"The Real Morality of Public Discussion": From Civility to Intellectual Virtue

Jason Baehr | Professor of Philosophy

Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles

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"While it is not the business of education to prove every statement made ... it is its business to cultivate _deep-seated and effective habits_ of discriminating tested beliefs from mere assertions, guesses, and opinions; to develop a lively, sincere, and open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded ... No matter how much an individual knows as a matter of hearsay and information, if he has not _attitudes and habits_ of this sort, he is not intellectually educated." (John Dewey _How We Think_, 1910)
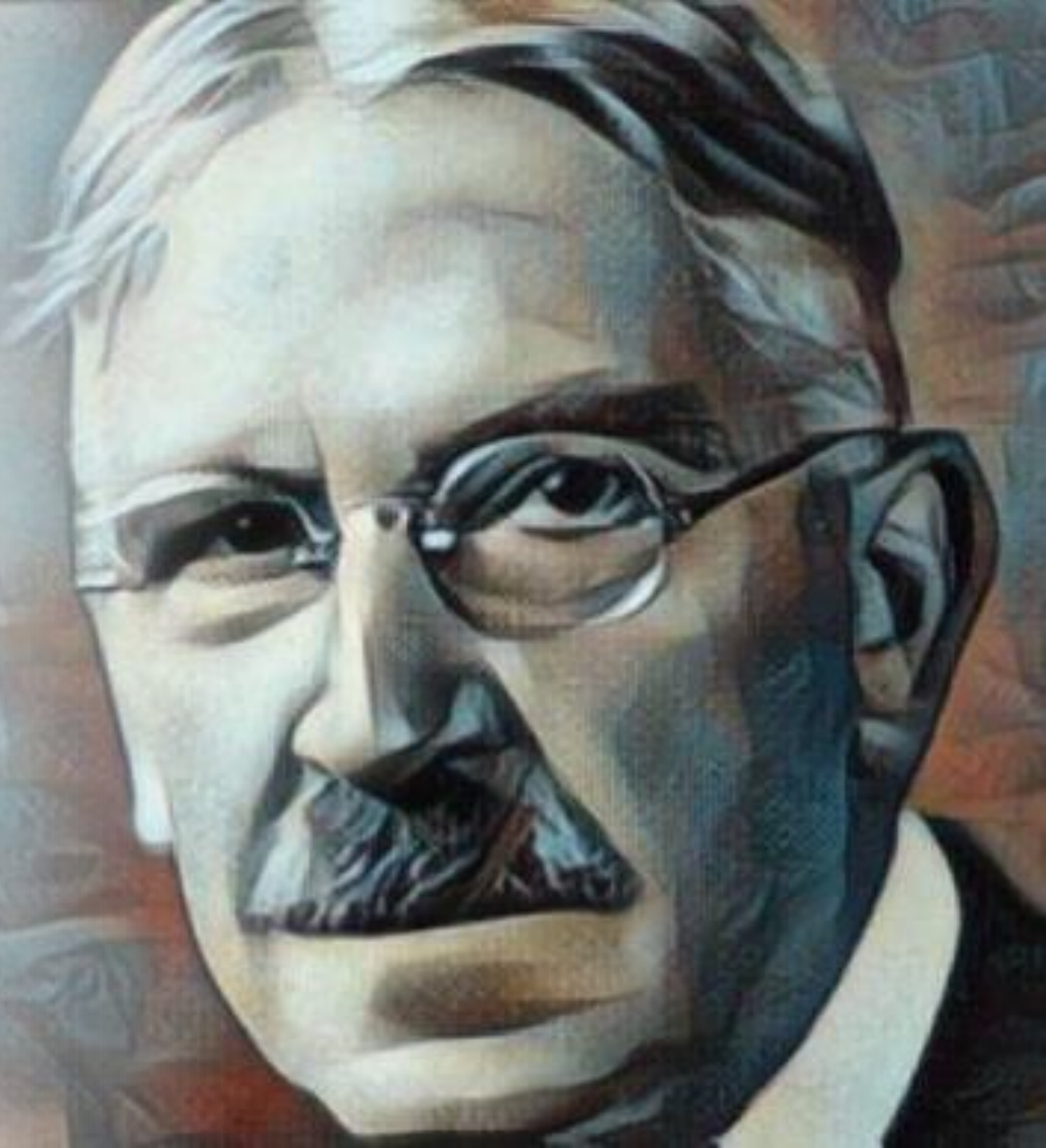
- What exactly is Dewey getting at? What are the relevant "attitudes and habits"? Is there a list? A theoretical model?

