**Open-mindedness: A double-edged sword in education**

**Luke Tucker**

**Abstract**

This paper examines the question of whether and under what conditions teaching open-mindedness to students could have negative effects. While there has been much discussion in the literature about the potential downsides of being open-minded, the question of whether teaching this trait to young, untutored minds could result in more negative effects than positive has received little attention. Yet, given a primary focus of the literature is providing models for use in educational contexts, exploring the potential risks of encouraging students to emulate such models is imperative. In this regard, the paper presents three concerns. The first is that students may lack the full intellectual character to avoid the pitfalls of open-mindedness that have already been noted in the literature. The second concern is that students who exercise open-mindedness may incur social costs that cannot be compensated for by epistemic goods. The third concern is that educators, particularly at universities, often face certain non-ideal conditions that may make it difficult for them to effectively cultivate open-mindedness in students. I ultimately conclude that, in light of these concerns, we should approach teaching for open-mindedness with great caution. However, we should not avoid it altogether. Preliminary suggestions are offered on how instructors may attune their approach to teaching for open-mindedness to mitigate the identified concerns.

**Keywords**

Open-minded, education, virtue, knowledge, fallibility, belief

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**Introduction**

A problematic feature of the current literature on open-mindedness is the lack of attention paid to an intriguing question: could teaching open-mindedness to students be detrimental? While there has been discussion that being open-minded may not always be truth-conducive (see for example Carter and Gordon, 2014; Levy, 2006; Madison, 2019; Kwong, 2017), the separate question of whether teaching this trait to young, untutored minds could have *particular* risks has received little discussion (for a noteworthy exception, see Curzer and Gottlieb, 2019). Yet this question is worth examining, regardless of whether open-mindedness is a trait that fully mature intellectual exemplars paradigmatically possess.

What makes this lack of interest in the risks of open-minded education problematic is the fact that a principal goal of the literature, often made explicit by contributors, is to help educators effectively foster open-mindedness in students (see for example Adler, 2004; Battaly, 2006, 2015; Baehr, 2013; Riggs, 2010, 2018; Spiegel, 2012). Of course, the study of open-mindedness is interesting for many reasons besides education, and there are many motivations behind the ongoing research in this field other than the desire to aid educators. But it’s apparent that education is a driving force behind much of the literature; for many, the ultimate goal is to equip educators with a practical model of open-mindedness that can be used in real classrooms to coach the intellectual character of real students.

It’s perfectly legitimate for much of the literature to take on this educational orientation. The purpose of education is not only to impart knowledge to students but also to make them lifelong learners, capable of seeking knowledge for themselves, and a necessary precondition for independent learning is open-mindedness. Thus, it is crucial for students to cultivate open minds, as future citizens, voters, and members of the workforce, and also as human beings deserving of the tools necessary for flourishing. To this educational end, philosophers can lend their theoretical services.

But if a principal focus of the literature is providing models for use in educational contexts, then it’s important to consider the potential drawbacks of encouraging students to emulate such models. Before promoting open-minded education, we should examine whether this may have any negative implications, epistemic or otherwise. If we identify none, then it’s reasonable to proceed with the current theoretical approach. However, if we discover that there are potential risks, we may wish to adjust our posture in light of these risks.

In this paper, I will present three concerns about encouraging students to emulate current models of open-mindedness. My purpose is not to discourage educators from nurturing the intellectual character of students, nor to dissuade philosophers from contributing to education theory, but rather to suggest a need for great caution in approaching open-minded pedagogy. The structure of the remaining paper is as follows. The next section will present a basic model of open-mindedness based on recent literature. The following three sections will detail three overlooked concerns about promoting the aforementioned model for emulation by students. These include: (1) students may lack the full intellectual character to avoid the pitfalls of open-mindedness that have already been documented in the literature, (2) students who exercise open-mindedness may incur social costs that cannot be compensated for by epistemic goods, and (3) educators, particularly at universities, often face certain non-ideal conditions that may make it difficult for them to successfully cultivate open-mindedness in students. In the final section, I will suggest some ways we might adjust our approach to teaching open-mindedness to address these concerns.

Before proceeding, two prefatory comments are important. First, in this paper, the term ‘students’ refers broadly to recipients of instruction within education institutions. The three concerns outlined herein each highlights a potential risk that teaching for open-mindedness poses to students, broadly defined. However, it is important to note that each concern arises from consideration of a distinct facet of studenthood. The first concern pertains to students as individuals who, as learners undergoing education and intellectual development, typically do not yet possess the full spectrum of intellectual virtues. The second concern pertains to students as individuals who, for the sake of their overall well-being, must navigate the tradeoffs between social and epistemic goods, whenever they clash; however, due to their relative youth and inexperience, they may not be fully equipped to navigate this terrain. The third concern pertains to students as recipients of instruction within *real-world* education institutions, which are often subject to less than ideal conditions. It’s worth restating: although the concerns in this paper apply generally to ‘students’, each one draws attention to a distinct aspect of what it means to be a student.

Second, it is important to emphasize that the three concerns outlined in the paper are, I believe, not insurmountable. They should not be viewed as definitive objections against teaching open-mindedness. On the contrary, in the final section, I will offer preliminary suggestions on how instructors can adjust their practical approach to teaching for open-mindedness so as to mitigate the identified concerns. In other words, the overarching purpose of the paper is twofold: to outline a set of considerations regarding teaching for open-mindedness that have been overlooked, and simultaneously, to offer potential solutions to these concerns. My ultimate conclusion is that we should approach teaching for open-mindedness with great caution and a clear-eyed understanding of the concerns outlined herein, but we should not altogether shy away it.

**Defining open-mindedness**

Let me briefly set out what I will mean by the term ‘open-mindedness.’ My hope here is to give a general overview of the virtue that is inclusive enough to make my subsequent arguments relevant to a wide range of theoretical perspectives. I want my arguments to apply to as many common definitions of open-mindedness as possible, without any significant exceptions.

Open-mindedness is widely recognized to be a paradigmatic intellectual virtue, a trait that is acquired (not innate) and helps us do better what we already have a natural tendency to do, which is adjudicate between contrary opinions and perspectives in the course of inquiry. However, our execution of this capacity is rarely flawless. Some people may be too open to new ideas and perspectives. Jason Baehr (2011) illustrates this with the example of a bright college freshman in an introductory philosophy course who, within a 16-week span, has been a Platonist, an empiricist, a skeptic, a Cartesian, a Kantian, a utilitarian, a social contractor, a mind-body dualist, a Berkeleyan idealist, and so on; whatever view the current assigned reading espouses, she adopts. Such a rapid and frequent swapping of beliefs displays a lack of discretion and an epistemic indecisiveness that are incompatible with attaining genuine knowledge. On the other end of the spectrum, we find people who are too closed off to alternative views and perspectives, reminiscent of the character Archie Bunker from the sitcom ‘All in the Family.’ They tend to trust their own views and reasoning powers beyond what is warranted by an honest accounting of their epistemic situation and abilities. They see epistemic challenges as something to be avoided rather than as a chance for growth, much like Archie’s stubborn resistance to social change. But this is no way to conduct our epistemic lives, as refusal to consider challenges to our beliefs leaves us stuck in error or ignorance and precludes any future opportunity to escape. And given the fallibility of human judgement, it’s a safe assumption that some of our views are false or inaccurate.

