Case Summary: Nature & Purpose

By Levi Gulliver

The heart of this case is *reform* in the most literal sense of the word. It’s about making again (re-forming) education into something it used to be: classical education. To run this case well affirmatives must have, at least, a rudimentary understanding of the classical education tradition. The two best places to start learning about classical education are the (www.circeinstitute.org) and *The Liberal Arts Tradition* by Ravi Jain and Kevin Clark.

In the round, your strategic advantage is that to refute your case negatives will have to talk about what education actually is. While the classical tradition defines education as wisdom, virtue cultivated by truth, goodness, beauty, etc., a practical definition about “job training” is not exciting. The thematic core is very strong, but, in order to stay with that thematic core, affirmatives must stay on their ground—their case—in rebuttals.

More than likely, the negative will object to the definition but not have a fantastic argument against it. Affirmatives should prescript some CX questions and 1AR responses to common negative definitions and reasons-to-prefer. Use the whole 1AR on what definition of education is. Don’t ever lose sight of the question, in research or in rounds, “what is education?” People want good answers to that question, and the affirmative side has good answers.

The wording of the case is very conversational and friendly. So, if you’re more oratorical or humorous, you may want to reword the rhetoric. Also, the definitions are spread throughout the case to support the conversational/progressional tone. If spreading out the definitions throws you off too much, just move them to the beginning of the case.

Nature and Purpose

Affirmative Case: Wisdom and Virtue

by Levi Gulliver

Dr. Michael Bauman once said, “When words lose their meaning, people lose their lives.” I don’t want anyone in this room to die, so I’ll define a lot of terms throughout this debate, starting with education.

# Definitions

**Education**: “The cultivation of wisdom and virtue.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

According to David Hicks, who holds degrees from both Princeton and Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar, a **Formal Education** is one “in which the curriculum is selected in accordance with the nature of the inquiry being taught.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Basically, a formal education is structured to reach the ends it is designed to reach. Those ends are my values.

To impart the spirit of inquiry, therefore, and to clarify the objects of study, the need arises for a *formal* education in which the curriculum (“the course run”) is selected and organized in accordance with criteria supporting the nature of the inquiry being taught.

# Dual Values: Wisdom and Virtue

What are wisdom and virtue? Both definitions come from the Online Etymology Dictionary, written by Douglas Harper, B.A. in History and English.[[3]](#footnote-3)

* Wisdom is “the power of discerning and judging rightly” and
* Virtue means “excellence and worth”

Why should wisdom and virtue be the measuring sticks for this debate? I have two reasons.

## Values Link 1: Nature of education

Look back at the definition of education. Wisdom and virtue are the ends of education. The word “education” comes from a Latin word meaning “to lead out of.” Education leads people out of ignorance and mediocrity into wisdom and virtue.

## Application: Socrates’ Allegory of the Cave

Imagine prisoners in a cave. The prisoners are chained such that they can only see one wall of the cave. On that wall, shadows of real things are cast by a fire behind the prisoners. Because they have always been imprisoned, they don’t know what real things are. One day, some of the prisoners are liberated and leave the cave. The freed prisoners now see real things.

Socrates would say they are educated.[[4]](#footnote-4) They can now pursue wisdom and virtue.

## Values Link 2: Purpose of education

Why do we have Education? It's not for job training. “Just 54% of hiring managers [say college students are very prepared for work”[[5]](#footnote-5) according to a Wall Street Journal blog. Education is supposed to form people into better people—more wise and virtuous people. The question now is, “Do liberal arts or practical skills better cultivate wisdom and virtue?”

# Contention 1: Liberal arts cultivate wisdom and virtue

Again, according to the Circe Institute: Liberal Arts are “the arts of thinking.”

There are seven traditional liberal arts. Three of them are language arts—grammar, logic, and rhetoric; these make up the Trivium. The other four are numerical arts—arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music; these make up the Quadrivium. Those ten dollar words—Trivium and Quadrivium—are just metaphors. Trivium means three roads; Quadrivium, four roads.

But roads to what? Roads to wisdom and virtue. Let me explain how in three sub-points.

## Sub-Point A: Liberal arts are arts

According, again, to the Circe Institute, an art is a “a mode of producing something other than the art itself.”[[6]](#footnote-6) So, for instance, the art of carpentry produces houses and furniture; the art of knitting produces sweaters, etc.

What do the liberal arts produce? Thought.

## Sub-point B: Liberal arts are thinking arts

In fact, thought is not possible without the liberal arts. Don’t believe me? Let’s try it.

**Application: Your thought**

Think of a thought, any old thought. Go ahead and flow your thought. Chances are your thought is made of words. In which case, you’re using grammar. Possibly, you thought of a picture or shape, or, if you’re a lot smarter than me, a mathematical formula. In either case, you’re using the liberal arts to think. If you thought of a shape or picture, you’re using geometry; if a formula, arithmetic. Every thought is a product of the liberal arts.

