https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

MOLDING CONSCIENTIOUS, HARDWORKING, AND PERSEVERANT STUDENTS*

By Jennifer M. Morton

Teachers know that it is often their hardworking, conscientious, and dedicated students who are successful; these students end up achieving good grades, attending college, and finding good jobs. Notice what is left out of the above description of these, perhaps, ideal students: they are not described as verbally and mathematically proficient, analytical, or intelligent. Although these markers of cognitive skill and development matter, recent empirical research suggests that the noncognitive dispositions cited in the above initial description of model students matter as well. This research has sparked excitement among policymakers concerned with addressing inequality through education. In a recent best-selling book, Paul Tough, a well-known journalist, reviews research by psychologists, economists, and educational researchers in defense of the hypothesis that noncognitive dispositions such as grit, self-control, conscientiousness, and resilience matter for success.[1] Teachers and schools who have taken note of this research are starting to encourage teaching these dispositions under the label of "character education" or "social and emotional skills." For example, the well-known KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) charter school explicitly teaches and assesses whether a student "finishes whatever he or she begins," "remains calm even when criticized or otherwise provoked," "recognizes and shows appreciation for others," and so on.[2]

After the incessant focus on testing unleashed by The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, this research promises to shift the focus of educational policy in a refreshing new direction. Though this move is a welcome

* I am particularly grateful to audiences at the 2013 Middle Atlantic States Philosophy of Education Conference, the 2013 American Philosophical Association Central Division Meeting, and The Aims of Education Conference at the University of California San Diego for their questions and comments. Jason Anderson, Harry Brighouse, Zac Cogley, an anonymous referee, the editors of *Social Philosophy and Policy*, participants at the CUNY Faculty Fellowship Program, the Spencer Foundation's Philosophy of Education Summer Institute, and the other contributors to the present volume provided me with invaluable feedback. I conducted some of this research while on leave thanks to a generous grant from the Spencer Foundation.

[1] Paul Tough, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

[2] A sample KIPP character report card is available on the website of one of the leading researchers in this area. Angela Duckworth, "KIPP Character Report Card," http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/images/KIPP%20NYC%20Character%20Report%20Card%20and%20Supporting%20Materials.pdf.

doi:10.1017/S0265052514000119

© 2014 Social Philosophy & Policy Foundation. Printed in the USA.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

change, we should be careful not to jump to the conclusion that our public educational institutions should be molding students to develop certain noncognitive dispositions or character traits solely on the basis of evidence that shows that these traits are correlated with certain markers of success (e.g., educational attainment, college enrollment, and expected lifetime earnings). While the teaching of noncognitive dispositions is advocated by those seeking to eradicate the entrenchment of poverty and disadvantage, some worry that this kind of education is a form of oppressive pedagogy inculcating minority children to adopt white middle-class values.[3] This is a genuine worry, in particular, when those targeted by educational programs, such as KIPP, are students who overwhelmingly come from minority and low-income communities. On the other hand, advocates of noncognitive education argue that some noncognitive dispositions lead to success because they are useful in the promotion of a wide diversity of ways of life; failing to develop those noncognitive dispositions harms children's prospects regardless of which community they belong to and which way of life they eventually wish to pursue.

Both of these arguments capture part of the truth. Some noncognitive dispositions lead to successful outcomes because they conform to the values and preferences of the dominant majority culture; others lead to successful outcomes because they are useful in advancing many ways of life; yet others fall somewhere in the middle. What we need is a principled way to distinguish between these different noncognitive dispositions, a distinction largely overlooked in the empirical research. I propose to do so by considering the social, economic, cultural, and institutional conditions that underlie the correlations between noncognitive dispositions and successful outcomes. I argue that the concern regarding instrumental arguments for noncognitive education is that such arguments ignore the ways in which unjust conditions may favor certain noncognitive dispositions because they are those of the dominant majority culture. I distinguish teaching those noncognitive dispositions from those that do enable students to succeed in leading a wide diversity of ways of life against a wide background of *just* conditions. I argue that only the latter can be justified solely on the basis of their instrumental value.

