What Might a Flourishing University Look Like? Integrating Epistemic and Public Virtues in Higher Education

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In an age of technological, informational, and economic complexity, pressures to justify universities in commercial terms intensify (both as investments of the public and of students). "What are universities for?" asked intellectual historian Stefan Collini (2012). Thoughtfully answering such a question is both rare and difficult, especially among constituents of research universities (MacIntyre, 2009). More often, while mission statements float on web pages, we go routinely about academic *business*. Yet current external critiques of higher education (as too partisan, expensive, or detached) bring into relief questions of goal, role, and salience. Stefan Collini claims that universities play a distinctive function "devoted to extending and deepening human understanding" (quoted by Swain, 2011, in *The Guardian*). This, he suggests "is a pretty outrageous idea: no other institutions have this as their primary purpose" (n.p.). What might such a purpose mean, and can it be sustained? Public confidence in the concepts of knowledge and truth waiver increasingly as the technological age unfolds. Worldviews can be shared and countered in a flash of digital "connexity", leaving perhaps only a notion of "truthiness" (a word that seems new although it appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in the 19th century according to Zimmer, 2006). Higher education offers tested means/methods to examine truth claims, as well as ethical grounding upon which faculty and students may consider civic good. Yet questions arise. How can the academy foster deep understanding and practical virtue across disciplines, and through what pedagogies and forms of scholarship? Can/should higher education put forward visions of the public good, and by what criteria? How can we forge grounded commitments within relativism (Perry, 1970)? Such challenges are entwined as both individuals and the academic institution probe what it means to live a good life, to flourish.

What does a university need to flourish? Just as an individual requires a place to live, food, and social support, a university needs a place to learn (traditionally a campus), means to nourish the process (books, labs), and a community of learners. To examine things in relief, we may ask: can a university flourish with limited resources (perhaps), a campus disinterested in local and global contexts (likely not), or an undeveloped faculty ("no university can be better than its faculty", notes Burish, 2005)? While the unit of analysis in this work is the university (as institution), I argue that the ability of a university to

flourish will depend in part on its capacity to understand and promote flourishing. Such may/should include both the flourishing of faculty as well as students and the communities in which both live. Yet a university cannot be all things to all people (though large multiversities work at huge scale); it must, as individuals must do, find ways to integrate core strengths (including building knowledge, examining means and ends, and convening publics) toward a eudaimonic purpose. An exploration of flourishing from Aristotle through modern social science will provide context.

Flourishing

Flourishing, associated with eudaimonia, is a central concept for Aristotle, an aspirational end state. Flourishing includes taking action toward personal goals (in a collective context) via an integration of both reason and virtue toward a state of excellence (Rasmussen, 1999; Younkins, 2010). "Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue," Aristotle claims (*Nichomachean Ethics*, Book 1, 13). Thus, flourishing can be seen to have elements of reason, ethics, and purpose. Rasmussen (1999) points out that the use of the term *human flourishing* has involved in part to emphasize that eudaimonia is more than a subjective state of individual happiness but a "complex notion whose many interrelated features generate an elaborate conception of the human good and obligation" (p. 2). Such an *elaborate conception* seems an apt goal for university work.

Rasmussen presents a neo-Aristotelian view, informed by current scholarship, that characterizes flourishing as "way of living" that is "objective, inclusive, individualized, agent-relative, self-directed, and social" (1999, p. 3). Flourishing is inclusive in the sense that it includes "such goods as knowledge, health, friendship, creative achievement, beauty, and pleasure; and such virtues as integrity, temperance, courage, and justice" (p. 4). Flourishing is not a one size fits all phenomena—individuals will act according to their own goals and contexts, yielding a *moral pluralism* (Rasmussen, 1999, p. 6).

Scientific explorations of flourishing lagged behind examinations of pathology, as psychology, for example, focused on maladjustment and basic functions. The work of Keyes and Haidt (2003) prompted increased attention to the positive aspects of development, including personal strengths and resilience. Seligman's (2011) book—*Flourish*—is recognized as an additional turning point. He argued that well-being is comprised of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment (coining the mnemonic PERMA, p. 16). Other subcomponents associated with well-being include purpose, optimism,

resilience, and personal growth (Seligman, 2011). While in-depth analyses of these concepts are beyond the scope of this paper, they provide context for examining the potential for universities to flourish.

