

BETWEEN SIMMEL'S BLASÉ ATTITUDE AND
INTELLIGENT TEACHABILITY

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ABSTRACT. The aim of this article is to explore Georg Simmel's concept of the blasé attitude and to contrast it with the notion of intelligent teachability, derived from Aristotelian–Thomistic tradition. Here, Stanisław Gałkowski and Paweł Kaźmierczak view these two accounts through the lens of contemporary virtue epistemology, which helps to demonstrate their relevance to present-day educational theory, and to order the attitudes in question as intellectual counterparts of vice, *akrasia*, self-control, and virtue. There are two main criteria for how to distinguish these four states: (1) motivation to have epistemic contact with reality, and (2) the proper balance between receptivity and autonomy in learning. Taking the formation of intellectual character to be an important educational goal, Gałkowski and Kaźmierczak highlight the role of the teacher as an exemplar of mental disposition.

KEY WORDS. intellectual virtue; intellectual vice; intelligent teachability; blasé attitude; teaching; virtue epistemology

INTRODUCTION

The question of why some students benefit from teaching more and others less has always been of interest to educational theorists. The internal determinants of student success include all types of cognitive excellence, including cognitive faculties, talents, temperaments, virtues, and skills.¹ In this paper we focus on the virtue of intelligent teachability, and on its corresponding vice of the blasé attitude, both of which are relevant for teaching outcomes.

There is a long-standing tradition of inquiry into ethical and intellectual virtues and vices, one that goes back to Plato and Aristotle. Virtue ethics, which focuses on moral virtues, enjoyed a remarkable revival a few decades ago. Recognition of virtue epistemology, which deals with intellectual virtues, as a subdiscipline of philosophy has been relatively recent.² Virtue epistemology, particularly the so-called responsibilist account of it, takes moral and intellectual virtues to be closely interrelated and to contribute together to a person's good character.³

1. Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 22.

2. Linda Zagzebski and Michael de Paul, "Introduction," in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, ed. Michael de Paul and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 2. Some other notable works in the field include Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Heather Battaly, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology* (New York: Routledge, 2019). For further reference, see John Turri, Marc Alfano, and John Greco, "Virtue Epistemology," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019 ed.), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-virtue/>; and Jason Baehr, "Virtue Epistemology," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/virtueep/>.

3. Responsibilists view intellectual virtues as "acquired habits and dispositions — traits internal to agency that are the proper object of praise and blame." Guy Axtell, "Epistemic Luck in Light of the

Linda Zagzebski claims that the Aristotelian division between moral and intellectual virtues is based on unpersuasive grounds, and that intellectual virtues should be treated analogously to moral virtues.⁴ Consequently, on her account, the meta-virtue of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, governs the use of both moral and intellectual virtues.⁵

Another contemporary virtue epistemologist, Jason Baehr, explains the notion of intellectual or epistemic virtues as follows:

[P]ersonal character is not exhausted by moral character. It also has an epistemic or intellectual dimension: a fully or broadly virtuous person can also be counted on to care deeply about ends like truth, knowledge, evidence, rationality, and understanding; and out of this fundamental concern will emerge other traits like inquisitiveness, attentiveness, carefulness and thoroughness in inquiry, fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, and *intellectual* patience.⁶

On this view, intellectual virtue is a motivation to attain epistemic goods, such as learning the truth or getting in epistemic contact with reality, and it is usually effective in achieving its aims. Intellectual vice, conversely, is lack of care for epistemic goods. It can be manifested in extremes, either deficiency or excess, in various cognitive attitudes. By analogy with the moral sphere, there are two intermediate states between intellectual virtue and intellectual vice, namely self-control and *akrasia*. Self-control, *enkrateia*, means doing what is good, but the action is accompanied by a struggle with competing motivations, whereas *akrasia* means incontinence or weak will, that is, succumbing to the competing motivations.⁷ A student does not necessarily go through all these stages, but it is helpful to analyze each of them, since intellectual growth involves overcoming vicious temptations and usually starts with working one's way from *akrasia* to self-control.⁸

In this connection we will first analyze the blasé attitude. This concept was introduced by Georg Simmel, a classical sociologist and an influential interpreter

Virtues," in *Virtue Epistemology: Essays on Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility*, ed. Abrol Fairweather and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 162.

4. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 139.

5. *Ibid.*, 219–231.

6. Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 219–231.

7. Heather Battaly, "Introduction: Virtue and Vice," in *Virtue and Vice, Moral and Epistemic*, ed. Heather Battaly (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 4.

8. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 151–152.

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of modernity.⁹ In his use, this concept has two slightly distinct, but related, meanings: one, related to the city life, is characterized by boredom and reserve;¹⁰ the other meaning, related specifically to the money economy, focuses on a loss of "feeling for value differences."¹¹

Simmel's blasé metropolitan type is linked to overstimulation, information deluge, and relativism; in the education context, this type is represented by disengaged students who show unresponsiveness and aversion to teaching. Drawing on the account by Simmel and some of his followers, we argue that the blasé attitude is even more pervasive nowadays, as we experience a much more advanced stage of modernity than the one Simmel witnessed. In students, the blasé attitude is most often characterized by the vice of deficiency in intellectual engagement, which is associated with an insensible skepticism. However, in cases where a student is aware of holding a poorly grounded epistemic stance, the blasé attitude may be classified as epistemic *akrasia*.

There is a large and varied group of students who are more interested in obtaining credits than in the subject matter taught. To the extent that their extrinsic motivation is dominant, they lack the characteristically epistemic desire to know the truth and instead display "indifference to the specific qualities of things."¹² We will show the link between this approach to learning and the contemporary commodification of education. Depending on the actual effort these students invest in learning, their attitude may either manifest as *akrasia* (when they choose distractions over studying) or as self-control (when they manage to focus on learning). The latter response can be a stepping-stone to virtue.

After examining the blasé attitude, we will delineate the profile of "intelligent teachability," which is characterized by actual interest and the desire to learn and to receive instruction. We will draw on the premodern account of *docilitas*, developed within the Aristotelian–Thomistic tradition, and we will try to determine its characteristic as a virtue in the context of epistemic virtues discussed in contemporary work on virtue epistemology. Finally, we will conclude the paper with an attempt to draw pedagogical conclusions regarding how to counteract the blasé attitude and foster intelligent teachability among students.

THE BLASÉ ATTITUDE AS AN INTELLECTUAL VICE OR *AKRASIA*

The blasé attitude was first described by Georg Simmel in his book *The Philosophy of Money* and in an essay he wrote titled "The Metropolis and Mental Life," both of which were published in the early 1900s. These two accounts highlight two different aspects of the blasé attitude. The aspect he describes in

9. David Frisby, *Georg Simmel* (London: Routledge 2002).

10. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/content/BPL/Images/Content_Store/Sample_Chapter/0631225137/Bridge.pdf.

11. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge, 2011), 276.

12. Ibid.

greatest detail is the blasé attitude that results from metropolitan overstimulation. According to Simmel,

There is perhaps no psychic phenomenon which is so unconditionally reserved to the city as the blasé outlook. It is at first the consequence of those rapidly shifting stimulations of the nerves which are thrown together in all their contrasts.... This incapacity to react to new stimulations with the required amount of energy constitutes in fact that blasé attitude which every child of a large city evinces.¹³

In Simmel's theory, the blasé attitude (*die Blasiertheit*) is a natural defensive and adaptive response to the excessive stimulation of the nervous system caused by the accumulation of people and objects, information to be processed, decisions to be made, approaches that need to be adopted in the face of various — ever new — phenomena we encounter in the city. This attitude is, in Simmel's words, "a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it."¹⁴

The blasé attitude so described refers to the entirety of our relationship with the external world, and it has emotional, intellectual, and behavioral components. Emotionally, it boils down to indifference to weaker stimuli and a lack of curiosity about the world; the intellectual aspect manifests as a disposition toward relativism and the dominance of instrumental reason; and in the behavioral sphere, it is apparent in keeping one's distance and a reluctance to become more deeply involved in affairs of the world.