The trait of open-mindedness aims to address the above excesses. Being truly open-minded means being neither overly eager to change your views nor stubbornly resistant to doing so (Hare, 1983). It involves the ability to discern when it would be beneficial to consider a challenge to your views and when doing so isn’t worth the effort (Baehr, 2011; Riggs, 2010). It also means recognizing one’s own fallibility without becoming epistemically insecure or disillusioned (Adler, 2004) and considering the perspectives of others without distorting or caricaturing them (Baehr, 2011). In short, it means having mastered the ability to impartially adjudicate between conflicting views and, when necessary, to manage the discomfort that comes with changing one’s mind and admitting mistakes.

With these more introductory remarks out of the way, let me propose a more concrete model of open-mindedness through the following four remarks.

First, the point of being open-minded is to increase your chances of gaining epistemic goods such as truth, knowledge, and understanding and purging your mind of their opposites. This is what ultimately motivates one to be open-minded.

Second, the fact that open-mindedness is epistemically valuable (it helps us attain epistemic goods like truth and knowledge) is due to the contingent fact that human reasoning is fallible and we are often likely to hold false views. If it were highly unlikely that one is ignorant or wrong about anything, being open-minded would not be necessary (Carter and Gordon, 2014). But in the world that we inhabit, where certainty is rare and human fallibility makes error and ignorance common, it is in one’s epistemic interest to be open-minded and to take challenges to one’s views seriously, rather than dismiss them. This is especially important in dispute-prone domains such as philosophy, ethics, politics and economics. It’s noteworthy that one analysis found that 88% of philosophical theories with an entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* have ‘serious problems’ and 87% have ‘several alternatives’ (Mizrahi, 2016). This realization alone should be sufficient to demonstrate the inadvisability of closed-mindedness in the domain of philosophy.

Third, exercising open-mindedness improves upon something we already tend to do, but not always well, and that is evaluating and making judgements about conflicting ideas and perspectives. Some authors suggest that open-mindedness is also the virtue that allows one to consider ideas that are not necessarily contrary to one’s own, but simply difficult to comprehend. For example, Jason Baehr (2011) notes that the complex and counterintuitive nature of Einstein’s theory of special relativity represents, for many people, a barrier to understanding it. It’s possible to surmount this barrier through the cultivation and exercise of a kind of mental flexibility, and the name for this flexibility, says Baehr, ought to be ‘open-mindedness.’ Be that as it may, the focus of this discussion will be primarily on the value that exercising open-mindedness brings to the challenge of adjudicating between conflicting views, which is core to our everyday notion of the virtue (Riggs, 2018).

Fourth, it is core to our intuitive notion of open-mindedness that it requires taking challenges to one’s views seriously (Baehr, 2011). It is not sufficient to simply listen to challenges, but more than this, what is required is a willingness to truly consider the merits of competing views in an impartial manner, to follow the arguments where they lead, and to avoid making premature judgments. In order to do this, the open-minded person must approach competing views with sympathetic consideration, and try to understand them ‘from the inside,’ as Wayne Riggs (2018) insightfully notes. To approach contrary views as an outsider is to invite a biased assessment in which one simply rationalizes one’s prior views, without seriously entertaining that these prior views may be flawed. This sort of superficial ‘hearing out’ of contrary views prevents any further improvement to one’s epistemic situation just as much as outright, undisguised closed-mindedness.

**Students as intellectual virtue apprentices**

With this general model of open-mindedness in place, I can now present my three concerns about instructing students to emulate this model. My first concern is that students lack the intellectual character to ward off the potential negative side effects of open-mindedness. This concern pertains to ‘students’ in their capacity as apprentices in intellectual virtue, perhaps seeking but not yet possessing the full spectrum of the virtues.

There is a well-established worry in the literature that exercising open-mindedness may lead one to change one’s mind, but in the wrong direction. That is, you may begin an inquiry with the correct view, but after sympathetically considering serious challenges to it, you decide to abandon your prior view or withhold judgment. In this case, it would have been better for you to not reconsider your prior view at all, as the reconsideration led to a decrease in your total stock of epistemic goods. When an agent revises their beliefs in the wrong direction subsequent to the exercise of open-mindedness, call this ‘retrogressive revision.’

Contributors to the literature are generally not too perturbed by the threat of retrogressive revision. The open-minded agent is conceived of as having other intellectual virtues in addition to open-mindedness, and these other virtues working together render the threat of retrogressive revision innocuous. James Spiegel (2012) expresses the idea thusly:

[A] concern may be raised here that open-mindedness could work the wrong way as well, as an open-minded person might likewise be prone to revise her true beliefs into false ones. And the irenic spirit she displays will surely expose her to as many false alternative views as true ones, thus creating more temptation to revise beliefs in the direction of falsehood. While this is an understandable concern, it makes the mistake of considering open-mindedness in isolation from other intellectual traits. That is, it assumes that the open-minded person doesn’t also have the intellectual virtue of discernment, the presence of which diminishes the likelihood that one will revise in the direction of false beliefs. And the more discerning a person is, the less likely it is that her open-minded attitude will work against her epistemically. The same may be said of other intellectual virtues, such as wisdom and understanding, which provide safeguards against open-mindedness collapsing into the intellectual vices of gullibility or naivete (35).

So, Spiegel recognizes the potential for open-minded inquiry to result in retrogressive revision, but downplays the likelihood of this outcome. Ideally, epistemic agents will exercise a variety of intellectual virtues in addition to open-mindedness, and these virtues working in tandem will minimize the risk of agents changing their minds in the wrong direction.

Additionally, we may note that other virtues in the same family as open-mindedness—virtues that are meant to address the fallibility of human reason and the likelihood of being stuck in unrecognized error—also carry the same risk of retrogressive revision, and are treated similarly by theorists. For instance, C. Thi Nguyen (2022) makes the following remark in his paper on the virtue of playfulness:

One might worry that playfulness is just as likely to get a person ensnared in a new epistemic trap as it is to get them out of one … But one thing we might say is that playfulness serves as a useful insurance policy when it occurs in epistemic agents that are otherwise mostly rational. That is, a rational epistemic agent should be able to, if adequately presented with two systems of belief, determine which is better.

So, playfulness, like open-mindedness, entails certain epistemic risks, but these risks are minimized once we admit that, ideally, epistemic agents are ‘mostly rational,’ possessing a variety of positive epistemic traits along with playfulness.