In Section I, I summarize the empirical evidence supporting the teaching of noncognitive dispositions. I then offer a rough characterization of the kind of instrumental argument put forward by many of those who propose

[3] These worries are raised in various places including Adam Swift and Harry Brighouse, "Response: Progessive Universalism," *Boston Review* http://www.bostonreview.net/forum/promoting-social-mobility/progressive-universalism-adam-swift-harry-brighouse (September/October 2012); Annette Lareau, "Response: The Importance of Social Institutions," http://bostonreview.net/forum/promoting-social-mobility/importance-social-institutions-annette-lareau; Amy B Shuffelton, "A Matter of Friendship: Educational Interventions into Culture and Poverty," *Educational Theory* 63, no. 3 (2013): 299–316; Lelac Almagor, "Whose Character?" *Boston Review* http://www.bostonreview.net/us/lelac-almagor-character-education-inherent-flaws-schools (November/December 2013).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

incorporating teaching noncognitive dispositions into educational policy. This Crude Instrumental Argument, as I call it, purports to avoid the worries raised by those who are concerned that this kind of education is an unjust form of indoctrination into the dominant culture by showing that these noncognitive dispositions are broadly instrumental for securing education and employment opportunities. Unlike arguments that attempt to show that particular noncognitive dispositions are intrinsically good or essential to a way of life that we should aim to cultivate, instrumental arguments rely on the usefulness of particular noncognitive dispositions to do the bulk of the justificatory work. In Section II, I argue that instrumental arguments of this sort fail to be sensitive to potentially unjust social, economic, cultural, and institutional facts. Yet the truth of the empirical results they rely on hinges on these facts. As a result, instrumental arguments are open to the charge that the noncognitive dispositions they justify are instrumentally valuable as a result of conditions of injustice that favor the dominant majority culture. This shows us that the instrumental value of a particular noncognitive disposition is not sufficient grounds to justify teaching it. I advance a Justice-Sensitive Instrumental Argument that does offer a sufficient justification. I argue that if we can show that (i) a particular noncognitive disposition is instrumentally valuable, that (ii) its instrumental value does not depend on unjust background conditions, and that (iii) it is useful in the promotion of a diversity of ways of life in a diversity of just conditions, then we can offer a successful instrumental argument for teaching it that avoids the worries raised for the Crude Instrumental Argument. In Section III, I consider objections and, in Section IV, I review the conclusions reached.

I. An Instrumental Argument for Noncognitive Education

Until recently, educational policymakers have focused on the achievement gap in reading and math scores between black, Hispanic, and low-income children and their white and high-income counterparts as one cause of the entrenchment of inequality in disadvantaged communities.[4] This narrow focus on cognitive development has come under scrutiny in light of recent empirical research. Even Alfred Binet, the father of IQ testing, conceded that performance in school requires certain habits and character traits along with intelligence.[5] Recent research has supported

[4] Christopher Jencks and Margaret Phillips, "America's Next Achievement Test: Closing the Black-White Test Score Gap," *The American Prospect* no. 40 (1998): 518–33.

[5] Binet suggests that performance in school "admits of things other than intelligence; to succeed in his studies, one must have qualities which depend especially on attention, will, and character; for example a certain docility, a regularity of habits, and especially continuity of effort. A child, even if intelligent, will learn little in class if he never listens, if he spends his time in playing tricks, in giggling, in playing truant." (Angela Duckworth and Kelly Allred, "Temperament in the Classroom," in Marcel Zentner and Rebecca L. Shiner, eds., *Handbook of Temperament* [New York: Guilford, 2012]: 629.)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

this insight and has led to a surge of interest in targeting these noncognitive dispositions in the educational system as a way of remedying problematic inequalities. In this section, I review this research and outline the deceptively straightforward instrumental argument it engenders.