Simmel's observations regarding life at the turn of the twentieth century are considered by sociologists to be an important contribution to the classical theories of modernization,¹⁵ particularly in the field of the sociology of emotions.¹⁶ According to Chris Schilling, the *blasé* attitude offers protection against modernity, but it also indicates the emotional alienation of an individual from the modern forms of social life.¹⁷ Simmel's theory of *die Blasiertheit* was also applied to subsequent technological advances, such as television. For instance, Keith Tester has observed that television, like Simmel's metropolis, inundates us with such intense stimuli that we are unable to discern among them and tend to passively absorb the images.¹⁸ While the expansion of television massively increased the volume of information and stimulation people were exposed to in their daily lives, the advent of the digital age has raised the volume to a level that is much higher still. We can

13. Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 14.

14. *Ibid.*, 12.

15. Deena Weinstein and Michael A. Weinstein, "Simmel and the Dialectic of the Double Boundary: The Case of the Metropolis and Mental Life," *Sociological Inquiry* 59, no. 1 (1989): 55.

16. Chris Shilling, "The Two Traditions in the Sociology of Emotions," *Sociological Review* 50, no. 2 (2002): 21.

17. *Ibid.*, 23.

18. Keith Tester, "'Bored and Blasé': Television, the Emotions, and Georg Simmel," in *Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Gillian Bendelow and Simon J. Williams (London: Routledge, 1998), 90.

therefore assume that the consequences of overstimulation are even more severe nowadays than they were during the golden age of television. Moreover, while Simmel contrasts urban life with the "slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing"¹⁹ lifestyle of the inhabitants of small towns and villages, the current progress of globalization, the above-mentioned technological changes, and the ubiquity of social media mean that this diversity, if not eliminated, is seriously limited. The potential effects of information overload are no longer restricted to certain environments; they are becoming globalized as well.

Many contemporary authors raise similar concerns, even if they use different terms. When Allan Bloom describes the state of mind of American students, when Charles Taylor and Neil Postman deplore the ills of today's society, when Nicolas Carr and Manfred Spitzer describe the effects of spending long stretches of time online, their accounts are largely consistent with Simmel's description.²⁰

Today, given the constant flood of new information and new proposals, there is a need for some sort of preselection process. Theoretically, the most rational strategy for dealing with information overload and excessive stimulation is either to rely on external experts' authority during the preselection of information, or to make a critical, albeit cursory, analysis of all the available information and then narrow one's search by focusing only on the most promising threads. Paying attention only to the strongest and most intrusive stimuli, which is the typical approach for one having a blasé attitude, is therefore not rational and may bring adverse effects for the individual. Nevertheless, it is the simplest strategy in that it demands the least effort at a given moment and, perhaps more importantly, does not rely on any previous preparation. In this sense, the blasé attitude may be a pragmatic approach in adult life, or at least one that does not fully disclose its negative consequences. It usually takes the form of intellectual distance, of irony in the sense in which Richard Rorty uses this term, that is, of mild and tolerant relativism, in which one's awareness that accurate justification of one's beliefs is necessarily relative alleviates conflicts with people who have different views.²¹ At the same time, however, the blasé attitude immunizes us to all arguments that could potentially make us change our mind.

It should be noted, however, that the *sine qua non* condition for adopting such an attitude is to have already well-grounded beliefs, to have engaged in the issues that we consider important. Rorty is convinced that recognizing the relativity of

19. Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 12.

20. Allan Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012); Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord, Ontario, Canada: Anansi, 1991); Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1992); Nicholas G. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: Norton, 2010); and Manfred Spitzer, *Digitale Demenz: Wie wir uns und unsere Kinder um den Verstand bringen* [Digital Dementia: How We Make Ourselves and Our Children Lose Their Minds] (Munich, Germany: Droemer-Knaur, 2014).

21. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

the justification of our beliefs and actions does not necessarily entail changing or redirecting them. Nonetheless, these beliefs must already be somehow grounded, and our activity must already have a certain direction. Such an attitude is therefore acceptable only for adults — those already formed, educated, and having strong and established views. When children or adolescents, who are only at the beginning of their educational path, adopt the blasé attitude, this can significantly obstruct their development and learning.

However, the very psychological mechanism that allows adults to persist in their commitments allows (or even, perhaps, encourages) young people, who do not yet have established beliefs and whose natural energy has not yet been streamlined, to avoid any commitment (including the commitment to their own development). It is basically an excuse for laziness, cynicism, and lack of curiosity. If everything has the same value compared to what I already have, then nothing is worth the effort to acquire it. Thus, the blasé attitude undermines the commitment, consistency, and persistence necessary for pursuing one's own development.

