

READING RYDER THROUGH OPEN-MINDEDNESS

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ABSTRACT: Considered by epistemologists of virtue as an agent's disposition that leads us to true knowledge, open-mindedness can also be understood as a virtue linked to an ontological and epistemological interpretation as well as an ethical and political normative proposal. Analyzing Ryder's work through its relationship with open-mindedness allows us to enrich a theory that considers this virtue as a core philosophical concept. Furthermore, it elucidates Ryder's philosophy by showing some of its implications. This paper details relevant aspects of the relation between open-mindedness as virtue and Ryder's pragmatic naturalism.

Keywords: Open-mindedness, relational ontology, fallibilism, liberalism, democracy

Characterization of Open-mindedness as a Virtue

In the framework of a theory that looks to increase the philosophical relevance of open-mindedness as a virtue,¹ we need a precise characterization of what open-mindedness means. In order to obtain a characterization, instead of a definition, we have selected from the academic literature various, although complementary, traits.

1. Impartiality and alterity.² A first approach to open-mindedness is close to the way it is usually used in colloquial language. According to this, as an adjective it applies to those who are able to put aside their own points of view and to attend to others' perspectives in the most impartial way possible. In Hare's definition, it "is widely held that open-mindedness involves a willingness to form and review one's views as impartially and as objectively as possible in the light of available evidence and argument" (Hare 1985, 3). An example would be the case of the scientist who, starting from certain beliefs, faces facts or theories that put them into question.

2. Tenacity and experimentality. A different nuance would be one in which the person is "neutral" to different elements to be valued. This is the case of an impartial judge who, because he lacks interests or previous

judgments, does not need to set aside his own opinions in order to be able to attend to different arguments. In this case, having an open mind "is manifested instead in something like a willingness to hear both sides of an issue, to follow the relevant arguments where they lead, and to refrain from making hasty or premature judgments" (Baehr 2011, 144). In # 1 the opposite of being open is being closed-minded, dogmatic, biased, or prejudiced. In the case of # 2, the vices are being impatient, lazy, not taking different perspectives seriously or drawing premature conclusions.

3. Creativity. Intellectual activity is not always related to evaluation in case of conflict or disagreement. A person is also open-minded when she tries to understand a strange matter or a problem about which she lacks a position. In this sort of case, being open-minded has to do with imagining new scenarios, new answers or explanations, being original and creative. In this sense, Baehr draws attention to the ability to transcend a pre-determined cognitive point of view (Baehr 2011, 152)

4. Fallibilism. Adler, and then Riggs, have emphasized that being open-minded does not have so much to do with the value of beliefs (justified, true) as with the attitude (fallibilist) that the subject maintains towards their own beliefs. For Adler it is clear that being open-minded does not imply having little or weak conviction towards one's own beliefs (Adler 2004, 30). Open-mindedness means that, although I firmly believe in a position, at the same time I consider myself fallible. So, although I do not see that I may be wrong, I recognize that it cannot be entirely ruled out that I may be wrong, or at least be wrong in some part of my reasoning or convictions. In this way, Adler lays the foundations of one of the most defining features of our interpretation of open-mindedness as a virtue. This is its intrinsic link with fallibilist theses. It is the recognition of the possibility, however remote, of human error that makes it necessary to pay attention to other positions. Riggs supports this thesis: "To be open-minded is to be aware of one's fallibility as a believer, and to be willing to acknowledge the possibility that anytime one believes something, it is possible that one is wrong (Riggs 2010, 180).

¹ Some hints about this theory are in Mougán 2022.

² I will represent each trait by its reference, in this case #1.

5. Engagement. A critical aspect of the epistemic value of open-mindedness lies in having the proper moral concern. Our beliefs are strongly influenced by the concerns that guide us. That what we pay attention to, the skills we use, the reasoning we make, and the conclusions we draw, depend largely on the concerns from which we start. To be closed-minded is not a voluntary decision (generally no one considers themselves closed-minded). Rather, narrow-mindedness is the consequence of concerns and interests that are at stake, and of influences in a way that blinds us to evidence or reasoning. For Arpaly (2011, 80–82), cases such as Semmelweis' colleagues, who did not accept the evidence in favor of the relevance of handwashing to prevent infection, or permissive parents who do not accept their child's guilty behavior, or a bad driver who ignores the evidence that shows that he is a threat to other drivers, are examples that show the bias that influence cognitive processes and thereby determine their working. Then, according to Arpaly, the open-minded person "is the person whose moral concern insulates her from the pull of other concerns that would otherwise render her unresponsive to evidence, in contexts in which something morally significant might be at stake" (Arpaly 2011, 81). Arpaly stresses that open-mindedness is related to convictions being the result of moral concern. As Kwong points out, "a person is open-minded when she is willing to engage with a viewpoint that is novel to her" (Kwong 2016, 12). The absence of moral concern, the lack of moral sensitivity, blinds understanding and judgment. In this way, this epistemic virtue is intertwined and preceded by its moral consideration.

