion at all? Have experts in fact emerged? Is this person an expert? Is there any factor which might compromise his or her expertise in this case? And so on. There remains, as Siegel shows, a meaningful contrast between rational and irrational deference to expert opinion, and the person who can ask critical questions about alleged expertise can avoid irrational deference and retain a measure of epistemic independence. Hardwick had allowed that people could check on alleged experts, but argued that this in itself would require relying on yet other experts. This misses the point, however, that the individual in such a case is using his or her critical abilities to try to determine whether or not confidence may be placed in a certain source. We hardly need to be reminded, in the wake of the Keegstra case, that trust can be betrayed in the context of teaching, and students need to learn how to guard against miseducation. Students do need to learn how to judge whether or not their teachers deserve their trust; but trust is inevitable in the context of teaching, which
is all the more reason why we need teachers who are trustworthy. The latter, I suggest, are those who are committed to the intellectual virtues.

Concluding comment

In trying to explain the nature of these virtues, and in answering certain objections to them, I am not, of course, assuming that a philosophical understanding of these issues will automatically translate into an approach to teaching which manifests the virtues in question, nor that teachers who have these virtues necessarily have a philosophical account of them which they could provide. On the other hand, however, we are not likely to seek after these ideals, to try to live up to them in our teaching, if we begin to think that they have been discredited; and if we do pursue them, it can only help if we are as clear as we can be about they involve.
2 An excellent discussion of the attitudes of the historical Socrates is to be found in Gregory Vlastos, "Introduction: The paradox of Socrates", in Vlastos (ed.), *The Philosophy of Socrates* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980.
3 For evidence of these attitudes in Socrates, see, for example, Plato, *Crito* 46B, *Apology* 38A, and *Charmides* 165C.
5 Cooper, op. cit.: 466.
6 Cooper refers to openness of mind and movement of thought as essential to the rational person but he does not offer an account of how openness of mind is to be understood. Op. cit.: 467.
7 I shall follow others in taking the person who is a critical thinker to possess various abilities and dispositions. See John Passmore, "On teaching to be critical", in R. S. Peters (ed.), *The Concept of Education* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967.
10 Cooper, op. cit.: 468.
11 Vlastos, op. cit.: 10.
13 Cyril Bailey, *Epicurus: The Extant Remains* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926: 117. See Fragment LXXIV, "In a philosophical discussion he who is worsted gains more in proportion as he learns more."
16 The allusion, of course, is to Theodore R. Sizer, *Horace's Compromise* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984. Elsewhere in *What Makes A Good Teacher* (p. 9) I remind the reader that "the daily and weekly responsibilities are time-consuming and exhausting, with energies drained by mundane and routine tasks which nevertheless have to be done."
17 When Friesen charges me with having ignored what he calls "contextual pressures", I wonder what he can have made of my discussion of the Cannizzo case. Jeanne Cannizzo was the curator of the exhibition entitled "Into the heart of Africa" which opened at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto in November 1989. She was subsequently driven out of her classroom at the Scarborough campus of the University of Toronto by obscenity-shouting protestors, and she looked in vain for support from the academic community. A fairly clear case, I would have thought, of contextual pressures.
20 I make this point in my paper "Education and character development", *Journal of Moral Education* 2, 2, 1973: 115-21. Incidentally, I also observe that in the context of education for character, the notion of development is "peculiarly apposite."
21 I refer approvingly to David Solway's observation that teachers cannot be trained, they must be found; but this is perfectly compatible with holding that incipient virtues can be further enhanced. See David Solway, *Education Lost: Reflections on Contemporary Pedagogical Practice* Toronto: OISE Press, 1989.
22 Kvanvig, op. cit.: 9.
23 Friesen, for example, remarks that teacher education programmes must also engage students in a continual conversation about the moral aspect of teaching. As someone who has co-authored a book of case studies designed to achieve just this result, I might have been credited with appreciating this point. See William Hare and John P. Portelli, *What To Do? Case Studies For Teachers* Halifax, NS: Fairmount Books, 1993.
24 Friesen maintains that postmodernism turns to teacher experiences rather than to ideals because many possibilities for good teaching emerge from teacher narratives. This dichotomy, however, between experience and ideals is quite misleading, since ideals such as open-mindedness and imagination will serve teachers well in seeing and exploring the possibilities for good teaching in teacher narratives about experience.
25 Incidentally, when Friesen pours scorn on "a list of ideals that will make good teachers", let us be clear that it has not been claimed that a list will do this. Trying to live up to the ideals on the list is another matter.
27 Hence I draw on detailed descriptions of teachers in fiction where there is sufficient contextual content to allow one to ascribe or withhold a particular virtue.
29 Bertrand Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction* London: Unwin: 1971: 105. (Originally published, 1916.) By "suggestions" we may understand the kind of innuendo which implies and conveys a false or prejudicial view.
30 *Standards for Evaluation of Instructional Materials with Respect to Social Content* Sacramento: California State
demonstrations. It was written in the book of nature and that interpretation here demanded relevant expertise, exact observation, and necessary caution to avoid distortion. Bellarmine concedes that caution would be needed in interpreting Scripture if heliocentricism were demonstrated to be true; Galileo is urging caution in all cases where a demonstration might be given. See Galileo's letter to Castelli (1613), reprinted in Blackwell, Appendix IV, pp. 195-201.