University Purpose(s)

Modern universities are diverse, multifaceted entities (places, organizations, associations) with purposes or goals that vary according to constituencies (Bok, 2013). Universities may seem, for many, to have always been there—longstanding institutions whose origin stories are briefly noted in brochures but whose purposes are taken for granted: teaching, research, service. Scholarship on or about higher education is relatively robust, though many universities do not have academic programs directed toward such, and the majority of research on higher education is focused on the efficacy of methods and impacts vs. superordinate goals. So, what is a university for? What purpose(s) does it serve? And, in the digital age, can it be replaced by technological advances? Two recent books by Collini (2012, 2017) foreground such questions. Like others who explore this terrain, he points back to Newman's *The Idea of a University* (1852). The enduring interest is Newman's writing is surprising, Collini suggests, for the reflections of a Catholic priest—who worked at Oriel College at Oxford — in consideration of a new university in Ireland seem distant to the functions of modern universities. What lives on most vibrantly from Newman's work are his exhortations to take seriously what has come to be known as liberal education. Note that the term liberal here does not signify a partisan orientation (Zakaria, 2015) but is associated with freedom (from external rule, the status quo, unexamined assumptions); for a current model of liberal education, see the work of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2018).

Newman called for a university to focus on the "enlargement" of the intellect. As a hospital is focused on the health of the body, a university is directed to the excellence of the mind. He laments that no one term captures this intellectual prowess: knowledge and information accrued are not sufficient. A "great intellect" ... "takes a connected view of the old and new, past and present, far and near" and is "analytical, distributive, [and] harmonizing" in consideration of ideas (pp. 162-167). Newman outlines concepts such as *perfection of the intellect* and *intellectual culture* to suggest those elements of a university that "educate the intellect to reason well in all matters, to reach out towards truth, and to grasp it" (p. 125). He situates such intellectual work at the heart of the university, not as a general add or work of a single area.

Newman explores the long-standing tension within universities between the promotion of useful knowledge and what some term 'useless': that which does not have an immediate end or application but ultimately contributes to the good through fostering a liberation from the immediate, from the current status quo toward a wholistic, integrated view of reality. Newman emphasized that without the later, the "beau ideal", a university devolves to information gathering or technical training. He is elegant in naming the intellectual vision and rigor he champions: "That perfection of the Intellect ... is the clear, calm, accurate vision and comprehension of all things ... it is almost prophetic from its knowledge of history... heart-searching from its knowledge of human nature ... [and charitable in] its freedom from littleness and prejudice" (p. 139). Such goals are laudable, but (the modern researcher may say) difficult to operationalize and foster. A starting point for Newman was interdisciplinary communication, integration of learning across subjects (both among faculty and students). Without such, he argued, there will be silos of information with "little sensibility about real relations" between ideas and subjects. This concern seems prescient given current disciplinary specialization and insularity in modern universities.

The writings of Josef Pieper build on Newman's work. Pieper argues that the key purpose of a university is *universum*, an effort to see things in total: "the absolute striving for openness to the totality" via "disciplined mental effort to discuss ... unlimited meaning" (Pieper, 2015, pp. 60-61, as quoted in Warne, 2018a). Such begins with awareness and an orientation to truth, which is the "right seeing of reality" and the first stage of prudent action" (Warne, 2018a, p. 7). Warne (2018b) calls for a renewed understanding of the virtue of *docility*: to be characterized not by passivity but by "the openness to learn ... while remaining critical" (p. 107) in the context of engagement and justice (subjects to which I will return).