Open-mindedness and Relational Ontology

As a consequence of the above characterization, open-mindedness requires a degree of subject receptivity to the world with which it interacts. It is the objectivity factor, the constraints that the independent world of our subjective will imposes on us (# 1, # 2). But in addition to this factor there is another related to the contribution of

the subject to interaction through his creativity (# 3). Both factors depend on a fallibilist attitude in a world open for human action (# 4). Objectivity and creativity are two defining elements of open-mindedness that require an interpretive framework to show their compatibility. This compatibility has been often considered impossible because it was part of the mainstream of a philosophical tradition which is based on dualisms.

The interpretation of experience that we find in Ryder's relational ontology provides a framework for open-mindedness overcoming this traditional philosophical dualism. Ryder's analysis allows us to see how open-mindedness has been trapped under paradigms dependent on modern or postmodern conceptions of experience. From a modernist perspective, open-mindedness can be interpreted in line with the concept of objectivity linked to the experimental or natural sciences. To be open-minded means to eliminate the subjectivist biases that blind the exercise of reason, the elimination of the subjective component that "closes" the mind and prevents it from seeing reality as it is (#1, # 2). In this case, we refer to the fact that we discover new features of logical principles, or natural laws, "In fact, we discover them; we do not simply invent them" (Ryder 2013, 27). But, as Ryder points out, this image of experience is simplistic and partial. Besides the element of receptivity, experience also has a creative component. This is exhibited in the arts, literature, philosophy, and is emphasized in the postmodern vision that enhances the constructive capacity of the subject. Open-mindedness is, in this postmodern perspective, linked to the creative capacity of human subjectivity and the rejection of constraints of any kind (#3). It involves stating the unlimited and unrestricted creative capacity of subjectivity, and at the same time its lack of cognitive pretensions in relation to an independent reality.

Ryder's interpretation allows us to think of open-mindedness as a way to reconcile both former interpretations. It requires overcoming the dichotomies of fact / value, natural / social science, objectivity / constructivism, all of which are characteristics of the philosophical tradi-

tion. He shows that natural science has a component of social and subjective construction, and social sciences, arts and humanities have “certain traits and not others, and so our creative interactions with them are limited by the constraints imposed by their objectively determined properties” (Ryder, 2013, 111). Ryder understands that the problem comes to us, to a large extent, because the objective has been identified with the absolute. This identification is a consequence of an ontological framework according to which the world is made up of completed and independent entities. This Newtonian model has been extended from the natural sciences to the social sciences, and to political theory. Against this he opposes his relational ontology in which what is constitutive are not the units but the relationships. For Ryder our knowledge is always contextual and conditioned, and therefore it makes no sense to speak of absolute features. “That is to say that for the traits to be determined objectively is not equivalent to traits being determined unconditionally. Objectivity in this sense means, simply, not determined by the purposes or interests of the inquirer” (Ryder 2013, 31). It follows from a relational ontology that conditionality and objectivity are not antithetical terms. Fallibility, temporality and contextuality are characteristics of our being situated in an intrinsically relational world. Consequently, for Ryder creativity and objectivity maintain a symbiotic relationship. “Objectivity provides the framework in which the creativity occurs, and creativity is the developmental process of the world, and the generation of whatever meaning and value objectively determined aspects of nature might have. Objectivity and creativity are each senseless without the other” (Ryder 2013, 111)

Ryder’s ideas about subjectivity and creativity connect with our characterization of the open mind. His philosophical position reinforces open-mindedness as a virtue by understanding it not as a mere exercise of putting yourself in someone else’s shoes, but as an openness to realistic recognition of the world. Open-mindedness has to do both with the ability to see and imagine new possibilities and with the recognition of the results of one’s own experience. It has an aspect of

creativity and another of receptivity and recognition. Open-mindedness as a virtue requires making objectivity and constructivism compatible, which in Ryder’s eyes appears as one of the virtues of naturalist pragmatism: “it allows us to maintain both a defensible sense of objectivity in our understanding of nature and a satisfactory understanding of the constructivist dimension of experience and inquiry” (Ryder 2013, 76).