A. Noncognitive dispositions and achievement

Researchers working on noncognitive dispositions use the term "noncognitive" to refer to the soft skills, character traits, and social and emotional dispositions they wish to contrast with cognitive skills, such as analytical intelligence, reading, and mathematical ability. These noncognitive dispositions are not the target of standardized tests that are the usual focus of kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) educational assessment in the United States, such as the SATs, National Mathematics and Reading exams, Regents exams, IQ tests, and so on.[6] The distinction between the cognitive and the noncognitive is difficult to make precise in a way that makes it suitable for empirical investigation since cognitive and noncognitive elements are both involved in most activities, including performance on standardized tests. For example, an IQ test measures cognitive abilities but it also requires noncognitive dispositions, such as the disposition to sit through the test and follow instructions.[7] Nonetheless, researchers have had some success in employing different measurement tools, such as personality tests, self- and other reports, and experiments, to study noncognitive dispositions and mark the intuitive distinction between those dispositions that are part of how students relate to each other, pursue goals, and behave, on the one hand, and those that have been the traditional focus of K-12 instruction and testing, on the other.

It is important to be clear that the empirical work is limited by the available reliable measurement tools, namely, well-developed tests of personality and character traits. Consequently, the research in this area often relies on the Big Five personality traits — openness to experience,

[6] I use the term "noncognitive disposition" instead of "noncognitive skill"— the term coined by economist James Heckman — because "skill" is too narrow and normatively loaded to capture the variety of dispositions at stake. For example, extraversion and openness to experience are dispositions, but an argument would have to be made to show that they are skills, that is, activities that can be done well or poorly.

[7] The complex relationship between standardized test scores, personality, and IQ is addressed in various places in the literature. See Angela L. Duckworth and Martin Seligman, "Self-Discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance of Adolescents," *Psychological Science* 16, no. 12 (2005): 939–44; Angela L. Duckworth, Patrick D. Quinn, and Eli Tsukayama, "What No Child Left Behind Leaves Behind: The Roles of IQ and Self-Control in Predicting Standardized Achievement Test Scores and Report Card Grades," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 104, no. 2 (2012): 439–51; Lex Borghans, Angela Lee Duckworth, James J. Heckman, and Bas ter Weel, "The Economics and Psychology of Personality Traits," *Journal of Human Resources* 43, no. 4 (2008): 972–1059; Mathilde Almlund, Angela L. Duckworth, James Heckman, and Tim Kautz, "Personality Psychology and Economics," in Eric A. Hanushek, Stephen Machin, and Ludger Woessmann, eds., *Handbook of the Economics of Education* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2011), 1–181.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.[8] These personality traits were derived by social psychologists looking at natural language personality descriptions with the aim of finding a reliable and valid taxonomy because they have been found to be consistent across self-reports, interviews, questionnaires, and observations.[9] The problem is that the categories used in these tests are fairly coarse, which is particularly tricky when discussing their normative implications. For example, conscientiousness includes self-control, industriousness, responsibility, orderliness, traditionalism, decisiveness, and consistency.[10] Ongoing research in this area has started to focus on more fine-grained traits, so we can expect to get a more fine-grained picture of how these traits influence achievement. An additional problem is that there are controversies about what outcomes we should be concerned with from the point of view of equality; outcomes assessed in current studies, for example, range from higher educational attainment and wages to reported life satisfaction. I summarize the research here employing the outcomes as the researchers themselves describe them.

Conscientiousness, in particular, is a predictor of a variety of outcomes such as educational achievement, reported life satisfaction, and job performance.[11] In a well-known study, psychologist Walter Mischel showed that how long children can delay an immediate smaller reward (one mini marshmallow) in order to get a larger reward later (two mini marshmallows) is correlated with positive outcomes ranging from higher school performance to the ability to deal with stress and frustration.[12] These findings have been supported by Angela Duckworth's work on grit, which she defines as perseverance in the face of obstacles and passion for long-term goals.[13] Duckworth has shown that grit predicts various positive

[8] For the Big Five personality inventory, see Paul T. Costa and Robert R. McCrae, *Revised Neo Personality Inventory and Neo Five-Factor Inventory* (Odessa, Florida: Psychological Assessment Resources, 1992).