The above theorists are right to point out that open-mindedness *per se* doesn’t pose a high risk of retrogressive revision, since ideally it will be accompanied by other virtues that mitigate this risk. However, this is not applicable in the case of students. It is central to the concept of a ‘student’ that they typically lack a fully developed intellectual character. In other words, students do not possess a complete set of intellectual virtues with which to protect against retrogressive revision.

I do not intend to sketch a specific psychological or intellectual profile for the typical high school or college student, as this is likely impossible, given the diversity among students (especially on college campuses). Rather, my assertion that students typically lack a fully mature intellectual character is based on the milquetoast premise that this is inherent in the concept of a student. A student is someone who stands in need of something, be it knowledge or intellectual character development. Students undergo education, and as the etymology of ‘education’ suggests, to be educated is to be ‘led out.’ Being led out invokes the idea of moving from somewhere less desirable to somewhere more desirable. As posited earlier in this essay, in the context of high school and college, students are not just being led by their teachers and professors to the destination of knowledge, but also their intellectual character is being developed, in hopes that they may become independent learners or, to continue the metaphor, independent epistemic pilgrims. This all maps well onto the standard assumptions of virtue epistemology. Virtue epistemologists generally claim that virtues are acquired and not innate. This implies that everyone starts as a student. Even the ideal epistemic agent at one point in time needed intellectual coaching and development.

Therefore, if the ideal epistemic agent possesses a variety of intellectual virtues along with open-mindedness, students remain *apprentices* in intellectual virtue, perhaps seeking but not yet in possession of the full spectrum of the virtues. Theorists such as Spiegel and Nguyen would presumably agree that, insofar as the exercise of open-mindedness poses epistemic risks for those lacking the full spectrum of intellectual virtues, students are vulnerable to these risks. I do not intend to rehearse arguments to demonstrate that the risk of retrogressive revision is a concern worth taking seriously, as this has been established by other authors. My purpose is simply to note that theorists such as Spiegel and Nguyen try to resolve this worry in a way that doesn’t apply in the particular case of students.

Given that open-mindedness poses epistemic risks for apprentices in intellectual virtue, and that students are such apprentices, we would expect to empirically observe that students fall into epistemic traps at a relatively higher rate when exercising open-mindedness, compared to agents with more mature intellectual characters. I have no idea what evidence we could muster to test this hypothesis. However, I think it is sufficient to note that a long-standing norm in education is that educators should strictly avoid proselytizing their personal views on religion, politics, morality, etc. in the classroom (Hare, 1983). One possible justification for this norm is that students are uniquely susceptible to proselytization, given their status as intellectual virtue apprentices. In other words, when students open their minds to the influence of educators, they lack the ability to resist being proselytized. This supports my argument that, whatever the risks associated with open-mindedness, the risks are greater for students, as they are apprentices in intellectual virtue.

A second strategy for addressing the worry that open-mindedness exposes one to the risk of retrogressive revision is to argue that open-mindedness should be applied tactically, not to just any of one’s views but only to those that may have been formed due to bias. For instance, Wayne Riggs (2010) argues that open-mindedness fundamentally consists in (1) having self-knowledge of one’s idiosyncratic biases, limits, weaknesses, etc. and (2) committing oneself to monitoring for these epistemic flaws. In the same vein, Jack Kwong (2017) writes:

[Being] aware of one’s biases and prejudices and taking steps to correct them can remove cognitive blind spots that prevent one from fully understanding a particular viewpoint, and enhances one’s ability to detect truths among falsehoods. Either way, the person who gives alternative viewpoints serious consideration is not at risk of losing her true beliefs (1620).

So, I’ve raised a worry that students, being intellectual virtue apprentices, are more vulnerable to the risks associated with open-mindedness than more mature epistemic agents. But following Riggs and Kwong, someone could object that students should only take an open-minded attitude to their views that they specifically believe may have been formed due to bias. And in doing this, they can avoid most of the risk of retrogressive revision.

But this objection doesn’t work. Having self-knowledge of one’s idiosyncratic biases and being able to monitor for them are both signs of considerable epistemic maturity. As Cassam Quassim (2019: ch. 7) has insightfully noted, one feature of intellectual vices that makes them especially pernicious is that they are often hidden and difficult to monitor for. Even those who are intellectually mature must be vigilant in identifying and overcoming intellectual vices. But we’ve already established that students, by definition, typically lack the intellectual maturity of ideal epistemic agents. So, Riggs and Kwong are right to point out that ideal agents can ward off the risk of retrogressive revision, as ideal agents possess the intellectual maturity to self-monitor for idiosyncratic biases and to apply open-mindedness more tactically. But it is unrealistic to suggest that students can do likewise.

**Begetting epistemic orphans**

The previous argument raises doubts about promoting open-mindedness among students, given the uncertainty that it will increase students’ access to epistemic goods. My next argument goes a different direction. In this section, I will not question the value of open-mindedness in promoting epistemic goods. Rather, I will argue that in certain situations, practicing open-mindedness may put social goods at odds with epistemic goods, and that students, being relatively young and inexperienced, may lack the maturity to make an informed choice about which is more important in these situations. Note that this concern specifically pertains to ‘students’ in their capacity as agents who, still being in the transition phase from adolescence to full adulthood, may be insufficiently equipped to weigh the tradeoffs between social and epistemic goods, where they clash.

In her *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust*, Linda Zagzebski proposes that a community may be conceptualized as an extended self (2012: ch. 5). This is shown by the utilization of first-person pronouns (we, us, our) by the members of a community when referring to its shared beliefs, values, history, and so on. Notably, in certain communities, membership is conditional upon aligning one’s beliefs with those held by the community. For example, adherence to the core tenets of Christianity is a prerequisite for membership within the Christian church. In cases where an individual’s beliefs come to deviate significantly from orthodoxy, it can no longer be said that they are a member. This is not because the church takes intentional action to expel the individual, but rather because it becomes implausible for the individual to go on expressing their former beliefs in the first-person (‘we believe that x,’ ‘our belief in x’). The individual can continue attending church meetings, festivals, and ceremonies, but now they do so as a spectator rather than a fellow member. This transition can be emotionally painful for everyone, especially for the excluded individual, who may experience feelings of alienation, disaffection, and otherness (Zagzebski 2012).

It is not exclusive to religious groups that shared beliefs and attitudes play a role in determining good-standing membership within the group. These dynamics are present in many forms of community. Even in cases where membership is partly conditional upon immutable factors, such as family or ethnicity, diverging from shared beliefs or attitudes can lead to tension and division within the group. An episode of ‘The Sopranos’ illustrates this through the character of A.J. Soprano, whose perception of Christopher Columbus as a source of ethnic pride for Italians is challenged by his middle school history teacher. The teacher convinces A.J. that, were Columbus alive today, he would be tried for crimes against humanity rather than celebrated. When A.J. shares his newfound view of Columbus with his parents, Tony and Carmela, it provokes a strong reaction from them; they feel offended by the teacher and betrayed by A.J.’s change in attitude. The scene ends with Tony bellowing that a positive assessment of Columbus is non-negotiable within their household: ‘He discovered America is what he did! He was a brave Italian explorer, and in this house, Christopher Columbus is a hero, end of story!’