Ultimately, our characterization of open-mindedness finds support in Ryder’s relational ontology and the appropriate framework for an interpretation of open-mindedness that goes beyond old dualisms.

The Question of Truth and Open-mindedness

A decisive and clarifying aspect about the status of open-mindedness, its meaning and limits as a virtue, lies in its relationship with truth. Some authors have questioned the need of this relationship, and have relativized the epistemological role of open-mindedness. Thus, they understand that the connection between open-mindedness and truth is accidental or, at best, conditional. From this perspective, if you have true beliefs, then there is no advantage to being open-minded over being dogmatic, since the latter would allow you to be more resistant to false opinions or arguments. It can, according to Baehr, depending on circumstances, even be a vice or a weakness (Baehr 2011, 158). Other authors try to answer this objection by showing how open-mindedness contributes, in any case, to the achievement of true beliefs. So, for example, for Kwong, “In the long run, the open-minded person will possess more true beliefs than the uncritically credulous” (Kwong 2017, 1622). In this sense, Mill’s argumentative strategy is well known. For him, even being in possession of the truth, the contrast and consideration with erroneous ideas strengthens one’s own points of view, making us aware of their adequacy and exercising the mind in the defense and justification of true beliefs (Mill 1977, ch. 2).

Now, this debate on open-mindedness and its relationship with truth starts from the assumption that all

knowledge is a form of belief, and assumes that there is an independent reality, a state of things, to which our beliefs and propositions refer. A new understanding of open-mindedness is possible if we adopt a different interpretation of knowledge and, consequently, of truth, linking it with the idea of inquiry. In the interpretation offered by pragmatism, the knower is seen as an active agent who is a part of the interaction or transaction between the subject and the world in which knowledge consists. In Peirce's approach, truth is understood in terms of the processes of inquiry, and beliefs are interpreted as habits. Research activities are those that arise from problems or difficulties posed by experience and are directed towards their resolution. For pragmatists, inquiry is, rather than a theoretical procedure, a mode of human behavior destined "for the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation" (Dewey 1991, 108). This is how Ryder's position can be framed. He also understands that "knowledge is not to be understood merely as justified true belief, indeed it is not to be understood as a matter of belief at all, at least not in all cases" (Ryder 2013, 107). Ryder continues the line opened by Dewey who established the continuity of art and science on the grounds that both are forms of inquiry in response to the uncertainties posed by experience. It is an aspect of Ryder's relational ontology to defend the intertwining of the different dimensions of experience and, therefore, of the cognitive and the aesthetic. As Ryder points out, the truth can be told in many ways. It may be that truth means an adequate, precise representation of an object or event, but also an idea that allows us to achieve something, to carry a business to a good purpose, or to engender an idea bringing new possibilities. The question of the truth, and consequently of open-mindedness, is not only a problem related to the natural sciences, but it is also a problem for the social sciences and the arts. In this way, Ryder understands that art has a cognitive dimension as well. This dimension cannot be reduced to the class of judgments that have an assertive content (those that establish a declarative sentence) and are propositional or representative. Aesthetic judgments often have to be evaluated in

other terms. Thus, for example, might be considered as expressive judgments or those which expand our possibility of appreciating an experience by giving it a new or deeper meaning. In any case, science and art "taken together [...] enable a broader understanding of knowledge and they reflect the richness of our experience, aesthetic and otherwise" (Ryder 2013, 164).

Ryder continues the pragmatist and naturalistic tradition of knowledge as the kind of judgment that moves us forward: "If knowledge is understood as judgement that enables us to move forward, rather than as accurate reflection of reality, then our conceptions of belief and truth, and their relation to knowledge, must be correspondingly revised" (Ryder 2013, 171). In the case of the art, Ryder emphasizes, following Vattimo, the idea that truth changes us insofar as it supposes an experience with a deep meaning: "All of these and no doubt other senses of truth have in common the fact that they enable us to carry on, to move on to the next proposition, belief, insight, or experience. Until, that is, we find our way blocked. In that case our understanding or direction requires revision. In that way knowledge and understanding continually unfold, often in unanticipated ways. And in that process art no less than science is a meaningful dimension of our experience" (Ryder 2013, 176).