[9] For an excellent overview of the history, see Oliver P. John, Laura P. Naumann, and Christopher J. Soto, "Paradigm Shift to the Integrative Big Five Trait Taxonomy," *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research* 3 (2008): 114–58.

[10] Nancy Eisenberg, Angela L. Duckworth, Tracy L. Spinrad, and Carlos Valiente, "Conscientiousness: Origins in Childhood," *Developmental Psychology* 50, no. 5 (2014): 1331–49; published online December 17, 2012.

[11] For a survey of the findings see Almlund, Duckworth, Heckman, and Kautz, "Personality Psychology and Economics"; Borghans, Duckworth, Heckman, and ter Weel, "The Economics and Psychology of Personality Traits"; Duckworth and Allred, "Temperament in the Classroom"; Eisenberg, Duckworth, Spinrad, and Valiente, "Conscientiousness: Origins in Childhood."

[12] Walter Mischel, Yuichi Shoda, and Monica L. Rodriguez, "Delay of Gratification in Children," *Science* 244, no. 4907 (1992): 933–38.

[13] Angela L. Duckworth, Christopher Peterson, Michael D. Matthews, and Dennis Kelly, "Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92, no. 6 (2007): 1087–1101; Duckworth, Quinn, and Tsukayama, "What No Child Left Behind Leaves Behind: The Roles of IQ and Self-Control in Predicting Standardized Achievement Test Scores and Report Card Grades"; Duckworth and Seligman, "Self-Discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance of Adolescents."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

educational outcomes.[14] Other personality factors also have some effect on life outcomes. Openness to experience predicts how long students stay in school better than student grades.[15] Positive measures of self-esteem and locus of control are predictive of higher wages.[16] Extraversion has been shown to have a labor market advantage, but the effect is limited to certain fields and it is most prominent for women.[17]

These studies show strong correlations between noncognitive dispositions and certain life outcomes. However, they do not yet tell us whether the relationship is causal and whether those aspects of personality can be affected by parenting, schooling, and/or other external factors. The evidence supporting causality and malleability is not as strong as that establishing correlation, but it is persuasive nonetheless. Annette Lareau's work on the differences between the parenting styles of middle-class and working-class families suggests that some of these social skills are taught in different ways by families, depending on their socioeconomic background.[18] For example, how assertive children are with authority figures appears to depend on parenting style.[19] Two preschool programs, the Perry School Program and the Abecedarian Project, provide compelling evidence that early childhood intervention programs that focus on noncognitive development lead to diminished rates of incarceration, lower unemployment, and better health than control groups.[20] According to economist James Heckman, "the evidence from a variety of early intervention programs shows that enriching the early environments of disadvantaged children has lasting beneficial effects on adolescent and adult outcomes of program participants."[21] The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology recently reviewed fifty programs that target noncognitive dispositions and concluded that "while there is still a need for more empirical evidence that these factors can be taught as transferable competencies

[14] Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly,"Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals"; Duckworth, Quinn, and Tsukayama, "What No Child Left Behind Leaves Behind: The Roles of IQ and Self-Control in Predicting Standardized Achievement Test Scores and Report Card Grades"; Duckworth and Seligman, "Self-Discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance of Adolescents."

[15] L. Borghans, et al. "The Economics and Psychology of Personality Traits."

[16] William Darity, Jr., Arthur H. Goldsmith, and Jonathan R. Veum, "The Impact of Psychological and Human Capital on Wages," *Economic Inquiry* 35, no. 4 (1997): 815–29.

[17] Murray R. Barrick and Michael K. Mount, "The Big Five Personality Dimensions and Job Performance: A Meta-Analysis," *Personnel Psychology* 44, no. 1 (2006): 1–26.

[18] Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[19] Annette Lareau, "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 5 (2002): 747–76.