## Sub-Point C: Liberal Arts liberate people

The Circe Institute explains it this way, “Together the Trivium and Quadrivium are called the liberal arts because they are both the arts that every free person is free to master and the arts that are required to be free. A community that fails to master them cannot be a free community. For example, he who is not a master of the art of logic is a victim of manipulators, both external (in society) and internal (in the soul), while he who is not a master of the art of rhetoric will be unable to express his thoughts appropriately.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

Epictetus was more concise: “Only the educated are free.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

# Contention 2: Practical Skills do not cultivate wisdom and virtue

I’ve operationally defined this term, in order to clarify the difference between liberal and practical arts; namely, practical skills exist to produce useful things. Let me illustrate.

**Application: Computer Code**

Writing computer code is perhaps the most practical skill out there today. It has lots of benefits. If you taught a child to code, he would necessarily have a secure, big-salary job for the foreseeable future. He wouldn’t necessarily be wise and virtuous, though; that’s not the nature of coding. The nature of coding is to produce computer code, not wisdom and virtue.

# Conclusion

The operative word in both my contentions is “cultivate.” I use it because my whole case can be summed up in an analogy of a garden.

Imagine with me that this whole debate is taking place in the garden of formal education; the two crops of the garden are wisdom and virtue. The water and sunshine are the seven liberal arts. Practical skills aren’t in the garden.

The Roman poet Ovid captured the heart of the affirmative when he wrote, “a faithful study of the liberal arts humanizes character.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

Thank you.

Negative Brief: Nature & Purpose

By Levi Gulliver

Stoa’s Autumn 2015 resolution sets up a very explicit context for the debate: “In formal education…” While some of debates will glide by these first three words, others will debate context directly. This case is all about that context. It rests on a specific idea about what education is for—i.e. wisdom & virtue. If the judge agrees with that definition, few negative cases will even get off the ground. Thus, negatives are best off largely ignoring the affirmative contentions.

Instead, counter-define the term “education.” Many negative values will work better if education is defined as “life preparation.” A powerful argument in favor of this definition is that while the affirmative’s definition prescribes what education “should” be, “life preparation” describes what education is today. After all, this debate is happening now, so why should we consider education as it is now? Some affirmatives may respond that the resolution asks about an “ought” not an “is”, but they’re missing the point. The context of the resolution is the present day and place, while the exact question of resolution is what “ought” to be done in that context.

In the NC, negatives should spend no more than two minutes thoroughly dismantling the affirmative’s definition of education. Once done, the rest of the affirmative’s case can be dismissed with the argument that it relies on a faulty definition. The negative should move the debate onto his ground (i.e. his case). Ideally, the 1AR will be mostly about the negative case, but good affirmatives won’t let that happen. Force the affirmative to discuss your case by beating his definition of education.

1. Circe Institute: <https://www.circeinstitute.org/resources-what-classical-education/definitions-terms>. The full definition is, “The cultivation of wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness, and beauty. It should be distinguished from training (for a career), which is of eternal value but is not the same thing as education.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hicks, David V. "Chapter 1: Virtue Is the Fruit of Learning." *Norms and Nobility: A Treatise on Education*. New York: Praeger, 1981. N. pag. Print. The full definition is, “To impart the spirit of inquiry, therefore, and to clarify the objects of study, the need arises for a *formal* education in which the curriculum (“the course run”) is selected and organized in accordance with criteria supporting the nature of the inquiry being taught.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Harper, Douglas. "Online Etymology Dictionary." *Online Etymology Dictionary*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 July 2015. Douglas Harper is a historian, author, journalist and lecturer based in Lancaster, Pa.

   ington Post and many magazines. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Plato. "The Republic by Plato." *The Internet Classics Archive | The Republic by Plato*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, n.d. Web. 06 July 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Korn, Melissa. "College Kids Give Themselves an ‘A’ for Job Readiness." *At Work RSS*. Wall Street Journal, 29 Oct. 2013. Web. 06 July 2015. The full quote is: “Nearly 80% of current college students say they’re “very” or “completely” prepared to put their organization skills to work, just 54% of hiring managers [say college students are very prepared for work] who’ve interviewed recent grads would agree, according to a survey of 2,001 U.S. college students and 1,000 hiring managers, conducted by Harris Interactive on behalf of education company Chegg.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. "Circe Institute." *Definitions of Terms*. Circe Institute, n.d. Web. 06 July 2015. <https://www.circeinstitute.org/resources-what-classical-education/definitions-terms> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 1. Ibid.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Epictetus. "Epictetus Quote." *BrainyQuote*. Xplore, n.d. Web. 06 July 2015. <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/e/epictetus100808.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Naso, Publius Ovidius. "Ovid Quote." *BrainyQuote*. Xplore, n.d. Web. 06 July 2015. <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/o/ovid397241.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)