This characterization of knowledge agrees with a defense of the centrality of open-mindedness in relation to the truth. If the very point of open-mindedness is to open horizons, to transcend the already established (# 3), then the description of truth as provisional and linked to the forward movement makes being open-minded a significant requirement of truth. What paralyzes us, stops us from our search, blocks our ability to continue expanding our giving meaning to our experience, cannot be knowledge or truth.

Once we ignore the reduction that a certain kind of naturalism has made of the truth and we understand it as part of the human process of searching and increasing the meaning of human experience, being open-minded becomes a central disposition, not an instrumental or auxiliary one, for truth and knowledge. It is the consequence of

thinking the truth in terms not only of theory but also of action, not only of receptivity of a reality already finished but of an experience in a continuous process of re-elaboration. In a closed world, and whose meanings may simply be revealed to the human being, open-mindedness would have little relevance, a merely passive role.

Pappas (1996) within the pragmatism way of thinking reminds us of the importance of open-mindedness as a virtue, and of how it requires a conception of the world and knowledge. Virtues are habits that result of the individual's interaction with the world. Open-mindedness alludes to, on the subject's side, the development of a disposition that has to do with flexibility, plasticity, the ability to establish new adjustments, and a new harmonic relationship with the environment. "Openness makes a character flexible and readaptable when a change of direction or modification in our beliefs and habits is needed" (Pappas 1996, 327). On the other hand, open-mindedness manifests, and it is a consequence of, a world that is dynamic, evolutionary, plural, characterized by the emergence of novelties, marked by contingency. In short, the open mind shows us the precarious and open nature of the experience in which it acquires its full meaning.

The Political Dimension of Open-mindedness

One of the implications of Ryder's relational ontology is that the individual is made up of relations and relationships. Discussing the ontological priority of the individual or society is meaningless because it ignores that one and the other constitute each other. So, "persons, like other living beings, are embedded in and constituted by their surroundings" (Ryder 2022, 194³). As far as this perspective is concerned, the consequence is that an individual cannot be open-minded by himself alone. The individual of whom the open mind is preached is part of a community in which there are social practices that condition our

way of thinking and knowing the world. For Kwall (2002, 259), virtue epistemologists have focused their attention on the analysis of the knowledge of individuals, showing how to overcome skeptical arguments, but leaving aside the fact that knowledge is produced in a context situated socially and within an epistemic community. Once we take this dimension into account, we can affirm that having an open mind is, consequently, both individual and collective work, both the result of a personal moral concern and of a collective and educational process that tries to avoid the presence of prejudices, biases particularistic or partial or selfish interests.

A social and political reading of open-mindedness features, complements and supports Ryder's political philosophy. He thinks that one of the virtues of his pragmatic naturalism is that it "enables us to avoid ideology." For Ryder ideology means "a tenacious commitment to one's concepts, perspectives, and ideas regardless of evidence and experience. Ideologies, both religious and political, have been responsible for more suffering and evil than can be noted here" (Ryder 2013, 51). Bernstein (2013), within the pragmatist tradition, emphasized in the same sense that it is the absence of an experimental and fallibilist mentality (# 2, # 4) that leads us to evil, to the dangers of totalitarianism and imperialism. The imposition of one's own points of view, no matter how valid they seem to us, as a political practice in international relations, especially by the US and the colonizing western countries, is repeatedly criticized by Ryder. We can say, in the terminology of this perspective, that for Ryder open-mindedness is a corrective to ideology. He stands against those who cling to values and principles in international relations that become ideological elements: "One of the shortcomings of all traditional approaches is that they are conducive to the development of an ideological commitment to whichever values they endorse" (Ryder 2013, 52).