[20] James J. Heckman, Seong Hyeok Moon, Rodrigo Pinto, Peter A. Savelyev, and Adam Yavitz, "The Rate of Return to the Highscope Perry Preschool Program," *Journal of Public Economics* 94, nos. 1–2 (2010): 114–28; Frances A. Campbell, Craig T. Ramey, Elizabeth Pungello, Joseph Sparling, and Shari Miller-Johnson, "Early Childhood Education: Young Adult Outcomes from the Abecedarian Project," *Applied Developmental Science* 6, no. 1 (2002): 42–57.

[21] James J. Heckman, "The Economics of Inequality," *American Educator* 35, no. 1(2011): 31–35, 47.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

across situations, there are a wide range of promising programs and approaches."[22] However, it should be born in mind that the data on effective pedagogical approaches that target noncognitive dispositions is in its infancy.[23]

This data should not lead us to think that the causal relationship here is straightforward or well understood. For example, in a breakthrough paper, Heckman and his colleagues found that when controlling for cognitive ability, General Equivalency Diploma (GED) recipients have higher rates of unemployment and lower incomes than high school graduates.[24] Since employers rank "attitude" and "communication skills" as more important than industry-based credentials or academic performance in their hiring decisions,[25] Heckman concludes that a GED signals to employers that the applicant does not have the perseverance to make it through high school. Therefore, evidence of certain noncognitive dispositions appears to have an effect on the *perceived* value of an employee, but it does not yet demonstrate whether it has an effect on the employee's productivity. We have to be cautious in relying on the employer's *perception* of which noncognitive dispositions are valuable since this could well be influenced by what the dominant culture values. Consequently, we cannot assume that a correlation between a noncognitive disposition and higher earnings or lower unemployment means that those dispositions directly cause an increase in productivity.

The emerging research is very suggestive and points toward a new avenue in school reform. In a recent draft of the aforementioned report, the U.S. Department of Education suggests that, "across the board in research, practice, policy, industry, and popular culture, there is an emerging and convergent recognition that noncognitive factors — and particularly grit, tenacity, and perseverance — should play an essential role in evolving educational priorities."[26] The report goes on to recommend various ways in which educators and educational institutions can promote these noncognitive dispositions. However, as I will argue in the next section, there are difficult normative issues that arise when public educational institutions take it upon themselves to mold children's character. Public educational institutions already play an important role in shaping children's future opportunities. The more these institutions take it upon themselves to

[22] Nicole Shechtman, Angela H. DeBarger, Carolyn Dornsife, Soren Rosier, and Louise Yarnall, *Promoting Grit, Tenacity, and Perseverance: Critical Factors for Success in the 21st Century* (http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/technology/files/2013/02/OET-Draft-Grit-Report-2-17-13.pdf: Draft, 2013).

[23] Thanks to Harry Brighouse for suggesting that I make this clear.

[24] James J. Heckman and Yona Rubenstein, "The Importance of Noncognitive Skills: Lessons from the GED Testing Program," *American Economic Review* 91, no. 2 (2001): 145–49.

[25] Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Melissa Osborne Graves, "The Determinants of Earnings: A Behavioral Approach," *The Journal of Economic Literature* 39, no. 4 (2001): 1137–1776.

[26] Shechtman, DeBarger, Dornsife, Rosier, and Yarnall, *Promoting Grit, Tenacity, and Perseverance: Critical Factors for Success in the 21st Century*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

shape what kind of people children will grow up to be, the less room there is for the diversity of ways of life that ought to flourish in a multicultural society. Furthermore, when children are taught to behave in ways favored by the dominant majority culture, the charge that children from minority cultures are being unjustly indoctrinated is that much more salient. It is imperative that we develop a philosophical framework that is sensitive to the normative issues at stake and that can inform the development of educational proposals as they incorporate this empirical research.