Collini (2012, 2017) outlines the challenges incurred when attempting to bring Newton's ideas of intellectual development and integration into the present. The complexity and scale of modern research universities is compounded by market and economic forces (and the unexamined assumptions that undergird such) in a context of competition and rankings. Disciplines have become dominant frames of reference for faculty disconnected from the larger whole of the university. Two modern examiners of the university—Readings (1997) and Zakaria (2015)—forcefully critique the decline of liberal/intellectual learning. Yet there is still a belief, Collini claims, that the university should be a "protected space" in which ideas are freely examined in a context of exploration "not wholly governed by ... economic logic" (2017,

location 1284). We (those who sense a need for something larger, more holistic) return, he notes, to ideas of liberal education (like Newman's) precisely because the utilitarian and economic pressures are so relentless. Collini points out that there are few such protected spaces still functioning in western culture, while Reading (1997) cautions that universities may be in the 'twilight' of their influence as a result of their search for profit and excellence (which he describes as an empty standard providing no guidance) vs. quality of thought.

Such challenges are made more complex by the pace of technological change and the explosion of information and means to share it. The idea of a renaissance thinker, capable of mastering knowledge across various domains, readily gives way to the anxiety of keeping up in one's targeted specialization. Such pressures, however, only reaffirm the need for what Newman and Pieper emphasized: a concerted effort to enlarge the intellect in the context of the whole for the good. We need to develop, Readings (1997) suggests, a new "community of thinkers" (p. 178).

In light of and in agreement with the above, I argue that a first quality of a flourishing university is the **capacity to examine and clarify its purpose**(s). Such a capacity may be actualized in various ways (e.g., via trustees, through regular dialogue across disciplines and constituents, in theory and praxis) but needs to be more than public relations, more than a mission statement. The second quality of flourishing, a corollary of the first, would be an identified **collective purpose oriented toward intellectual understanding and enlargement** in the context of human understanding. Apart from such, a university has severely limited capacity to consider truth across multiple claims, assess appeals to justice, or examine the particular in the context of the whole.

While the modern university tilts predominantly toward the practical, economic, instrumental, and social/political, there is still a felt need for the "disinterested" values associated with intellectual exploration and learning for its own sake (Corey, 2018). There are many modern (and worthy) descriptions of the intellectual enlargement Newman emphasized. Vail (1996) argues for learning as a "way of being" during social change. MacIntyre (2009) suggests that "the underlying presupposition of scientific inquiry" is a search for a deeper "unity of nature" toward a "concept of continuing intelligible and unified order" (p. 358). Indeed, support for such intellectual enlargement seems for some an article of faith (with a small 'f' but still a form of faith) that there is something beyond mere facts, opinion, and information: an idea that elevates us toward greater human understanding and purpose. "In the beginning was the idea" wrote a young Jean Piaget (in 1916) foretelling his longstanding interest in the biological and cognitive underpinnings of epistemology (Piaget, 1970). He wrote poetically about the ongoing power and challenge of ideas:

> The Idea surges from the depths of our being. The Idea ... guides the whole of humanity. Everything is Idea, returns to the Idea. ... Think of the force of freedom, of the untold numbers who have fought for it, of all those giants of the Idea who have imposed on whole peoples the plans of their fertile brains. The same for the idea of country, of justice. These ideas are indestructible and yet always new [and] ... no one who tries can grasp it all, so great is it richness, so infinite its diversity. (Piaget, *The Mission of the Idea*, 1916, in Gruber and Voneche, 1977)

"The idea of the academic" Pieper (1955/56) argues, is the ability "to see what is", to understand the richness of life in being a "receiving-perceiving subject" able to experience "the whole of all real things" (p. 588). While such ideas/ideals are appealing, they can seem mystical, difficult to justify on logical grounds. One explanation for such, Readings (1996) suggests, is our deep social and moral embeddedness which poses a felt but 'incalculable obligation' (p. 189) that strains our cognition; thus, in the multiple otherness of the modern era, we must work in coherent collaboration to understand "how thoughts fit together" (p. 191), a moral undertaking.