This idea becomes even clearer if we look at international relations from Ryder's interpretation of democracy. Ryder refers to Dewey's *Democracy and Education* to point out that democracy involves the cultivation of common interests with members of the community itself, but

³ This is the reference for Ryder's forthcoming book that will be published as *Philosophy of Education: Thinking and Learning through History and Practice* by Rowman & Littlefield in 2022. All page references are to the manuscript pages.

also beyond its limits and borders. The most determining component of the definition of democracy offered by Dewey/Ryder is that it consists of “the pursuit of common interests.” More than institutions or principles, what democracy needs is individuals with the capacity to pursue such interests. “A democratic individual in this sense is someone who is inclined to look beyond his community to seek common ground, common interests, with members of other communities; a democratic society is one that is characterized by public policies and social habits that promote the pursuit of shared interests within and across its many internal boundaries and beyond its national borders” (Ryder 2013, 188). If finding common interests is a distinctive trait of democracy, then the cultivation of an open-mind is central in democracy. And it is because democracy, and open-mindedness, demand of us that we not allow ourselves to be locked up by our own interests, but to transcend the limits of our own world (# 1, # 3, #5).

Again, it is the relational conception, as opposed to modernist atomism, which lays the foundations for the new way of understanding international relations and which endows open-mindedness with a broader dimension. The characterization of democracy as a way of life reinforces the relevance of open-mindedness. Following Dewey, it is said that democracy does not imply rejecting the importance of institutions, of the mechanisms of election and selection of power, but it does emphasize that without citizenship that incorporates democratic habits, spirit and talent, democracy cannot exist. Or, to put the point another way, that the former is a necessary but not sufficient condition for there to be true democracy. What allows us to justify the claim that open-mindedness is a democratic virtue in Ryder's philosophy is that according to him, it is important not so much to adhere to the ideological principles of democracy as it is to behave democratically (Ryder 2013, 182). Evidence of this argument can be found in his separation of himself from those who affirm the superiority of the democratic way of life. In fact, Ryder claims “there are millions of intelligent and morally trustworthy people who prefer other political arrangements” (Ryder 2020, 21). He points out that also in

democracy we can find situations that hinder the development of people's potentialities. Hence, he wants to be attentive to the recognition of other socio-political realities in order to avoid dogmatic bias. We may, he says, be content with the claim that “democracy is a desirable way of life that is conducive to the development in all relevant respects of those who live in it, and leave open the possibility that other people may do just as well in other situations” (Ryder 2013, 181).

For Ryder democracy requires, first, open-mindedness, sensitivity to experience, consideration of alternative possibilities, and creative solutions (# 1 – # 5): “Democracy, in other words, rests not on blind custom, nor on dogma, nor on rigid ideology, nor on clichés and slogans, but on the exercise of our collective capacity to study ourselves and our world, to perceive its problems, and to apply in our lives a mode of interaction that opens to the possibility of new and creative solutions. That is the exercise of intelligence, and it is a necessary feature of democracy” (Ryder 2013, 185). Sharing the same Deweyan idea of democracy as a way of life, Pappas has shown how open-mindedness can only really exist in an experimental and democratic community. “But we do not form our habits in a vacuum; certain social conditions and environmental and communal activities makes possible certain dispositions. For example, open-mindedness requires engaging in activities where there is open communication” (Pappas 2016, 329)

In short, open-mindedness allows us to see the continuity between epistemic and political problems and it becomes a determining virtue in Ryder's political philosophy. It is a consequence of adopting a relational ontology, a fallibilist conception of knowledge and of interpreting democracy as a way of life that seeks the pursuit of common interests.

Relational Ontology, Open-mindedness and Philosophy of Education

If there has been an area in which the reference to open-mindedness as virtue has had any resonance, it has been

in education.⁴ Two aspects of Ryder's contributions to our analysis of open-mindedness are remarkable in this context. On the one hand are the implications of his relational ontology and epistemology in the curricular areas of education. On the other hand, there is his understanding of the nature and objectives of education and, consequently, of civic and democratic education.