- What might it look like to educate – or more precisely to *teach* – in light of this ideal?
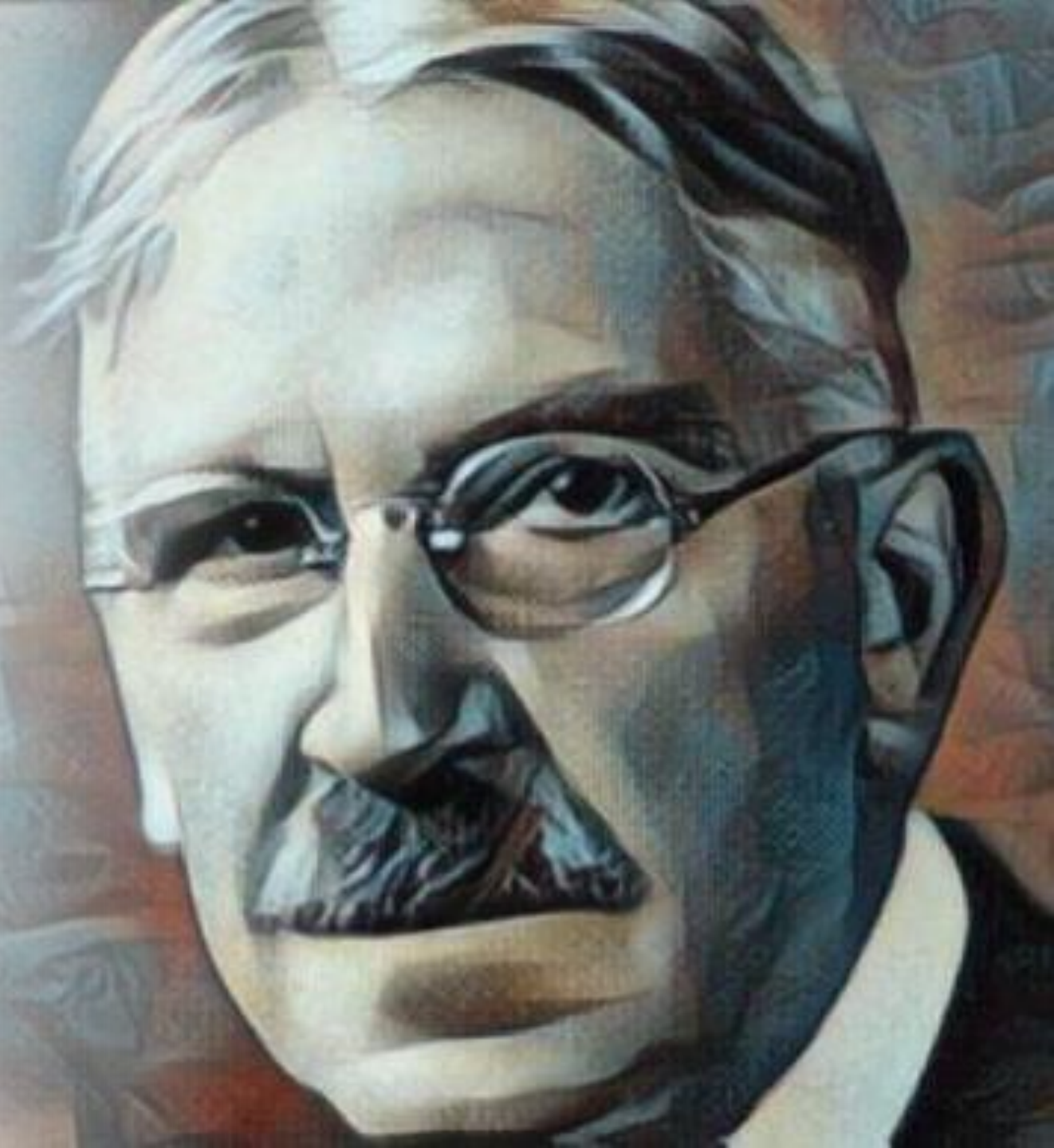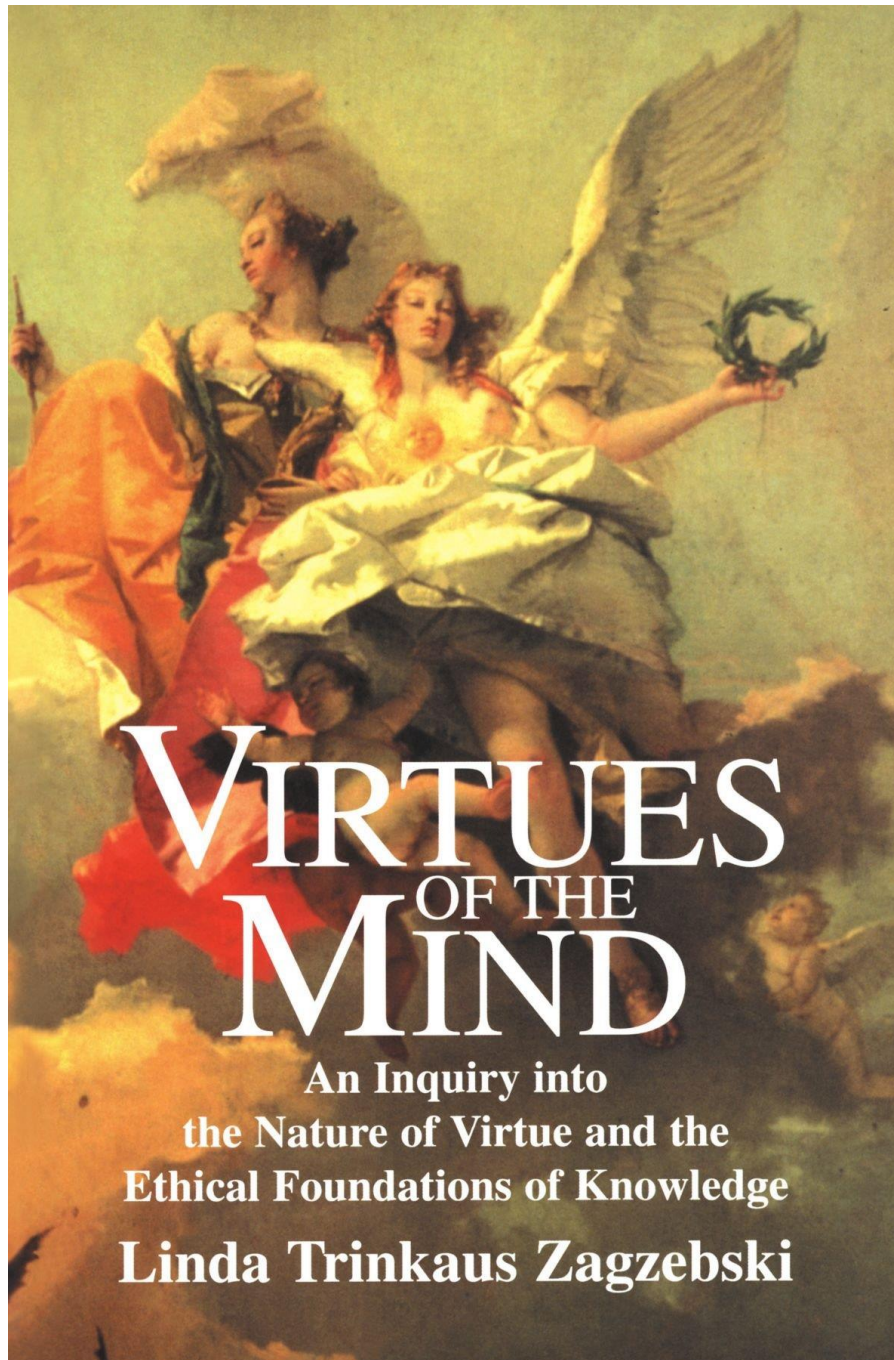
Intellectual virtues