B. The Crude Instrumental Argument

The research on noncognitive dispositions can easily lead those who are committed to addressing existing inequalities to a deceptively straightforward instrumental argument that would seem to avoid worries concerning the impact of noncognitive education on nondominant minority ways of life. I believe that this argument underlies various discussions of this research in the media that urge schools and other educational institutions to engage in character education because that model works and is "devoid of value judgment."[27] Tough reports that one of the founders of KIPP, David Levin, found the character education approach intriguing because "it was not focused on finger-wagging morality but on personal growth and achievement."[28] Heckman writes that the noncognitive dispositions in question "empower people to be what they want to be and do not force them to make particular choices or adopt one way of life over another."[29] The basic tenor of these arguments is that in teaching noncognitive dispositions, public educational institutions are not overstepping boundaries that keep them from imposing a way of life, because these noncognitive dispositions have been shown to lead to successful outcomes that are useful for the pursuit of many different kinds of life. It is important to note here that instrumental arguments are distinct from intrinsic arguments that might be made for the inherent value of some dispositions or their importance to other values we have reason to promote (e.g., citizenship or tolerance). These kinds of noninstrumental arguments would offer, if successful, an alternative route for justifying teaching certain noncognitive dispositions. However, not only are these arguments notoriously difficult to make successfully in a liberal multicultural society that embraces a commitment to respecting the diverse ways of life therein, but there is no guarantee that the noncognitive dispositions justified in this way will coincide with those

[27] Tough, *How Children Succeed : Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, 60.
[28] Ibid., 60.
[29] James Heckman, "Aiding the Life Cycle," http://www.bostonreview.net/forum/promoting-social-mobility/final-response-aiding-life-cycle-james-heckman. Heckman suggests both that these traits are devoid of value judgment and that they are universally valued across all cultures. The latter is a bold and contentious statement that is not the target of the argument I offer here. See Section III A.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that are instrumentally useful. My concern in this essay is with the instrumental arguments used by advocates of noncognitive education who are not arguing that we should educate children to adopt particular values or ways of life, but rather wish to avoid doing so by pointing to the usefulness of these noncognitive dispositions in the promotion of a diversity of ways of life.[30] We can characterize such arguments as follows:

Crude Instrumental Argument

1. Our educational institutions should develop the knowledge and skills in our students that will make a diversity of good lives open to them.
2. In our society, employment and, increasingly, a higher education are necessary to make a diversity of good lives open to them.
3. Research shows that noncognitive dispositions X, Y, and Z lead to higher educational achievement, higher rates of employment, higher wages, better health, and reported life satisfaction.
4. Dispositions X, Y, and Z are malleable and can be taught.
5. Some children do not acquire dispositions X, Y, and Z at home.

Conclusion: Our educational institutions should teach noncognitive dispositions X, Y, and Z.

Such arguments are driven by the empirical work detailed in the previous section concerning the value of noncognitive dispositions in promoting educational goals and accessing opportunities in the labor market, the inequity in the development of these noncognitive dispositions among students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and a concern to promote better opportunities for those who are disadvantaged by growing up in homes in which the noncognitive dispositions parents instill are not those valued by the labor market and educational institutions. Though there are many questions we can pose about the premises of this argument, I will argue that even if we take these premises for granted, the Crude Instrumental Argument makes problematic assumptions. In particular, this argument fails to take into account the role that unjust conditions might play in the causal relationship that underlies the truth of the third premise.

II. A Justice-Sensitive Argument for Noncognitive Education

In this section, I argue that the way in which empirical research is used in instrumental arguments often ignores the role of injustice in determining whether a particular noncognitive disposition is instrumental in achieving a particular goal. I then advance an argument that is sensitive to these considerations.

[30] I must thank an anonymous referee for pressing me to clarify the scope of my argument.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A. Context and injustice

Not all dispositions are good means to pursue one's goals for the same reason. Some dispositions promote these goals because they are valued by the dominant majority culture. Other dispositions promote these goals because they are broadly effective means in pursuing most ways of life in most environments. Some dispositions fall somewhere in the middle. In assessing instrumental value, we must be careful to distinguish dispositions along these lines because they are subject to different justificatory burdens. To do so, we need to closely examine the assumptions we are making about the context in which we are claiming a particular noncognitive disposition is useful. In particular, we should be wary of assuming background conditions that we have good reasons to change.