In relation to the first, Ryder's relational ontology affirms that it makes no sense to think of reality, as modern philosophy did, as individual atomic entities which are independently constituted, and then come to be related to one another. A relational ontology applies to every existing thing, and to each and every one of the classes (Ryder 2013, 186). The consequences of this approach lead Ryder to consider how wrong it is to think about the different disciplines that are studied in the curricula separately or in isolation. "It is not so much that the disciplines are constitutively related to one another, though they are, but that the aspects of the world that they study are constitutively related to one another, and if we treat them in isolation, we will never understand them well" (Ryder 2022,189). Moreover, for Ryder if all entities do not maintain a hierarchical relationship with each other, but are in a relationship of parity, it makes no sense to point out that one prevails over another. "Existential parity, we might say, implies parity in intellectual value among subjects of study" (ibid.,192). Hence it makes no sense to think that, for example, the natural sciences study a more real object than theater or painting. They are all important in some sense or in some context. A better understanding of the world requires integrating diverse perspectives, not neglecting any of them: "But if we have good reason to hold that because nothing is more real than anything else, from which it would follow that a literary or theatrical construct is no less real than a non-fictional person, then all this changes" (ibid.,188).

Furthermore, and digging deeper into the relational nature of experience, Ryder articulates his interpretation through the cognitive, aesthetic and political dimensions

of experience. These dimensions do not exist separately from each other but rather are intertwined. This means that the aesthetic is as constitutive a dimension of our experience as the propositionally cognitive and, consequently, it cannot be considered a marginal or decorative element of the curriculum. On the other hand, if a dimension of power exists alongside the cognitive, then education cannot be a passive learning process, but it must involve an active commitment of the student in the educational process so that he experiences the influence of his action in the world (Ryder 2022, 197).

These considerations help us to specify the meaning and importance of educating in open-mindedness. Educating in open-mindedness requires paying attention to relationships, seeing things in their interrelations, and understanding them in their complexity (# 1 – # 5). "The education we provide our students will be enriched to the extent that we can embed the information we wish to teach, in principle in any subject, in the arts and in creative activity" (Ryder 2022, 209). Ryder himself provides us with examples to illustrate how considering the relationship between the different dimensions of experience enrich our knowledge. Thus, if we want to understand the impact of war on civil life, literature or painting can be more illustrative than knowledge of data (see the case of Picasso's *Guernica*): "There are ways that painting, music, literature, and all the arts capture and exhibit aspects of the world and of our experience that are not available through any other medium" (ibid., 210). The importance of disciplines thus becomes a contextual issue. In each situation, and based on the complexity and relationality of what exists, one element or a set of relationships can be emphasized over others. Consequently, educating in open-mindedness means promoting the disposition to see things in their complexity, paying more attention to relationships than to disciplines, and recognizing that we find in each experience the integration of its different components, the cognitive, the aesthetic or the political (#1, #4).

Finally, there is nothing more appropriate to our interest in highlighting the relevance of open-mindedness

⁴ Keep in mind Hare 1983.

than the very definition that Ryder, following Dewey, offers of the objectives of education: “the nature of education is to enhance experience.” So, “to enhance experience is to contribute to the capacity each of us has to master the conditions of our lives, to construct their meaning according to our own lights, and to guide the course of our lives in ways that are consistent with our own ends and purposes” (Ryder 2022, 206). If the objective of intelligence is to expand the meaning of experience and to enrich it, then open-mindedness, as we have characterized it, is the central virtue that make it possible. All institutions, and especially the educative, must be judged by the way in which their practices contribute to cultivation of open-mindedness.

Now, this is precisely the way in which the objectives of liberal education have been characterized: the development of the personality itself.⁵ A liberal education, and consequently a liberal society, is one that encourages individuals not to be locked up and trapped in the community, in the traditions, ideas, opinions and interests of the community itself, but cultivates the arts and science in a way that enables the forging of more generic interests. Nussbaum (1998) considers three skills to define liberal education, and two of them coincide with our characterization of the open-mind: ability of critical examination of oneself and one’s own tradition (#1, #4), and “narrative imagination” (#3). Hence, according to our proposal, the civic cultivation of open-mindedness would then be one of the characteristics of a liberal education. Ryder also agrees with this characterization of the liberal spirit: “For example, among the meanings we would ascribe to ‘liberal’ as a moral or value concept is flexibility and expansiveness of outlook” (Ryder 2020, 24). Furthermore, as we have noted, Ryder has emphasized that the foundation of democracy lies in the construction of common interests with members of other communities. For this reason, a democratic policy will have to be internationalist in its orientation and, consequently, so should an education in accordance with the

democratic spirit: “A democratic society is, to put it differently, necessarily internationalist in its orientation. It promotes international understanding, competence in foreign languages, cosmopolitan values, international cooperation, and diplomacy; in short, it pursues common interests with those beyond its borders. This is not easy to do, especially in a somewhat hostile environment [...] Nonetheless, this is what is required” (Ryder 2013, 189). Therefore, the civic cultivation of open-mindedness, according to Ryder’s position, would be one of the central characteristics of a liberal and democratic education.