- The personal qualities or character attributes of good or responsible thinkers, learners, or inquirers (Zagzebski 1996).

- "[T]he qualities a truth-desiring person ... would want to have" (Montmarquet 1993: 30).

Intellectual virtues and social inquiry

- Intellectual virtues bear on individual *and social* inquiry.

- Some familiar obstacles to social inquiry: *preclusion* and *pollution*.

- A familiar remedy: civility.

- Intellectual virtues as a "thicker" and more comprehensive remedy: (1) their focus is epistemic, not (narrowly) moral or ethical; (2) they're several and diverse.

"The real morality of public discussion"

"He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that ... Nor is it enough that he should hear the arguments of adversaries from his own teachers ... That is not the way to do justice to the arguments, or 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. He must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form; he must feel the whole force of the difficulty which the true view of the subject has to encounter and dispose of; else he will never really possess himself of the portion of truth which meets and removes that difficulty." (J.S. Mill, *On Liberty,* Ch. 2)

➤ Open-mindedness, fair-mindedness, curiosity, and *intellectual* thoroughness, tenacity, patience, courage, honesty, integrity, charity, and humility.

ON LIBERTY
John Stuart Mill
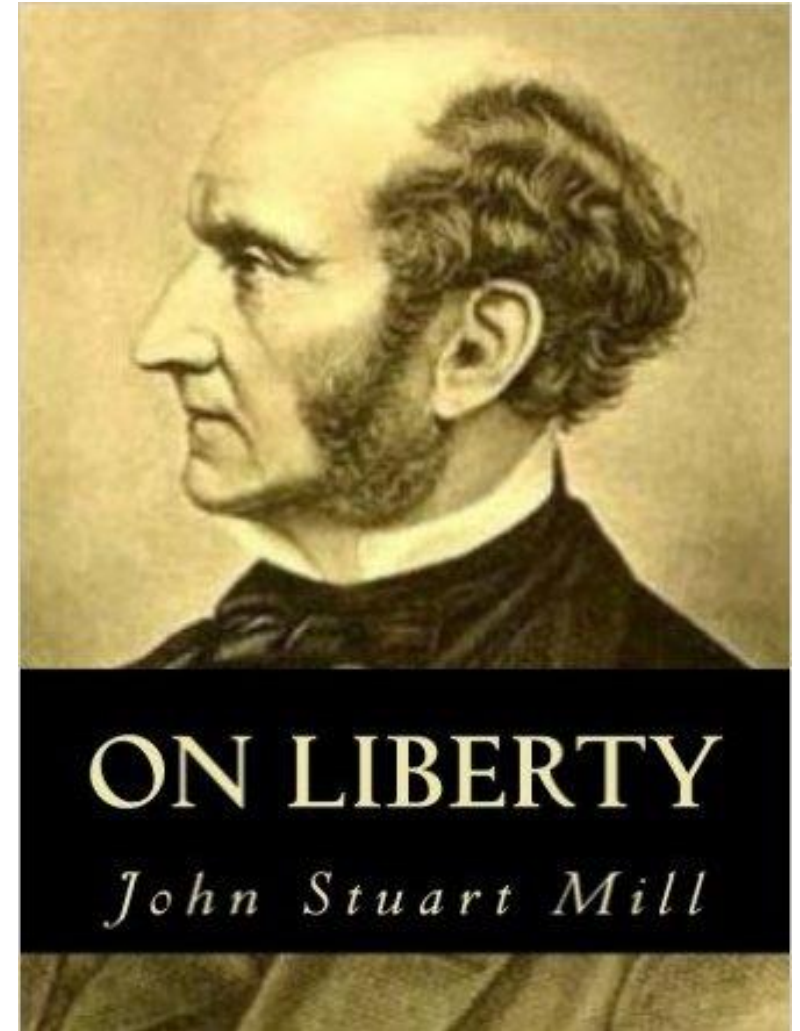
Intellectual virtue formation as an educational aim