The question of whether Tony and Carmela have a justifiable reason to feel hurt by A.J.’s change in attitude is an open one. But one possible justification for their reaction can be found in an analysis offered by Kurt Baier (1985), according to which parents possess a *prima facie* right to exert control over their children’s education. From this angle, it could be argued that educators such as A.J.’s history teacher, who foster an environment in which students are encouraged to question the beliefs imparted to them by their parents, interfere with parental privileges.

A second justification may be found in Annette Baier’s (1995) compelling analysis of trust as the ‘acceptance of vulnerability to harm that others could inflict, but which we judge that they will not inflict.’ Suppose this definition of trust is suitable, and also suppose that children have a *pro tanto* duty to trust the ethical, cultural, and religious teachings of their parents. It follows, then, that kids who approach these teachings with an open mind, treating them like any other set of claims to rationally scrutinize, are in violation of this duty to trust. If trust involves acceptance of vulnerability, then for children to open-mindedly evaluate their parents’ teachings is for them to suspect that their parents may inflict epistemic harm, revealing trust to be absent. Therefore, Tony and Carmela’s reaction when A.J. resists morally assessing Columbus in their preferred way can be interpreted as a legitimate reaction to a loss of trust. It’s similar to how a husband might feel if his wife refused to do a trust fall exercise; his wife lacks trust in his ability and willingness to not harm her.

Someone could object that there are potential ways to reconcile the current model of open-mindedness with epistemic authorities and traditions. But I am pessimistic about the possibility of such reconciliation. A similar pessimism finds expression in Jonathan Adler (2004), who writes:

Even if it is granted that open-mindedness is strictly compatible with traditional religious and cultural beliefs, as it is actually taught and promoted, it may undermine them. For many of those beliefs will depend upon according authority to texts and to individuals due to their place in these traditions, rather than for their expertise (138).

Adler doesn’t fully flesh out this skepticism about the practical possibility of reconciliation, but he may be alluding to an assumption prevalent in the literature that open-mindedness is useful for conducting rational assessments, which is typically code for weighing arguments and evidence. Terence McLaughlin (2003) notes that ‘in [William] Hare’s characterization of open-mindedness ‘evidence’ and ‘argument’ (of a relevant kind) are central in that ‘evidence’ and ‘argument’ are what the open-minded person is open to.’ It is difficult to see a place for authority or tradition within the categories of ‘argument’ or ‘evidence.’ In a similar vein, Wayne Riggs (2018) writes that ‘an open-minded person doesn’t discredit an opinion because of whom it comes from, but rather judges it on its merits.’ If the open-minded person disregards the source of an opinion when assigning discredit, presumably they also disregard sources when assigning credit, and this crowds out traditional beliefs, which are founded on the epistemic trustworthiness of a source. And again, Jason Baehr’s (2011) commentary on open-mindedness appears undergirded by a conception of ‘rationality’ which is difficult to reconcile with traditional belief. Baehr writes, ‘where open-mindedness involves rational assessment or evaluation, it also necessarily involves adjusting one’s beliefs or confidence levels according to the outcome of this assessment.’ Thus, open-mindedness is the handmaiden of rationality; rationality requires following arguments to their logical conclusion, and open-mindedness simply enables one to overcome the emotional obstacles that may impede this process.

In summary, the argument presented so far takes it as a premise that social connectedness and a sense of belonging are essential for leading a flourishing life, and these goods are often obtained through membership in a group. Further, maintaining membership within a group may require adherence to certain beliefs. The primary source of justification for these shared beliefs is often tradition, meaning current or younger members of the group base their belief on the testimony of older or past members, whom they deem epistemically trustworthy. These shared beliefs often pertain to areas that are prone to disagreement, such as religion, ethics, and politics, thus the current model of open-mindedness presented in the literature requires that an open-minded attitude be taken towards them. However, because these beliefs are based on tradition, approaching them with an open-minded attitude is likely to result in questioning or rejecting them, potentially jeopardizing one’s membership in the group and access to the social goods necessary for flourishing.

My ultimate point is this. In these situations where social goods are pitted against epistemic goods, an ideal agent would possess the maturity and judgement to weigh the importance of each, in light of the context, and to appreciate the tradeoffs involved in prioritizing one set of goods over the other. However, students, owing to their relative youth and inexperience, may lack the ability to navigate this balance effectively. So, given the potential downsides it may have on students’ overall well-being, open-mindedness-promoting pedagogy should be approached with caution.

Here the question may arise whether teachers can simply avoid topics that may, for students, pit social and epistemic goods against each other. If this is a viable option, teachers could bypass the concern outlined in this section altogether and continue promoting open-mindedness with regard to less sensitive topics.

I concede, it does appear that teachers can, to an extent, evade the concern I have outlined by strategically designing curricula to steer clear of sensitive topics. However, this solution has certain limitations that we should acknowledge. First, circumventing sensitive topics may not always be possible without significantly compromising the integrity of course curriculum. For instance, imagine a theology course focusing on Christianity. The doctrine of the Trinity, which holds that God is three persons in one, is a cornerstone of mainline Catholic and Protestant theology. However, this doctrine is not universally accepted across all Christian denominations; Unitarians notably deny it. A thorough exploration of Christian theology necessitates examining such doctrinal divergences. But encouraging sympathetic, open-minded scrutiny may lead some students, who mainly accept Trinitarianism based on tradition rather than personal analysis, to question or even reject it. And this rejection could result in tension with their particular religious community. To avoid this risk, the instructor could omit Trinitarianism from the course; however, this seems infeasible given its prominence in the theology under study. This is just one example, but I do not believe that similar examples are rare. Therefore, while strategic curriculum design may help alleviate the concern I have outlined in part, I’m skeptical that it can reliably negate it in its entirety.

Second, even in cases where avoiding sensitive topics is viable in principle, I would worry that this policy could impose a substantial burden on instructors in practice. It might prove challenging for instructors to keep track of which topics are deemed sensitive for different groups of students. It is somewhat dissatisfying to ask instructors in the classroom to burden themselves with this potentially tedious responsibility on top of the educational responsibilities they already bear. In sum, I maintain some skepticism that the concern detailed in this section is avoidable by strategically designing curricula to avoid of sensitive topics.