The University and Moral Elements of Flourishing

Having identified university purpose as a key, let's explore other core elements of individual flourishing (noted above) that may be extrapolated to university life. The literature of flourishing identifies the development of personal virtues as crucial, and notes the importance of social engagement. The virtuous person employs reason toward goals/ ends, entering more deeply the ethical domain. Higher education is, fundamentally, a moral enterprise (Long, 1992) by virtue of its social contexts and public focus. Universities can and often do play a role in fostering ethical reflection and character development, albeit at times reluctantly. Questions arise: whose moral understandings are privileged, what character outcomes can we agree upon? The virtue tradition itself presents a means to answer such queries, for the virtues are understood as self-directed through reason toward excellence (involving balance) in considering moral action. Such qualities—reason, respect for individual development, excellence—resonate with university values.

It seems reasonable, then, to designate salient **attention to the ethical/moral**, informed by reason, as an element of a flourishing university. This aspect of flourishing, (what may be called a university virtue), builds on the first, on the ability to see the world in its complexity and build deep understanding. Such a claim, however, opens many lines of often contested inquiry. Objectivist notions and cultural understandings of science as a technological (practical) enterprise mix with individualistic understandings of learning (prioritizing career

development) and scholarship (for faculty/university status) to overshadow collective understandings of common or ethical purposes. Ethical thinking is hard work (it is 'de-liberation', John Dewey points out). While many academic courses address social concerns, and most universities attend to research ethics, the inertias of scale and system at major universities make it easier to proceed with rather thin ethical foci, loosely connected. While we may be tempted to leave to philosophers study of the moral life, it is important to examine not just questions of ought, but "how human beings make sense of their moral experiences" and how "moral character, belief, and reasoning" are "inherently social, embodied, and historically situated" (Fesmire, 2003, p. 4).

To explore further the ethical functions of universalities, I turn to the writings of Ignacio Ellacuria, whose work (1991) as a faculty member at the University of Central America was grounded in praxis heightened by war in El Salvador. Ellacuria suggests two key functions of universities: the development of the intellect and concern for social realities (1982). He argues that universities must have an active social *horizon* that contextualizes and animates intellectual work. Such cannot be limited to the "subjective interests of students and professors" (1991, p. 181). Ellacuria goes beyond Newman's (primary) focus on the intellect, arguing that universities need to be in critical and yet formative conversation with historical reality. He argued for "Knowing how things are and knowing how they ought to be: knowing what is being done and what should be done in a unity of consciousness" (*consciousness* translates here as both conscious awareness and conscience; p. 184). Ellacuria asks: "What then does a university do, immersed in this reality? Transform it? Yes. Do everything possible so that liberty is victorious over oppression, justice over injustice, love over hate? Yes. Without this overall commitment, we would not be a university" (1982, n.p.). Some may challenge Ellacuria here, perhaps attributing a leap in his reasoning to his faith-based contexts. Yet Ellacuria argues that a university only makes sense if it has a future focus toward a collective moral end. Just as the study of agriculture is done to enhance the growth of nature and crops, "what the culture of a university should seek to do is make its members rational cultivators of reality" (p. 182). In doing so, a university cannot abandon its defining functions (and become, say, a social service agency). Further, "because of its own critical character, and because of it fundamental need to be rational and ethical, the university cannot be reduced to taking the side of a given political or social system indiscriminately" (p. 179). Rather, a university is one constituent among many

and "its role is not so much to implement things technically and politically, as to propose principles for such implementation" (p. 186).

There is much more to be said—beyond the scope of this work—about how to promote the ethical. Universities may foster enhanced social responsibility according to McTighe Musil (2009, 2011) in the form of three salient reform movement in higher education—diversity, civic engagement, and global learning. *How* we engage in such work is critical.

Engagement: Connecting across Diversity

A focus on social horizons with an ethical orientation suggests further examinations of engagement: how is a university connected to its respective civic communities? The university as ivory tower, separated from the 'emotions' of the messy world with the leisure (the root meaning of the word *school*) to consider abstract matters has given way to a more active framing of university life. Yet tensions remain.

Just as a flourishing individual must engage well and develop positive relationships (Seligman, 2011), so must a university. Universities must not just *deal with* increasingly diverse populations and the knowledge they represent, but learn to embrace such, even as its traditional (built-into-the-bricks) ideas are challenged. They must facilitate positive forms of engagement, based on reciprocity, in both learning and scholarship efforts. Such should be promoted not for public relations but because a university requires and flourishes through such an integration (consistent with its intellectual and ethical functions). There is much to learned as universities move from modes of separation to connection.