The expansion of the blasé attitude is a natural — and, to some extent, inevitable — consequence of the development of technical civilization and the lifestyle it engenders. It is, as Simmel already recognized, a byproduct of moral relativism, resulting from the money economy, which often, although mostly indirectly, undermines any sense of active involvement in affairs of the world. We focus here not on the discussion of relativism as such, but rather on its consequences for virtue epistemology and education.

Many thinkers resort to relativism or even to skepticism as an antidote to fanaticism and fundamentalism. Bertrand Russell, for instance, wrote, "The world contains too many people believing too many things, and it may be that the ultimate wisdom is contained in the precept that the less we believe, the less harm we shall do."²² Certainly, taking up skepticism as means of protecting ourselves from excessive engagement in anything can protect us from getting involved in some bad causes. For this reason, some even consider it to be an epistemic virtue.²³

Unfortunately, at the same time, it undermines the motivation to engage in potentially worthy endeavors. Thus, it hinders sustained effort, which requires the ability to overcome disillusionments on the way. Interestingly enough, Heather Battaly charges skeptics with epistemic self-indulgence because, in her view, their desire to avoid error makes them deny valuable truths as well.²⁴ It seems, however, that the notion of epistemic insensibility — that is, a deficiency of curiosity and of intellectual desire — is a more appropriate description of the blasé attitude. As Battaly puts it, epistemic insensibility is the tendency "to desire and enjoy

22. Bertrand Russell, "Foreword," in Stefan Themerson, *Professor Mmaa's Lecture* (London: Gaberbocchus, 1953), 11.

23. Allan Hazlett, "Skepticism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Battaly, 221–231.

24. Heather Battaly, "Epistemic Self-Indulgence," in *Virtue and Vice, Moral and Epistemic*, ed. Battaly, 233–234.

appropriate epistemic objects too seldom and too little."²⁵ It thereby signifies a cognitive deficiency or an epistemic vice.

A reasonable choice is possible provided that some things are more valuable than others. If we reject this assertion, we will not be able to justify rationally our decisions. The irony proposed by Rorty means a weakening of theoretical justifications for our commitments, up to the recognition of their full-blown relativity, without reducing thereby our engagement in actions resulting from these claims. From a virtue-epistemological point of view, this attitude should be classified as epistemic *akrasia* or incontinence, which, as Christopher Hookway points out, is marked by the discrepancy between our commitments and our evaluations.²⁶

EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION: FROM *AKRASIA* TO SELF-CONTROL

In *The Philosophy of Money* Simmel claims that as a result of the money economy, the blasé person "has completely lost the feeling for value differences. He experiences all things as being of an equally dull and grey hue, as not worth getting excited about."²⁷ The introduction of the money economy makes various things equally accessible, and thus encourages an indifference in our valuation of things.²⁸ From this, Chris Shilling concludes that the acceptance of money as the means of evaluation promotes moral relativism.²⁹ According to Matthieu Deflem, Simmel speaks of "the commodification of interactions or the general reduction of quality to quantity."³⁰ Numerous contemporary social scientists have examined the phenomenon of commodification arising from the money economy as it relates to various spheres of culture, including education, and higher education in particular.³¹ It has been noted that commodification of education transforms students into the consumers of educational commodities, understood primarily in terms of grades and credits, which in turn become a currency they can use to obtain desired social roles.³²

25. Ibid., 232.

26. Christopher Hookway, "Epistemic *Akrasia* and Epistemic Virtue," in *Essays on Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility*, ed. Fairweather and Zagzebski, 178–199.

27. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 276.

28. Ibid., 276–277.

29. Shilling, "The Two Traditions in the Sociology of Emotions," 22.

30. Matthieu Deflem, "On the Sociology of the Sociology of Money: Simmel and the Contemporary Battle of Classics," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 3, no. 1 (2003): 67–96.

31. Fuyuki Kurasawa, "Which Barbarians at the Gates? From the Culture Wars to Market Orthodoxy in the North American Academy," *Canadian Review of Sociology & Anthropology* 39, no. 3 (2002); and Jacek Tittenbrun, "The Commodification and Privatization of Higher Education," in *Concepts of Capital: The Commodification of Social Life* (London: Routledge, 2017), 167–174.