**External barriers to teaching open-mindedness**

My final concern is that educators, particularly at universities, often face certain non-ideal conditions that may make it difficult for them to successfully cultivate open-mindedness in students. In particular, empirical data show that the political demographics of professors at U.S. universities are heavily skewed to the left, so much so that it is not uncommon for departments in the humanities and social sciences to lack a faculty member with rightwing views (Gross and Fosse, 2012; Langbert 2018; Langbert, Quain, and Klein, 2016; Shields and Dunn, 2016). This is a problem because in order to foster open-mindedness among students, universities must provide students with opportunities to habituate open-mindedness. However, if faculty overwhelmingly hold left-leaning political views, the best students can expect from their professors is to play devil’s advocate on behalf of rightwing perspectives. But engaging with a devil’s advocate, I shall argue, is at least a worse form of practice for open-mindedness than engaging with a genuine advocate, and may even be counterproductive. Note that this concern pertains to ‘students’ in their capacity as recipients of instruction within real-world education institutions, which are often subject to non-ideal conditions.

My argument begins with the uncontroversial premise that a virtue, whether moral or intellectual, is a trait that is not innate, but rather is acquired through a process of habituation. One habituates a virtue by encountering opportunities to express it and repeatedly choosing to do so, until it becomes second nature. This implies that certain external conditions, which are not entirely under one’s control, are necessary for cultivating virtue, and virtue is unattainable if these conditions don’t obtain. A person who lives in extreme poverty may never encounter any opportunities to act generously, and without such opportunities, they cannot habituate generosity. Likewise, a person who always lives in perfect safety may never have the chance to habituate courage; someone who lives on a desert island may never have the chance to habituate compassion or justice; and so on.

This principle also applies to intellectual virtues. Intellectual virtues are cultivated through habituation, but if opportunities for habituation don’t present themselves—if the external conditions aren’t right—habituation can’t occur. It follows that to cultivate an open mind, one must encounter opportunities to exercise open-mindedness, but whether these opportunities arise is not entirely up to you. If you live in epistemic isolation, for example, or if you (unwittingly) spend your whole life in an ideological echo chamber, you cannot cultivate open-mindedness.

We shouldn’t think of these external conditions as binary. Rather, they may obtain in different degrees, so as to be partly present or partly absent. For example, a person may encounter some opportunities to practice a virtue, but if these opportunities are infrequent or not of good quality, the person will not be able to habituate the virtue to its full potential.

Given the partial dependence of virtue cultivation on external conditions, it follows that the cultivation of open-mindedness in students also partly depends on external conditions. In other words, how effectively educators can foster open-mindedness in students partly depends on the quantity and quality of opportunities they can provide for students to practice being open-minded.

This is significant because, I argue, universities face certain external circumstances that inhibit their ability to supply students with opportunities to habituate open-mindedness, particularly as it regards contrary political opinions. Empirical data show a pronounced leftward lean in the political views of college professors. Moreover, a significant fraction of departments have zero professors who hold rightwing views (Gross and Fosse, 2012; Langbert, 2018; Langbert, Quain, and Klein, 2016; Shields and Dunn, 2016).

Most illustratively, Mitchell Langbert et al (2016) examined the voter registration of 7,243 professors at forty universities that were ranked in the top sixty by the *U.S. News* report,and discovered that the average ratio of Democrat to Republican professors was 11.5:1. The individual ratios for the five specific fields under examination were: Economics 4.5:1, History 33.5:1, Journalism/Communications 20.0:1, Law 8.6:1, and Psychology 17.4:1. Similarly, Langbert (2018) examined the voter registration of professors at fifty-one of the sixty-six top ranked liberal arts colleges and discovered a Democrat to Republican ratio of 10.4:1, and also discovered that ‘39 percent of the colleges in [the] sample are Republican free—having zero republicans (186).’

Why would the political views of faculty being skewed limit the opportunities of students to habituate open-mindedness? The answer is twofold: (1) On average, faculty views are so heavily skewed that opportunities for students to engage with a genuine advocate of rightwing views are virtually non-existent. Therefore, the best students can expect is for their professors to play devil’s advocate on behalf of right-leaning views. (2) When seeking to habituate open-mindedness, engaging with a devil’s advocate is at least inferior to engaging with a genuine opponent (*weaker claim*), and it could also be argued that engaging with a devil’s advocate is simply inadequate, or even counterproductive (*stronger claim*).

In defense of the weaker claim, it is generally true that a genuine opponent, being both emotionally invested in their views and more familiar with the nuances and subtleties involved, is better able to represent a view than a devil’s advocate. This is a central theme in Mill’s defense of free inquiry in *On Liberty*, and Mill repeatedly suggests that genuine opposition is superior to devil’s advocacy (see Mill, 1978: 20, 35, 36, and 43). For instance, while arguing that it is irrational to reject a view without knowing the reasons presented by its supporters, Mill writes,

Nor is it sufficient that he should hear the arguments of adversaries from his own teachers, presented as they state them, and accompanied by what they offer as refutations. That is not the way to do justice to the arguments or to bring them into real contact with his own mind. He must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them, who defend them in earnest and do their very utmost for them (1978: 35).

If we accept Mill’s general maxim that genuine advocates can represent their views better than devil’s advocates, then it follows that faculty views being heavily skewed to the left will at least *water down* students’ opportunities to habituate open-mindedness. At best, professors can play devil’s advocate on behalf of rightwing views but, lacking both emotional investment in them and familiarity with their nuances and subtleties, the professors won’t be able to present them to students with full force. But of course we may be tempted to concede that devil’s advocacy is better than nothing.

Now consider the stronger claim that engaging with a devil’s advocate is simply inadequate to the task of habituating open-mindedness and possibly counterproductive. We noted in section two that as a matter of definition, to consider a contrary view ‘open-mindedly’ is to consider it sympathetically or ‘from the inside,’ in Wayne Riggs’ (2018) memorable verbiage. The basic reason for this definitional proviso is that the point of being open-minded is to increase one’s chances of accessing epistemic goods, such as truth or knowledge, and ridding one’s mind of their opposites. Given the epistemic fallibility of humans, it is always likely that some of your beliefs are flawed. So, sympathetically hearing out other perspectives can reveal errors or gaps in one’s knowledge. In contrast, *merely* hearing out an opponent—considering their perspective ‘from the outside’ without actually considering that they could be right—is not sufficient, as it is apt to lead to simply rationalizing one’s original position. Going through life rationalizing one’s original views is tantamount to being closed-minded.

This is significant because when one engages a devil’s advocate, there is no genuine opposing perspective to which to apply sympathy, as the reasons and arguments being presented are not sincere. Given this, it is a question whether *sympathetic* consideration can take place. In other words, I am worried that ‘merely hearing out a view’ is inherent in the notion of ‘engaging with a devil’s advocate.’ Crucially, this is a problem *even if* the reasons and arguments presented by the devil’s advocate are (in defiance of Mill’s general maxim) equally strong and persuasive as those that a genuine opponent would present. One could merely hear out the strongest case for a view that has ever been devised, and this would still not necessarily count as open-minded consideration.