This raises the problem of how to approach conflict with those who reject cultivating open-mindedness because they consider it to be a way to weaken the truth. We have already mentioned that Ryder wants to solve the problem with non-democratic communities by considering the spirit of open-mindedness, the construction of common interests, to be more important than the attachment to ideologies and principles. The rejection by certain groups and parents of civic, liberal and democratic education is based on the idea that it is a type of education that weakens true beliefs and the access to the truth. Thus, they defend a kind of dogmatic education. Naturally, the concrete response to this problem cannot be but strategic and contextual, abandoning the dispute in terms of principles. This strategy does not avoid the problem that education for citizenship raises for a democratic society. Cultivating open-mindedness is something intrinsically desirable for democratic citizens, in formal, non-formal or informal education, in its mandatory and its optional stages. In order to be coherent, the only available possibility is the promotion and defense of educating in open-mindedness, and accepting that doing so entails a conflict with dogmatism and censorship. This is even a more important issue in case of minors to whom liberal society has a commitment and a responsibility. This idea seems, initially, to contradict Ryder’s defense, considered earlier, that we should be respectful to those who reject the democratic way of life, who believe that cultivating open-minded-

⁵ For an explanation of this sentence and its roots see Mougan 2016.

ness is a mistake. However, despite the ambiguity in his texts on the matter, it is possible to read Ryder as a defender of the primacy of public responsibility of cultivating open-mindedness over the will of dogmatic parents. The following texts from Ryder comes to our aid: “The default position, therefore, should be clear, and that is that an educational institution has a responsibility to expose students to the range of ideas and behavior that human beings have devised, even ideas and behavior that students and their teachers may be convinced is mistaken or even immoral. Educators do not hide from mistakes and immorality. Rather we have a social responsibility to engage and correct them, and to enable our students to do the same” (Ryder 2022, 250–251). As a consequence, we must be as open-minded as circumstances allow, but also defend the liberal cultivation of the mind. “Those of us who identify with moral liberalism and the possibilities it engenders should be expected to apply its flexibility and broad-mindedness sufficiently to be able to respect and acknowledge the wishes of those who prefer otherwise. But that fact does not preclude us from exerting the efforts required to defend liberalism when it is threatened” (Ryder 2020, 21). This responsibility with open-mindedness has to be extended to those groups that want to avoid considering different perspectives and, therefore, want to educate in dogmatism. This proposal is effective not only for religious or private education, but also, as Ryder himself indicates, for those states that want to instill in students certain visions of community or history as occurs in some authoritarian or nationalist societies. Likewise, we could consider that education for exclusively commercial and labor purposes is nothing more than a new type of dogmatic education which closes minds. These considerations have been extended by Ryder to the realm of the university, freeing it both from the rhetoric of the ivory tower and also from its subordination to private or mercantile interests (Ryder 2013, 231–238).

The goal of education, according to Ryder, should be to empower people with the necessary knowledge and skills to control their own living conditions in the pursuit

of having a richer and more meaningful experience. Furthermore, we have already seen that an open mind requires a type of commitment to the world (# 5). Consequently, the defense of its cultivation is not a morally neutral education but rather one committed to the development of intelligence and the growth of the meaning of experience.

Conclusion

Open-mindedness is not just a requirement for the advancement of knowledge. It is also a way to understand our experience, our relationship with the world, and a transformation of reality to make it more enriching and democratic. Considering open-mindedness as a philosophically relevant virtue, beyond its strictly epistemological value, requires an interpretive framework. Ryder’s relational ontology and a fallibilist interpretation of knowledge, which recognizes both the constraints of reality and the active role of the agent, provide this framework. In addition, the characterization of open-mindedness as a virtuous habit is consistent with Ryder’s defense of democracy as a way of life and the search for common interests. Educating in open-mindedness, the cultivation of this virtue, becomes the axis of a normative proposal for a society that wants to be liberal and democratic. Ryder’s work is a support for those of us who want to defend the centrality of this virtue, and it is as well an example of a philosophy built with an open-minded spirit.

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