32. Tobias Wenger, "Commodification of Teacher Professionalism," *Policy Futures in Education* 14, no. 1 (2016): 60–76.

This system produces students who are interested principally in grades and are relatively indifferent to what is being taught. In this context, it is worth considering again Alasdair MacIntyre's criticism of the corrupting focus on the external goods of practices (money, prestige, and power) to the neglect of their internal goods and corresponding virtues.³³ Of course, external goods are also goods, necessary to some extent, and the problem lies rather in the insufficient motivation to attain internal, epistemic goods of knowledge. Also, as James Schall remarks, some sort of grading is necessary in order to set the standards, to differentiate between the true and the false, between the excellent and the mediocre.³⁴ Credits are part of the institutional framework that is necessary for the taught discipline to flourish. When such instrumental motivation proves insufficient, a student may choose entertainment instead of learning, and thereby constitute a case of *akrasia*. Correspondingly, the attitude of students interested mainly in obtaining credits and who apply themselves to study with this purpose in mind can be interpreted as epistemic self-control, since it involves learning, even if that process itself is deprived of joy and satisfaction.³⁵ It implies consuming scientific truths, but only in order to fulfill some external requirements, thus without intrinsic motivation.³⁶ This attitude is not yet an epistemic virtue, as it lacks a properly entrenched "motivation to have cognitive contact with reality."³⁷ However, if such students are conscientious enough to pursue their course of study, they may reach their goal anyway. Furthermore, an exclusively instrumental attitude with regard to learning seems rather artificial. It is more natural to assume that a career-oriented ambition, coupled with following the teachers' instructions, creates good opportunities for getting absorbed in the inner goods of the practice in question, for experiencing the wonder of knowing, and for developing related epistemic virtues.

THE VIRTUE OF INTELLIGENT TEACHABILITY

The subject of the now-forgotten intellectual virtue of intelligent teachability has been reintroduced to contemporary academic discourse by James Schall. He defines intelligent teachability as willingness to learn what we do not yet know and readiness to accept the truth in this regard.³⁸ In doing so, Schall has recourse to a long-standing Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. According to Aristotle, "the

33. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 191–192.

34. James Schall, "Docilitas: On Being Invited into the Kitchen of Heraclitus," *Utraque Unum* 2, no. 2 (2009): 9–14.

35. Jason Baehr, "Conclusion: Themes and Questions in Intellectual Character Education," in *Intellectual Virtues and Education: Essays in Applied Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Jason Baehr (New York: Routledge, 2016), 241.

36. *Ibid.*, 231.

37. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 167.

38. James Schall, *Docilitas: On Teaching and Being Taught* (South Bend, IN: St Augustine's Press, 2016).

learner should take things on trust."³⁹ Thomas Aquinas defines teachability (*docilitas*) as readiness to be taught, taking it to be an essential component of prudence.⁴⁰ On his account, teachability does not imply automatic submission, but a readiness to take someone else's opinion into serious consideration. He himself was a paragon of this virtue, engaging all philosophical traditions available to him in his search for truth. It is no accident that MacIntyre, in the mature stage of his intellectual itinerary, found Thomism to be a model tradition-constituted form of inquiry and "the best theory so far" capable of explaining the drawbacks of the rival traditions — both the Enlightenment Encyclopedia and the Nietzschean Genealogy.⁴¹

The narrative of intelligent teachability tallies very well with the contemporary accounts of virtue ethics — Aristotelian, Thomist, and others — and by the same token, it can also be incorporated into contemporary virtue epistemology, where the virtue of open-mindedness seems to be its closest counterpart.⁴² Open-mindedness, however, has a broader scope, as it refers not only to the teacher–student relationship, but to the entirety of the student experience. In the words of John Dewey, "Open-mindedness is not the same as empty-mindedness. ... But there is a kind of passivity, willingness to let experiences accumulate and sink in and ripen, which is an essential of development."⁴³ An attitude of openness to what is not yet given to us and readiness to accept knowledge is helpful for all education and upbringing, enabling us to learn and to consciously work on our own development. Other intellectual virtues that overlap with teachability are curiosity and inquisitiveness,⁴⁴ intellectual humility,⁴⁵ deference,⁴⁶ and also diligence and intellectual sympathy.