This worry is supported by empirical research, most notably Nemeth, Brown, and Rogers (2001). Charlan Nemeth et al studied the effect of different forms of devil’s advocacy and authentic dissent on group deliberation. They examined three types of devil’s advocacy: *consistent advocacy*, where the views of the devil’s advocate (DA) align with the position they are advocating for; *inconsistent advocacy*, where the DA’s views do not align with the position; and *ambiguous advocacy*, where the DA’s authentic views are unknown to the group. The study found that, while groups that included a DA generated more numerous thoughts in discussion compared to control groups, groups that engaged with an authentic dissenter generated both more numerous *and* higher-quality thoughts, even if theDA was consistent. However, the authors consider their ‘most important finding’ to be that

the results also showed a negative, unintended consequence of devil’s advocacy. The DA stimulated significantly more thoughts in support of the initial position. Thus, subjects appeared to generate new ideas *aimed at cognitive bolstering their initial viewpoint* [emphasis added] but they did not generate thoughts regarding other positions (2001: 708).

In other words, subjects who interacted with a DA were more likely to simply rationalize their initial view. Even when a consistent DA was present, the group experienced ‘perceptions of stimulation’ but, nevertheless, ‘did not [produce] more solutions or more quality solutions than the Control,’ and the quality of discussion stimulated by the consistent DA was found to be ‘significantly less than the Authentic Minority and equivalent to the Control.’

This raises the question of why an authentic dissenter would stimulate better discussion from subjects than a consistent DA. The authors speculate that

people may argue differently with a person who authentically dissents rather than one who is role-playing her position. For one thing, one cannot expect to ‘persuade’ a person who is role-playing as they cannot change their position. Additionally, one is not having an authentic debate. The potential ‘give and take’, of arguments and counter-arguments both expressed and unexpressed would seem to be more difficult when one is interacting with a devil’s advocate. The level of engagement may be less. It is even possible that one starts to think of the interaction as a ‘debate’ rather than as a discussion aimed at elucidating the best position. In other words, one might start to role-play in response to the role-playing devil’s advocate (2001: 718).

In other words, simply being aware that the DA is playing a role, even if their views align with the role, is enough to prevent the subject from engaging in *sympathetic* consideration. This supports my foregoing claim that ‘*merely* hearing out a view’ may be built into the notion of ‘engaging with a devil’s advocate.’ Open-minded consideration is an inherently sympathetic activity, but with a devil’s advocate, there is no genuine perspective to which to apply sympathy. Therefore, this will represent a barrier to truly engaging in open-minded consideration.

The upshot is this. If the goal of the literature on open-mindedness is to provide educators with a practical model for use in real classrooms, it is important to address the potential non-idealness of these classrooms. That is, educators may face external circumstances that are not under their direct control and that interfere with their ability to provide students with opportunities to habituate open-mindedness. If these external circumstances cannot be directly addressed, educators must adapt and find ways to teach open-mindedness in spite of them. However, currently in the literature, guidance on how to do this is missing.

Before concluding this section, I want to address the objection that the concern I have detailed here may be less grave than I have portrayed. Below, I will consider three variations of this objection and offer brief replies. These replies, I believe, will reaffirm the gravity of the concern in question. However, it’s possible that certain objections may not have been entirely resolved to every reader’s satisfaction. I’m amenable to this possibility, and I acknowledge that the concern I have detailed here is not a definitive objection against the pursuit of open-minded pedagogy. Indeed, as stated in the introduction, the overarching purpose of this paper is to outline certain overlooked considerations and *also* propose practical remedies (which will be presented in the following section). Therefore, the inclusion of the following objections and replies aims to emphasize that the concern I have detailed, while perhaps not fatal, is worthy of serious consideration.

*Objection 1:* I have argued that a lack of ideological diversity among faculty may curtail students’ opportunities to cultivate open-mindedness, but perhaps it is sufficient for there to be ideological diversity among *students*. On this view, instructors could simply facilitate neutral classroom discussions, thereby enabling students to engage in sympathetic consideration with each other.

*Reply:* Relying solely on student diversity is better than nothing, but still less than ideal. I maintain that the quality (not just the quantity) of available opportunities for open-minded engagement significantly impacts one’s prospects for cultivating the virtue. Thus, one could argue, engaging with an authentic dissenter is preferable to engaging with a devil’s advocate insofar as it offers a higher-quality form of practice for open-mindedness. Correlatively, it seems to me that professors are generally better than students at articulating and defending their views. This superior proficiency is due to factors such as subject-matter expertise, greater familiarity with the spectrum of viewpoints within their respective fields, and honed skills in presenting arguments and fielding objections. Consequently, students engaging with professors who are genuine dissenters represents a higher-quality form of open-mindedness practice; for any given stance, these professors are generally better able to present the relevant arguments ‘in earnest and do their very utmost for them,’ to recall Mill’s words. Therefore, if our goal is to maximize the quality of opportunities for students to practice open-mindedness, ideological diversity among professors is more desirable than ideological diversity among students.

*Objection 2:* What if students enter college with narrow, parochial views? Moral and political history has seen a huge range of ideas from diverse cultures and eras, many of which are not represented in the contemporary American left-to-right spectrum. As such, even politically engaged students are unlikely to be acquainted with these ideas. In light of this, one may argue that instructors can promote open-mindedness simply by offering a cosmopolitan curriculum that features views from diverse cultures and eras. On this view, ideological diversity among faculty seems unnecessary.

*Reply:* While a cosmopolitan curriculum is valuable in broadening students’ horizons, I maintain some skepticism whether it develops their capacity to sympathetically engage with contemporary political rivals in their home jurisdiction. Open-mindedness is frequently upheld as a key virtue in liberal democracies, where citizens have diverse conceptions of the good (see for example Riggs, 2010; Spiegel, 2012). Core to the virtue, I believe, is the capacity to sympathetically engage with immediate (as opposed to distant or abstract) opponents. Undoubtedly, open-mindedness includes sympathetic engagement with ideas from diverse cultures and eras, even if these ideas won’t directly influence one’s practical political reasonings regarding one’s own society. For example, it’s valuable for students to explore the model of ancient Athenian democracy, where citizens directly participate in governance and policy making. Exploring this foreign, unfamiliar model can broaden students’ knowledge and encourage them to view democracy from a fresh angle.

But does this directly exercise their ability to engage sympathetically with contemporary rivals? It’s relatively easy to be open-minded towards an Athenian democrat; one doesn’t have to compete against an Athenian democrat voting bloc during elections, co-exist in the same neighborhood, or debate them on social media. In contrast, practicing open-mindedness towards one’s day-to-day adversaries on palpable issues such as abortion, immigration, transgender rights, racial inequality, or gun control is likely to stir up discomfort and the temptation to be partial. This is precisely where open-mindedness is critical. Yet I am skeptical whether students engaging with a cosmopolitan set of ideas will directly develop this core aspect of the virtue.