Intentional and reciprocal engagement, then, is important for university flourishing. Research literature on community engagement and public scholarship in higher education (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Welch, 2016; Beckman & Long, 2016; Post et al., 2016; Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2019) provides grounding for such work, and demonstrates ways to integrate the intellectual and moral elements of university life (see Brandenberger, 2005). Research by Bowman et al. (2010) showed, for example, that students who were civically engaged during college showed higher levels of adult flourishing, integrity, and well-being more than a decade later. Also relevant is scholarship on empathy (Zembylas, 2012; Damainidou & Phtiaka, 2016), collaborative learning (Scager et al., 2017), intercultural friendship (Rochenbach et al., 2019), neuroethics (Hardiman et al., 2012), and deliberative democracy (Longo & Shaffer, 2019) in higher education.

University Flourishing in Four Virtues

I have outlined four characteristics of a flourishing university: 1) a sense of purpose (and the capacity to renew such) 2) an active focus on the enlargement/perfection of the intellect, 3) an ethical horizon/framework directed toward the public good, and 4) an orientation toward and capacity for engagement to develop connected, reciprocal relationships with diverse communities in the pursuit of shared knowledge and commitments. Such characteristics could be labeled university virtues. They are related in function, of course, and complex in development. What integrates such university virtues is a focus on reason in the context of collective ways of knowing and human understanding. While there is much more to consider (I have examined matters broadly), it may be instructive to examine how we might we apply such university virtues amid current partisan divisions.

Universities in the Context of Partisan Division

Universities in many parts of the world, especially Europe and the United States, are experiencing—and their flourishing is tested by—current partisan and political divisions. Digitally fashioned truth claims circulate in moments, challenging assumptions (that undergird higher education) about the transmission of expertise and value. Politicians make defiant assertions via Twitter, the truth of one network is reflexively countered by another, and "followers" seem fixed in their particular "umwelt" (personal frame of reference). Amid such flux, a sense of "moral panic" may develop (Gladstone, 2017). While "reason is inherently aggressive when faced with prevailing irrationality" (Ellacuria, 1991, p. 186), students and faculty need to strengthen abilities to assess claims of truth, negotiate epistemological assumptions, and engage in productive discourse. Such may be important even for university survival, for the inherent values of universities and their neutrality is increasingly questioned across partisan lines. In the United States, recent levels of state funding for higher education correlate with the political party in charge (Carey, 2019). Similarly, political party affiliation differentiates opinions on colleges and universities: Republicans believing that colleges have a negative impact on the country rose significantly from 37% (in 2015) to 58% (in 2017), while only 19% of Democrats (in 2017) expressed belief in a negative impact (Fingerhut, 2017). In

Europe, Central European University was recently forced to move out of Hungary by government opposition to the democratic ideals associated with the University (Santora, 2018).

As a "critical cultivator of reason" (Ellacuria, 1991, p. 186), higher education needs to respond intentionally and with some urgency to such challenges. To do so will require self-understanding and a vision that integrates internally and beyond. It is not sufficient to hope to foster human virtue and flourishing among enrolled students and alumni without consideration of the parallel virtues needed within and outside the university. A flourishing university will build a functional eudaimonic ethos. Context will matter, since virtues are a matter of balance, and the eudaimonic involves an integration of self-interest and broader purpose. Universities will do well to emphasize how to direct core competencies (think curriculum) toward building the capacities (among faculty, students and the public) to go beyond the reflexive partisanship of the current era, to re(build) means to foster openness to alternative worldviews, tests claims of truth, and forge knowledge that is respected and employed in trust. As noted, these are not new challenges, but attention needs to be reawakened at universities now often passive in the of wake global and economic forces (Baez, 2008).