39. Aristotle, *On Sophistical Refutations*, Part 2, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/sophist_refut.1.1.html (accessed March 20, 2020).

40. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–IIae, q. 49, art. 3, online edition 2017, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3049.htm#article3>.

41. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); and Christopher Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre: Relativism, Thomism, and Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).

42. Wayne D. Riggs, "Open-Mindedness, Insight, and Understanding," in *Intellectual Virtues and Education*, ed. Baehr, 18–37.

43. John Dewey, "The Nature of Method," in *Democracy and Education* (ebook) (1916; rev. ed. Project Gutenberg, 2008), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/852/852-h/852-h.htm#link2HCH0013> (last updated August 1, 2015).

44. Lani Watson, "Curiosity and Inquisitiveness," in *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Battaly, 155–166; and Lani Watson, "Why Should We Educate for Inquisitiveness," in *Intellectual Virtues and Education*, ed. Baehr, 38–53.

45. Nancy E. Snow, "Intellectual Humility," in *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Battaly, 178–195.

46. Kristoffer Ahlstrom-Vij, "The Epistemic Virtue of Deference," in *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Battaly, 209–220.

Intelligent teachability requires the ability to strike a proper balance between openness to change and steadfast belief. A more mature and more autonomous stage of intelligent teachability involves the ability to identify reliable epistemic authorities. The virtue complementary to teachability is intellectual autonomy, but normally it develops only gradually, based on the knowledge and practical judgment we learn from others. Aristotle emphasizes the social groundedness of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, meaning that it can best be learned from adequate exemplars. Applied to intellectual endeavors, *phronesis* enables us to find the extent of proper inquiry and proper doubt, the virtuous mean between unjustified conviction and the questioning mania.⁴⁷

Intelligent teachability as an epistemic virtue involves recognizing the knowledge of the world as a value in itself. Aristotle founds the natural human quest for knowledge on the belief that “[e]very realm of nature is marvelous ... for each and all will reveal to us something natural and something beautiful.”⁴⁸ Another aspect of teachability is readiness to cooperate with others in the pursuit of knowledge. Learning is a social process; it needs external support from other community members and social institutions. Intelligent teachability recognizes that, in the words of Aquinas, “old folk who have acquired a sane understanding of the ends in practical matters”⁴⁹ deserve to be acknowledged as superior in terms of practical knowledge. Teachable disciples accept their teachers’ authority within the realm of their competence and understand that they can benefit from complying with their instructions. When they attain a more finely tuned intelligent teachability, they are able to perceive more precisely the limits of their teachers’ knowledge.

Teachability is a kind of curiosity about the world combined with the awareness that our knowledge is insufficient, more precisely, that our point of view is only one of many, so in order to perceive the whole properly, we need to know and take into account the opinions of others. According to Aquinas, teachability requires a certain humility — recognizing that the knowledge I have is inadequate and experiencing that fact as a source of discomfort, which in turn motivates me to learn. The best model of this approach is Socrates, who, by declaring that he knew nothing, also expressed the greatest readiness to learn from others. Intellectual humility is also valued by contemporary virtue epistemologists such as Allan Hazlett, who defines it as “excellence in attributing ignorance to yourself, withholding attributing knowledge to yourself, and questioning whether you know.”⁵⁰ This does not mean a tendency to degrade oneself, but a lack of

47. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 153–154.

48. Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, Book I, Part 5, accessed October 17, 2019, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/parts_animals.1.i.html (accessed October 17, 2019).

49. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–IIae, q. 49, art. 3.

50. Allan Hazlett, “The Civic Virtues of Skepticism, Intellectual Humility, and Intellectual Criticism,” in *Intellectual Virtues and Education*, ed. Baehr, 76. See also Ian James Kidd, “Educating for Intellectual Humility,” in *Intellectual Virtues and Education*, ed. Baehr, 54–70; and Robert C. Roberts, “Learning Intellectual Humility,” in *Intellectual Virtues and Education*, ed. Baehr, 184–201.

conceit — maintaining an Aristotelian sense of a proper measure of self-confidence and intellectual distance with regard to one's own knowledge.