Richard Paul and Joel Rudinow, "Bias, relativism and critical thinking", in Journal of Thought 23, 1988: 125-38. This sort of doubt is reminiscent of the point which occasionally turns up in discussions of indoctrination to the effect that an analysis in terms of using reason to assess truth may itself involve a kind of doctrinal commitment which invites the same charge of indoctrination. For an example, see I. M. Gregory and R. G. Woods, "Indoctrination: inculcating doctines", in I. A. Snook (ed.), Concepts of Indoctrination London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972: 162-89.

Perhaps J. Anthony Blair is right to claim that in fact one finds people using the term "bias" to mean e.g. "biased in favour of the truth." The essential point is this. If we accuse a racist person of being biased, in endorsing stereotypical views about a certain group, it is nonsense for anyone to say that we are equally biased, biased in favour of the truth, as if that somehow cancelled out our criticism of the racist. Our complaint is that the racist distorts the truth, and this cannot be the charge against us if we have judged fairly. See J. Anthony Blair, "What is bias?", in Trudy Govier (ed.), Selected Issues in Logic and Communication Belmont: Wadsworth, 1988: 93-103.

For one example, see Deanne Bogdan, "Towards a rationale for literary literacy" in John P. Portelli and Sharon Baillien (eds.), Reason and Values: New Essays in Philosophy of Education Calgary: Detselig, 1993: 143. This sort of view is now commonplace. "Knowledge" ought to be in quotes presumably, but in this particular reference it is not.


See L. Susan Stebbing, Thinking To Some Purpose Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939: 38: "I must see from my point of view; you must see from your point of view." Stebbing, needless to say, does not fall into relativism. If we use "bias" to mean that we look from a point of view, this is not a bias that it is profitable to worry about, and what we need to do is to ask if our point of view is defensible.

See, for example, Susan Haack, "Multiculturalism and objectivity", Synthese 68, 1986: 225-59.


James A. Montmarquet points out that a desire for truth could be shown by an extreme dogmatist, absolutely convinced of his possession of the truth. See his "Epistemic virtue", Mind 96, 1987: 482-97.


See Blackwell, Galileo, Bellarmine, and the Bible op. cit.: 265. The entire letter, to Foscarini, is included as Appendix VIII, pp. 265-67. Earlier in his career, Bellarmine had stated that "the perversity of heretics is as much worse than all other evils and afflications as the dreadful and fearful plague is worse than the more common diseases." See Westfall, Essays on the Trial of Galileo op. cit.: 6.