What, if anything, can I do to encourage my students' development of intellectual virtues?

Bad news

- Are there steps we can take to ensure that most of our students leave our courses or university as *paragons* of intellectual virtue? *No*.

- Is there a single and easy pedagogical trick or intervention I can use to impact the intellectual character of my students? *No*.

Good news

- Is there anything I can do to support my students' development of intellectual virtues? *Yes*.

- Can I reasonably expect these efforts to help a significant number of my students make "meaningful progress" along one or more dimensions of at least a limited number of intellectual virtues? *I think so*.

Good news

- Teaching for intellectual virtues isn't (primarily) something we do *over and above* teaching for knowledge and skills.

- It's something most of us are *already* doing at least to some extent.

Pedagogical Practices

1. Engineering opportunities for practice

- Each intellectual virtue has a characteristic *activity* or *skill*.

- These skills are cultivated (partly) through *practice*.

> "We become builders by building, and lyre-players by playing the lyre. So too we become just by doing just actions, temperate by temperate actions, and courageous by courageous actions." – Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics,* Bk. 2

Practicing curiosity

- "Let's pause for a moment. What does this make you wonder?"

- End-of-class questions/wonders

- Reverse quizzes

- Introducing puzzles or paradoxes

- Thinking routines*: "Agree-Disagree-Wonder" or "Word-Phrase-Sentence-Wonder"

*See Ron Ritchhart *et al, Making Thinking Visible* (2011) and Project Zero's Thinking Routine Toolbox (https://pz.harvard.edu)

1. Engineering opportunities for practice

- What are my target virtues?

- What does or would it look like for *my* students in *my* courses to manifest the activity or competences characteristic of these virtues?

- In what ways do I *already* provide my students with opportunities to practice these competences?

- How could I *improve* upon or *add* to these opportunities?

2. Creating a supportive environment

- What are my stated (and implied) *values* and *expectations* as an instructor?

- Do the *norms* and *protocols* in my classes encourage (or discourage) the practice of intellectual virtues?

- What kind of *posture* do I tend to adopt toward my students?

3. Authentic Modeling

- The value of modeling intellectual virtues:
  - ➢ Reinforcement
  - ➢ Instruction
  - ➢ Motivation
- Do I model the intellectual virtues I'd like to develop?

Modeling intellectual humility

"It was the first time that I could remember a teacher saying 'I don't know,' and this man was one of the leading scholars in the world … From then on I began to feel that it was alright not to know. I no longer had to pretend to know. From then on I began to think things through. I wanted to know not what someone else thought, but what I thought. I realized it was ok to be wrong for a time while searching for the truth. Of course this was just the beginning of the journey, but it had begun. The fact that I still vividly remember these moments some 50 years later shows how powerful these moments were." – Robert Lawton, S.J., 14th President of Loyola Marymount University

Two final notes

1. Value and meaning in the intelligent and competent *pursuit* of worthy educational aims

2. The added value of collaboration and institutional commitment

For further reading/reflection

Curiosity

Carefulness

Autonomy

Humility

Self-confidence

Honesty

Perseverance

Courage

Open-mindedness

Firmness

Fair-mindedness

Charity