Teachability creates a kind of partnership between teacher and student, a recognition that both have a common goal or at least go in the same direction that is determined by knowledge. It also acknowledges that the teacher is the right guide on this path and enables the student to trust the teacher and accept his authority.⁵¹

Teachability, however, is a mindset built on the previously adopted dispositions. And like all other attitudes, it requires proper formation. Aquinas emphasized that

Man has a natural aptitude for teachability even as for other things connected with prudence. Yet his own efforts count for much towards the attainment of perfect teachability: and he must carefully, frequently and reverently apply his mind to the teachings of the learned, neither neglecting them through laziness, nor despising them through pride.⁵²

Teachability is largely the natural attitude of a child, curious and open to the world, but it is also a virtue that can and should be consciously developed and reinforced by the student's own actions.

Admittedly, there are situations when a young person learns without the support of a teacher, and even against a teacher's efforts (ignoring her advice or doing the opposite of what she recommends). However, assuming both the good will of the student and the professional expertise of the teacher, the strategy beneficial for the student consists in collaborating with the teacher and relying on her advice. If resistance to the teacher is to bring tangible epistemic benefits, it must be based on previously acquired knowledge and experience. Therefore, as mentioned previously, emphasizing learner autonomy should not be the starting point of learning but can come to the fore only gradually. Autonomy goes hand in hand with intellectual criticism, i.e., the ability to appropriately question the claims of other people,⁵³ which is a protective measure against manipulation and the abuse of authority on the part of the teacher. This highlights the Aristotelian middle course between autonomy and reliance on authority, between skepticism and open-mindedness. Uncritical, one-sided, or excessive submissiveness on the part of the student can impede his or her intellectual and moral development and thus become an epistemic vice. This danger is signaled by the evolution in the meaning of the English word docile. Charles McMillan remarks, "Docile in English has shifted the interpretation from its etymological meaning of *docilis*, educatable

51. Stanisław Gałkowski, *Długomyślność: Wprowadzenie do filozofii wychowania* [Thinking toward the Future: Introduction to the Philosophy of Education] (Krakow, Poland: WAM, 2016), 219–220.

52. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–IIae, q. 49, art. 3, Reply to Objection 2.

53. Hazlett, "The Civic Virtues of Skepticism, Intellectual Humility, and Intellectual Criticism," 76. Compare this with Harvey Siegel's claim that "The critical spirit component includes a cluster of attitudes, dispositions, and character traits, many of which could equally well be thought of as intellectual virtues." Harvey Siegel, "Critical Thinking and the Intellectual Virtues," in *Intellectual Virtues and Education*, ed. Baehr, 96.

and easily taught, to denote passive, submissive and obedient."⁵⁴ In the worst-case scenario, such an attitude can degenerate into the vice of fanatical allegiance to irrational ideologies. Therefore, following Battaly, we can best construe one dimension of intelligent teachability as a mean between epistemic self-indulgence and epistemic insensibility, specifically epistemic temperance, which is the tendency to desire, consume, and enjoy appropriate epistemic goods, at proper times, and in proper degrees or amounts.⁵⁵ It is also possible to be too greedy and too detailed in acquiring knowledge, particularly when it concerns trivial or disconnected facts — in other words, to pursue learning in a chaotic, unstructured way. The Internet offers a vast array of hyperlinked resources, which, when used indiscriminately, may lead students away from their track of inquiry. In such circumstances, a self-indulgent desire to consume epistemic goods may distract the student from a serious intellectual pursuit and thus constitute a vice of excess.

PEDAGOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

Jason Baehr claims that intellectual virtues are vital for educational theory and practice,⁵⁶ and he proposes that fostering the growth in intellectual virtues be established as the principal goal of education.⁵⁷ For Ben Kotzee, the reason why "education should attempt to form good intellectual character" is obvious, as it is necessary for fruitful and cooperative participation in social life.⁵⁸

The virtue of intelligent teachability seems especially relevant in view of the widely accepted ideal of lifelong learning. We follow Dewey in arguing that "[t]he most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning."⁵⁹ Likewise, according to MacIntyre, the aim of liberal education in the traditional sense is to train educated generalists, that is, members of an educated public who are open-minded and able to go beyond the narrow confines of their professional knowledge and to engage in constructive debates between rival traditions.⁶⁰

Ability and willingness to learn, or teachability, has therefore both a high intrinsic value and is an important resource for overcoming the

54. Charles J. McMillan, "On Docility: A Research Note on Herbert Simon's Social Learning Theory," *Journal of Management History* 22, no. 1 (2016): 93.