*Objection 3:* If the environment of universities is unsuitable to teaching for open-mindedness, what about the environment at the primary and secondary levels? Unlike university faculty, instructors at primary and secondary schools do not display a lack ideological diversity. Consequently, they do not encounter the same environmental challenges to teaching for open-mindedness as their counterparts in higher education. Therefore, a possible solution would be to focus our efforts on fostering open-mindedness within primary and secondary education institutions.

*Reply:* This objection rightly notes that the concern outlined in this section does not apply to primary or secondary schools. But I’m not confident that its proposal satisfactorily addresses the concern at hand. The mainstream literature on open-mindedness seems to implicitly agree on the importance and desirability of teaching for open-mindedness in higher education. Presumably, avoiding teaching for open-mindedness in higher education institutions would be viewed unfavorably by scholars in this field. Perhaps we ought to redouble our efforts to promote intellectual virtue in primary and secondary schools. But suggesting that these efforts could substitute for the promotion of intellectual virtue in higher education is, I believe, unlikely to garner much support among education scholars.

**Practical recommendations**

So far, I have argued that educators should be cautious about encouraging students to emulate current models of open-mindedness. This is due to the fact that (1) students may lack the intellectual character to avoid the known risks of open-mindedness, (2) students who exercise open-mindedness may incur social costs that cannot be compensated for by epistemic goods, and (3) educators, particularly at universities, may face certain non-ideal conditions that may make it difficult for them to successfully cultivate open-mindedness in students. But I have also argued that developing the intellectual character of students in general and guiding them towards open-mindedness in particular is a legitimate and noble educational goal. In this section, let me offer some preliminary and broad suggestions on how future research could potentially reconcile these two claims.

In response to concern (1), I believe it is obvious that teaching any skill, ability, or virtue often requires taking a gradual approach. It is educational common sense that knowledge and abilities should be transmitted to students in a way that takes into account their current level of ability. Students are epistemic pilgrims in need of a guide, and guiding them often means walking them through a series of incremental steps. They must learn ‘the basics,’ and then they can graduate to intermediate knowledge and abilities, and only then, once the student has mastered these intermediary steps, can the teacher proceed to impart to them the knowledge and abilities suitable for *ideal* agents.

For illustration, imagine a karate sensei who does not expect white belts to emulate black belts. The sensei may encourage students to observe black belts with admiration and try to appreciate the high level of skill they possess. And this serves to motivate the student to train and study. Nevertheless, as a white belt, the student must first be taught a series of ‘noble lies,’ strict and codifiable rules that apply to most situations: ‘Always stand with your dominant foot forward’; ‘Never put your hands down’; ‘Don’t kick above your waist’; etc. But black belts don’t always follow these rules. They have the skill and practical sense and vision to know when a strict rule, though typically correct, should be broken in light of the circumstances. The goal is for the white belt to gain this ability to make reliable judgment calls as well. But first they must master the noble lies, necessary intermediaries on the path to higher learning and knowledge.

Similarly, cultivating the virtue of open-mindedness may be a gradual process, where one goes through beginner and intermediate stages on one’s way to becoming truly open-minded. One of the intermediate skills that must be acquired is the ability to simply hear out contrary views without being overwhelmed by negative emotions, in order to have a civil and respectful discussion. Throughout this paper, I have assumed that giving an opposing view an open-minded hearing is distinct from giving it a mere hearing. And this distinction definitely holds, as they are different things. However, we should also acknowledge the relationship between them. Giving an opponent a mere hearing is not enough to be open-minded, but it is a necessary condition. I can’t imagine a case in which an individual fails to give a mere hearing to an opponent and still manages to open their mind. If the risk inherent in practicing true open-mindedness stems from the willingness to change one’s mind, and if the ability to merely hear out contrary views at least approaches true open-mindedness but doesn’t go all the way, it follows that educators might teach students how to master the intermediate task of giving contrary views a mere hearing. This would secure the benefit of putting students on the path to open-mindedness while avoiding encouraging them to fully open their minds, which they lack the intellectual maturity to do safely.

In response to concern (2), my answer is similar. The educator must acknowledge the obvious fact that open-mindedness is a trait of individuals and individuals occupy different standpoints. The ultimate motivation behind opening oneself to other standpoints is to increase one’s stock of epistemic goods, either by recognizing flaws or errors in one’s current beliefs or by confirming that one’s beliefs withstand scrutiny from opponents. However, even the ideal agent doesn’t always choose to initiate open-minded inquiry in every situation, as epistemic goods don’t always reign supreme. Bertrand Russell (1950) notes that the Dalai Lama and the Pope, if they cross paths, should not be open to each other’s religious views; this would conflict with other important considerations in their particular circumstances. Russell similarly notes that if a young person is uncertain whether a career in law or medicine would make them happier, and ultimately settles on law school, they should not continue to be open-minded about this decision; the potential epistemic benefits of reconsideration would not compensate for the paralyzing distractions it would immediately inflict on their current studies, focus, and motivation. We should recognize Russell’s general point that an individual’s particular life circumstances determine whether, all things considered, open-minded inquiry into a particular question is appropriate; if open inquiry has the potential to jeopardize one’s standing in a community that grants one access to cherished social resources, the decision must be prudently weighed. But students may lack the intellectual maturity to conduct these delicate, all-things-considered life assessments. And educators, not occupying their particular standpoint, can’t do it for them.

One way out of this dilemma is for educators to simply expose students to contrary religious, moral, and political perspectives without reservation, but instead of encouraging students to consider these open-mindedly, coach students to develop the intermediate ability of giving contrary views a mere hearing without getting angry or upset and to maintain civil discourse. This is a crucial step on the path to true open-mindedness; therefore, fostering this ability in students will help them inch closer to intellectual virtue without nudging them to confront all-things-considered life assessments that they aren’t ready for.

It is noteworthy that my solution to the present dilemma resembles Harry Brighouse’s (1998) solution to a dilemma concerning civic education. Brighouse notes that liberals often argue that states have a right to mandate education institutions to instill certain liberal virtues (e.g. tolerance) and values (e.g. autonomy) in students, as this maintains the conditions that make liberal democracy possible. Yet, says Brighouse, this threatens to undermine liberal legitimacy insofar as it portrays states as manipulatively conditioning students to endorse a society founded on liberal principles prior to obtaining their autonomous consent.