An important step in this direction will be the clarification of epistemic virtues, for a special role of universities is to examine the ground upon which knowledge structures are built. Just as Jean Piaget (1970) pondered claims of maturity across scientific paradigms, universities need to more intentionally develop models to assess and improve the quality of cross-disciplinary and civic thinking. Fricker (2007) argues that some knowers experience *epistemic injustice* as their knowledge is disrespected or unrepresented in status quo structures. Anderson (2012) explores how social institutions may respond to the epistemic concerns Fricker raises, noting that the burden cannot be left to individuals alone to solve. To foster epistemic justice will require forms of "epistemic democracy" and a sustained vision of "universal participation of all inquirers" (Anderson, 2012, p. 172).

Toward this end, universities can draw from work in cognitive science. Students progress developmentally in their ability to think about thinking, or metacognition, which impacts their epistemic cognition, "a type of metacognition involving knowledge about the justifiability of knowledge" (Moshman, 2011, p. 38). Moshman cites research affirming that individuals move from *objectivist* notions (truth as observable or grounded in authority) to *subjectivist* beliefs (truth as relative to points of view), to *rationalist* understandings of knowledge (though not all individuals transition to the rationalist position). Rationalists do not dwell on

absolute truth claims, believing rather "that ideas and viewpoints can be meaningfully evaluated, criticized, and justified" (2011, p. 43). Moshman describes a rationalist epistemology as a "metasubjective objectivity—a fallible quest for truth though reflection on and coordination of subjectivities" (p. 45). Since students and faculty (and citizens) employ differing types of epistemic cognition along the range outlined, universities will do well to teach about such differences. Moshman notes that "epistemic cognition is a function not only of developmental level but also of epistemic domain", or area of focus (p. 47). In the classroom, research initiative, and civic initiative, multiple epistemologies are at play.

Similarly, research has uncovered over 150 forms of cognitive bias that impact thinking (see Benson, 2016, 2019); these have been organized (with J. Manoogian) into a Cognitive Bias Codex (retrieved here) for learning purposes. New insights regarding empathy show that it is not a simple emotional concept, but a cognitively complex construct affected by culture. Research suggests that individuals from lower socioeconomic groups may demonstrate higher levels of empathic accuracy (Kraus, Cote, & Keltner, 2010), and that experiences of increased power may lower sensitivity to others (Galinski et al., 2006; Hogeveen et al., 2014). McGilchrist (2009) argues that the preference in Western cultures for activities associated with the left hemisphere of the brain (details, calculation, predictability) vs. the right hemisphere (meaning, seeing differences in context, understanding the big picture) has enduring impacts on our lives (and science). Fostering greater understanding of such findings, and means to find points of integration and development, is a salient role a university can play. If work toward an enlarged, perfected intellect distinguishes universities, then learning about the intellect—including the functions of brain, reasoning, mind, and cognition—should be seen not just as disciplinary specializations but as means to enhance and integrate core academic functions.

Arendt's focus on the *faculty of judgment* (note the parallel to the role of university faculty) is especially relevant here. As described by Yar, Arendt emphasizes judgement and thinking (vs. simple knowledge of something) as "a quest to understand the *meaning* of our world, the ceaseless and restless activity of questioning that which we encounter." (Yar, n.d.). Similarly, "the faculty of reflective judgement requires us to set aside considerations which are purely private (matters of personal liking and private interest) and instead judge from the perspective of what we share in common with others" (n. p.). Here we see the integration of the intellectual and the moral. Indeed, without this ability to question and see from multiple perspectives, Yar suggests, political divergence and conflict ensues. The solution, according to

Arendt, is imagination: "To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one's imagination to go visiting" (quoted in Yar, and in Arendt, 1992, p. 43). In this context, Arendt does not mean fantasy or something quaint: she speaks of the "force of imagination" as a means to liberate ourselves from passively accepted prejudice through complex public work "open to all sides". (1992, p. 43).