55. Battaly, "Epistemic Self-Indulgence," 225.

56. Jason Baehr, "Introduction: Applying Virtue Epistemology to Education," in *Intellectual Virtues and Education*, ed. Baehr.

57. Jason Baehr, "Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 47, no. 2 (2013): 248–262.

58. Ben Kotzee, "Introduction: Education, Social Epistemology, and Virtue Epistemology," in *Education and the Growth of Knowledge: Perspectives from Social and Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Ben Kotzee (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 8.

59. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1963).

60. Alasdair MacIntyre and Joseph Dunne, "Alasdair MacIntyre on Education: In Dialogue with Joseph Dunne," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 36, no. 1 (2002): 1–19.

compartmentalization of our social and cultural life. It is also practically beneficial as a desired character trait in potential employees in a fast-evolving job market.

One of the basic tasks of educators, therefore, is to show their students the need to avoid the blasé attitude and the other extreme, excessive and irrational docility, and to lead them along the path of intelligent teachability, open-mindedness, curiosity about the world, and search for the truth.

In order to do so, a good teacher should first of all be an exemplar of intellectual virtues — that is, she should demonstrate intellectual engagement, open-mindedness, and the desire to have epistemic contact with reality. The good teacher should also possess the epistemic virtues of curiosity, inquisitiveness, critical thinking, intellectual humility, and, yes, intelligent teachability. The full profile of intellectual virtue involves being knowledgeable and passionate about the subject taught. It enables the teacher to find the joy in discovering its new aspects. Her enthusiasm is then contagious and inspiring for the students; they find her classes appealing, as she can captivate their attention and interest.

An intellectually virtuous teacher is obviously a lofty ideal. However, the second-best state of intellectual character, namely that of intellectual self-control, should also enable the teacher to perform her task in a satisfactory way. As it is, self-control also guarantees reliable, fair, and honest teaching and grading.

However, when the teacher represents the blasé attitude either in the form of *akrasia* or of vice, education becomes problematic. It is very unlikely that a frustrated or burned-out teacher will fan the flame of intellectual *eros* in her students. It seems that such an attitude in teachers can have significant consequences for the entire educational relationship, although these will only unfold gradually and indirectly. The teacher who does not see anything important in the content that she communicates to students, and the educator who is indifferent to the attitudes and values that she aims to instill in her pupils, cannot take their work to be particularly meaningful. This changes their work motivation: teaching is no longer perceived as a mission; it is just another form of paid employment. From this perspective, themes such as experiencing a call to teach or having a selfless dedication to children become empty clichés. Formally, this does not change much; teaching and learning still take place. However, taking into account the enormous importance of the educator's personal example in children's upbringing, it can be assumed that blasé teachers will educate, albeit indirectly, a new generation of blasé students.

In some cases of an entrenched blasé attitude, being an exemplar of intellectual virtue may not prove sufficient. There may be some deep-seated reasons for this demeanor, for example, one student's Internet addiction or another's deficient self-esteem. In such cases, it is necessary to do remedial and therapeutic work in order to reach these students. As Steven Porter observes, it takes a psychologically minded teacher to engage in such work.⁶¹ This teacher should be willing to learn

61. Steven L. Porter, "A Therapeutic Approach to Intellectual Virtue Formation in the Classroom," in *Intellectual Virtues and Education*, ed. Baehr, 221–239.

how the student's mind works, what cripples him, and what makes him tick. This brings us to the last, but not least significant, dimension of the teacher's intelligent teachability or receptivity. Fine-tuning her own approach in response to the feedback she receives from students demonstrates, in a sense, her ability and willingness to be taught by her students. The teacher's dexterity makes it easier to soften the resistance of the ostensibly blasé students, whose outlook often masks their own feelings of insecurity, and also to instill some enthusiasm in the dutiful but joyless grade earners, and also to fully elicit the potential of the "intelligently teachable."