In fact this characterization does not do justice to either one. Galileo had the greatest respect for the truth of Sacred Scripture.

Galileo would have agreed with this as far as matters of faith and morals were concerned, but he insisted that science was written in the book of nature and that interpretation here demanded relevant expertise, exact observation, and necessary demonstrations.

Quoted in Blackwell, Galileo, Bellarmine and the Bible op. cit.: 31. From Bellarmine's De Controversiis (1586-93).

See Blackwell, op. cit: 42-3. From Bellarmine's lectures at Louvain. Bellarmine is indicating here that he supports what is sometimes called the unity of truth principle.


The difference between Bellarmine and Galileo in this case is that Galileo would maintain that the meaning of Scripture with respect to natural science should not be definitively asserted where a contrary proof might emerge in the future. We should suspend judgment. Bellarmine concedes that caution would be needed in interpreting Scripture if heliocentricism were demonstrated to be true; Galileo is urging caution in all cases where a demonstration might be given. See Galileo's letter to Castelli (1613), reprinted in Blackwell, Appendix IV, pp. 195-201.

P. H. Nidditch observes that "intelлектuality, like modesty, comprises a company of needs. If one virtue gets too far out of line, the path of others may be blocked." See his inaugural lecture, "The intellectual virtues", University of Sheffield, 1970.


See, for example, Edward B. Fiske, *Smart Schools, Smart Kids* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991: 63. Fiske creates the impression that teacher talk implies authoritarianism.

Of course, if we *silence* our students, we can hardly communicate that what they have to say matters.


Montmarquet, "Epistemic virtue", op. cit.: 484. Openness to the ideas of others is not exactly equivalent to open-mindedness, since one can show the latter virtue in so far as one attends to problems which occur to one about one's own views. But openness to the ideas of others is clearly an important aspect of open-mindedness.


op. cit.: 147.

Montmarquet notes that some who avoid possible sources of contrary views may betray intellectual cowardice more than a lack of desire for truth. See Montmarquet, op. cit.: 485

Melinda Fine, "'You can't just say that the only ones who can speak are those who agree with your position': Political discourse in the classroom", *Harvard Educational Review* 63, 4, 1993: 412-33.

Fine, op. cit.: 433.

The evidence that students actually did ask to be told the "right" answer is equivocal. One student is reported as asking Fine herself about a particular controversy who is more right, but there are different ways of taking this "question." Perhaps it was a statement of frustration in question form.

Kvanvig also asserts that open-mindedness does not issue in belief, which may be the result of his view that open-mindedness leads to suspended judgment. Clearly, however, open-minded reflection might well lead to a certain conclusion notwithstanding that one could remain open-minded about it. See Kvanvig, *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind* op. cit., p. 97, and pp. 112-3

Fashionable talk about "affirming legitimacy" is problematic, of course, because it blurs the difference between having the right to one's opinion and being right in one's opinion. cf. David Carr, "Knowledge and truth in religious education", *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 28, 2, 1994: 227.

This objection is set out in some detail in Karen J. Warren, "Critical thinking and feminism", *Informal Logic* 10, 1, 1988: 31-44.


In fairness to the writers just cited, it should be noted that elsewhere in their writings they show that they recognize this point.


There are, of course, many such objections which I cannot deal with here, including the charge that critical thinking is itself uncritical and/or biased. I have addressed some of these concerns in my *What Makes a Good Teacher* op. cit.: 147-51. For further discussion, see Sharon Baill, "Is critical thinking biased: Clarifications and implications", op. cit. And Sherylle Bergmann, "An analysis of a feminist critique of the claim that the prime aim of education is to develop critical thinking", *Journal of Educational Thought* 28, 2, 1994: 165-78.


I have discussed this issue, especially as it relates to the views of Richard Rorty, John McPeck and E. D. Hirsch, in my "Content and criticism: The aims of schooling", *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 29, 1, 1995: 47-60.

See my discussion of Richard Rorty's views in "Content and criticism: The aims of schooling", op. cit.