Imagination then—in various, developed forms—is an additional virtue of a flourishing university, one that adds value to the other virtues/elements. Universities traditionally undervalue or misrepresent imagination as less worthy of study or difficult to fathom. Our focus is on the past, on transmission. Yet imagination is at the heart of intellectual and moral work: reason is not simply a matter of logic, nor morality of rule (Fesmire, 2003). Individuals and communities must consider points of view they do not inhabit personally, and imagine alternatives to the given. Johnson (1993, 2014) argues that a fundamental level, all morality is based on moral imagination. Johnson claims that "the way we frame and categorize a given situation will determine how we reason about it, and how we frame it will depend on which metaphorical concepts we are using." (1993, p. 2). Thus, we must attend to cultural sources of mental frames and concepts, and, importantly, teach "*that* moral reasoning is imaginative" and explore means to change our cognitively constructed structures, as appropriate. (Johnson, 1993, p. 2).

An important contribution in this area is a large study of worldview known as IDEALS (see: https://www.ifyc.org/ideals) developed by Matt Mayhew, Alyssa Rockenbach and colleagues. The researchers of this longitudinal study, launched in 2015, have surveyed over 20,000 students at more than 100 colleges in the United States. They are examining student experiences with diversity and their developing worldviews in the contexts of race, religion, gender, nationality, and political orientation. See Rockenbach et al. (2017) for a sample of various reports developed, with implications for practice.

Conclusion and Future Context

I have highlighted elements or virtues of a flourishing university in an attempt to integrate insights from virtue theory, cognitive science, and literature on higher education. What I've offered can be summarized, at least in part, as: universities should work to foster practical wisdom (not a new concept)! Practical wisdom (*phronesis* as described by Aristotle) is an aspirational high-level virtue that combines reasoning, purpose, and context as a frame for

moral life (see Brandenberger, 2017 and 2019). Such a call is easy to make, more difficult to facilitate, especially given the complexities of modernity.

For various reasons, many have cited H. G. Wells' comment that "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." (1920, Book IX, 594). New political divisions may be a result of our cognitive inability to negotiate the pace of technological development. Knowledge building and the transmission of information, once seemingly the province of universities, now happen simultaneously on millions of keyboards (touch screens, bots, simulators) across nodes of connected networks. How may universities respond to the changes brought by artificial intelligence and machine learning to offer a form of practical wisdom amidst complexity? One answer may involve a new intellectual understanding of technology itself (a very university thing to do). Kelly (2010) argues that technology in the aggregate is much more than wires and cables and machines, but a cultural integration of human invention he labels the *technium* (p. 11). Just as "lines of letters in UNIX qualifies as technology ... letters in English (*Hamlet*) must qualify as well. They both guide our behavior, alter the course of events, or enable future inventions." (p. 11). Kelly makes an intriguing claim: "that after 10,000 years of slow evolution" accelerated in recent centuries, "the technium is maturing into its own thing" that exhibits a "sustaining network of self-reinforcing processes" (pp. 12-13). Since humans created the technium—it is a result of learning in many respects—the human mind has a role to play in its unfolding. But many other influences within the technium (biology, population, infrastructure, system expectations) now have strong momentum as well. Kelly argues that human will and design still matter in the face of the complexity involved, but that "deep progress" will be made "not with today's tools but with the tools of tomorrow" through the "expansion of intangible minds" (p. 101). He argues for collective intelligence: "Science is a collective action, and the emergent intelligence of shared knowledge is often superior to even a million individuals. The solitary scientific genius is a myth. Science is both the way we personally know things and the way we collectively know. The greater the pool of individuals in the culture, the smarter science gets." (p. 93).

Such is a modern argument for the enlarged intellect that Newman put forward, (though his framing was at a smaller, mostly individual, scale). What Kelly's insights suggest for universities is a fundamental (and ethical) role in probing the inertia of technologies, their impacts on human thought and civic life, and most importantly, where things are headed. This is no small challenge, one few other institutions seem inclined to accept. Having such a

superordinate purpose could serve to clarify and animate university vision and practice, from curriculum to scholarship. A first step in that direction, as Warne (2018a) suggested, would be "to rebuild the university" in a "spirit of open dialogue between fields of study" (p. 301). Such a rebuilding would require the development and integration of the university virtues described above toward the goal of human flourishing.

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Collaboration

I welcome input on this text and collaboration on the ideas expressed. I've painted with broad brush strokes, and there are many implications to explore.

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