As a solution, Brighouse proposes that states should pursue ‘autonomy-facilitating education,’ equipping students with the foundational knowledge and skills for autonomy, enabling them to embrace it if they choose. Here, states don’t have a right to maintain favorable conditions for liberalism. Rather, they are *obligated* to facilitate autonomy in students, for two reasons: first, all citizens need the basic tools of rational evaluation to determine how to live well by their own judgment, and second, the state must enable people to live well, or else it treats citizens unjustly. So, to do justice by citizens, states must impart autonomy-related knowledge and skills to students. This includes training students in argument and analysis, exposing them to a diverse range of ethical and religious perspectives, and encouraging them to explore personal narratives of reasoned conversion to, or deconversion from, such positions. This approach avoids conditioning students to endorse civic virtues like respect or tolerance, yet still imparts to them the prerequisite abilities to cultivate these virtues voluntarily. In Brighouse’s words:

Here children are taught that diversity is a fact, but they are not taught that it is desirable. Correlatively they are not taught sympathetically to address views about the good life other than their own; only about such views, and how to engage them seriously... Though not value-free, these recommendations favor knowledge and skills over virtue. This is because the recommendation is for autonomy-*facilitating* rather than autonomy-*promoting* education... The education does not try to *ensure* that students employ autonomy in their lives... Rather it aims to *enable* them to live autonomously should they wish to... The argument suggests that, other things being equal, people’s lives go better when they deploy the skills associated with autonomy, but does not yield any obligation to persuade them to deploy them: autonomy must be facilitated, not necessarily promoted (1998: 733-734).

In a similar spirit, my proposal is that instructors should refrain from actively *promoting* students to embrace the virtue of open-mindedness. Instead, they should *facilitate* open-mindedness by focusing on equipping students with a fundamental, prerequisite skill necessary to pursue the virtue voluntarily: the ability to hear out opposing views with equanimity. This *enables* them to, but does not *ensure* that they will, embrace open-mindedness.

Finally, as it regards the concern that universities may face external conditions that inhibit their ability to provide students with quality opportunities to habituate open-mindedness, the problem is one of adapting to non-ideal external circumstances about which the educator in the classroom, acting alone, can do nothing. In fact, it is unclear how *collective* action could address the heavy leftward tilt of professors’ political views. Neil Gross and Ethan Fosse (2012) identify several factors that contribute to the current state of affairs, and each seems to me to simply lie beyond the realm of intentional human manipulation.1 For example, the authors identify the following factor:

[Our] theory would explain the greater prevalence of professors with left/liberal views at elite institutions in part by noting that elite schools are under strong pressures to hire scholars who are not only productive, but will also be seen by their peers and other constituencies as leading academicians who embody the qualities and virtues definitive of the academic role. To the extent that this role has been socially defined as tied to liberal politics, elite institutions—simply in offering positions to scholars who are seen as exemplary—will end up with a more liberal professorial workforce (2012: 159).

In other words, Gross and Fosse have just described a *collective action problem*, a problem the solving of which would require individuals to behave instrumentally irrationally (i.e. disregard their incentives, accept a high personal cost, and still most likely see zero impact).

Given professorial political bias is here to stay, how can educators in the classroom adapt? I have no definitive answer; my narrow purpose is to reconcile my claim that ‘Educators should be tactical about teaching open-mindedness’ with my other claim that ‘It is a legitimate and noble educational goal to develop the intellectual character of students and, in particular, foster open-mindedness among them.’ One path to reconciliation is to embrace devil’s advocacy. Obviously, I’ve argued that devil’s advocacy is a non-ideal form of practice for open-mindedness and carries with it counterproductive potential. Nevertheless, educators can mitigate the risks by simply keeping students informed about them. Additionally, providing students with opportunities to engage with a devil’s advocate *can* enable them to cultivate the ability to merely hear out contrary views, and this is a small but necessary step towards true open-mindedness.

**Conclusion**

Much of the literature on open-mindedness has an educational orientation, with many contributors explicitly asserting that they aim to propose models of the virtue suitable for practical use in real classrooms. Yet this literature largely overlooks certain risks that may be implied in promoting these models for emulation among students.

To remedy this gap, I have sought to draw attention to three overlooked risks: (1) students may lack the mature intellectual character needed to safeguard against the risks of open-mindedness already documented in the literature, (2) students who exercise open-mindedness may incur social costs for which epistemic goods cannot compensate, and (3) educators, specifically in university settings, may face non-ideal conditions that constrain their ability to effectively cultivate open-mindedness in students.

Each of these concerns revolves around ‘students’ broadly defined as recipients of instruction within education institutions. However, each pertains to a distinct facet of studenthood. The first concern regards students in their capacity as intellectual virtue apprentices, perhaps seeking but not yet possessing the full range of the virtues. The second concern regards students in their capacity as agents who must weigh the occasional tradeoffs between social and epistemic goods, but being relatively young and inexperienced, they may be unready to navigate this terrain. The third concern regards students in their capacity as recipients of instruction within *real­-world* education institutions, which are frequently subject to non-ideal conditions, to which students are exposed.

Taken together, these concerns should, I believe, convince us to approach teaching for open-mindedness with great caution. But we should not avoid it altogether. On the contrary, I have offered preliminary and broad suggestions on how instructors can attune their pedagogical approach to mitigate the concerns in question. The unifying theme of these suggestions is: *focus on equipping students with the ability to merely hear out contrary views with equanimity.*

Following this strategy circumvents concern (1) by equipping students to gradually approach full-blooded open-mindedness without exposing them to the risk of retrogressive revision. It acknowledges their status as intellectual virtue apprentices who, not yet possessing the full range of the virtues, would otherwise be susceptible to this risk. Regarding (2), the emphasis on imparting to students the skill of merely hearing out views with equanimity avoids pushing them towards all-things-considered life assessments that they may not be ready to handle. In other words, this strategy still allows students to inch closer to genuine open-mindedness, but without risking confrontation with momentous life choices. Finally, regarding the issue of political bias among university faculty, this strategy recommends that instructors embrace devil’s advocacy in the classroom. This allows students to practice engaging seriously, albeit not sympathetically, with opposing views. Of course, devil’s advocacy does have counterproductive potential. But this need not worry us because instructors can keep students informed about this potential.

Undoubtedly, possessing the ability to merely hear out contrary views with equanimity is not sufficient to call oneself open-minded. Genuine open-mindedness goes beyond this; it involves giving contrary views *sympathetic* consideration, entertaining the possibility that they may really possess truth or insight superior to one’s own views. Nevertheless, merely hearing out contrary views while maintaining equanimity and fostering civil discourse is a necessary skill that one must acquire on the path to becoming genuinely open-minded. Therefore, if instructors can impart this basic skill to students, it will facilitate their journey towards genuine open-mindedness.

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1. ‘Using data pooled from the [General Social Survey] from 1974 to 2008, we found that our hypothesized predictors accounted for a large amount—approximately 43%—of the difference in political views between professors and non-professors. In particular, we found that professors are more liberal than other Americans because a higher proportion have advanced educational credentials, exhibit a disparity between their levels of education and income, have distinctive religious profiles, and express tolerance for controversial ideas (Gross and Fosse 2012: 159-160).’

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