The importance of being wary of assumptions made regarding background conditions is central to G. A. Cohen's argument concerning the way Rawls's difference principle should be applied.[31] According to Rawls's difference principle, inequalities are justified only as long as they benefit the least well-off. For example, the difference principle justifies paying more to a doctor researching malaria, if doing so motivates him to work harder, because the products of that additional labor will benefit those who are worse off. Cohen points out that this is only true if we hold fixed the assumption that the doctor will only work harder if he is paid more. He argues that this is a problematic assumption to make.[32] If we care about justice, we should not assume motivations that are at odds with justice in order to justify an incentive structure that reinforces such motivations; justice might well require that we change the social and political structures to incentivize different motivations.

The lesson to be drawn from Cohen's argument is that we need to be careful about the background assumptions we make in advancing arguments in which the truth of some of the premises depends on psychological, social, and institutional background conditions that we are taking as fixed, but might have reason to change. This is particularly important when we make instrumental arguments because the truth of a particular instrumental claim is usually highly dependent on a particular background of social, economic, cultural, and institutional conditions such that if those conditions were to change, the instrumental claim would no longer be true. A justification that claims that we need to pursue a particular course of action in order to promote justice but assumes background conditions of injustice is insufficient because it overlooks the possibility that what we have reason to do is change the background conditions. There are several strategies one can use to meet this justificatory challenge. For example, one might put forward a noninstrumental argument by arguing, for example, that doctors deserve to be paid more. However, if we want to

[31] G. A. Cohen, "Incentives, Inequality, and Community," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 13 (1992).
[32] Ibid., 268–70.

continue to defend an instrumental argument, then more needs to be said about why changing the background conditions that underlie the correlation between motivation and higher income is not the better alternative.

To see the limits of the instrumental justificatory strategy in the case of education, consider the case of docility. Research has found that docility is rewarded by employers in low-skill labor markets.[33] It is plausible to assume that in a labor market in which a disproportionate amount of the labor needed is low-skill labor, docility would be widely valued. In such a context, the disposition for docility would be instrumental in procuring most available jobs and, consequently, the financial resources needed to pursue most ways of life. Now consider the following argument given within this community: Research has found that students who are docile are more likely to be employed, to be productive, and to be judged as valuable by their employers. Therefore, we should make sure to develop the disposition to be docile in our future citizens through our educational system in order to give children a better opportunity at being employed and having the resources to pursue their chosen way of life.

What this instrumental argument would be ignoring is that the truth of the instrumental claim it relies on depends in turn on unjust background conditions that we have reason to change. Suppose the reason this particular society required such a large amount of low-skilled labor was the existence of a vast socioeconomic and political power gap between those who owned factories and those who worked in them. If we were to alter the educational system to mold future citizens to be docile in order to suit this labor market's needs in order to give future citizens a better opportunity to procure available jobs, we would also be reinforcing an unjust set of conditions instead of addressing them. In this scenario, an argument could be made that what we have reason to do is to change the unequal distribution of resources, not teach docility. Again, there are several ways to meet this justificatory challenge. We might attempt to argue that docility is inherently good, which is a position that likely few would advocate. Alternatively, we might continue to pursue the instrumental justification. However, since the crude instrumental justification is not sufficient, we would have to show that teaching docility is compatible with bringing about a more just distribution of resources or that it is a better alternative than changing the unequal distribution of resources directly.

Though this example clearly displays what is problematic about the Crude Instrumental Argument, an objector might balk at the idea that this philosophical fiction shows us anything about the current educational situation in the United States. However, consider what Lelac Almagor, a teacher at a high performing charter school that practices the kind of noncognitive education we have been discussing, describes:

[33] Bowles, Gintis, and Osborne Graves, "The Determinants of Earnings: A Behavioral Approach."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> [Low-income Students] need to know how to prioritize their assignments, advocate for a better grade, ask for financial aid, ace a job interview . . . . Some of that is about strength of character — about being more independent, assertive, and persistent than kids who enter school with greater advantages.[34]

One might argue that independence, assertiveness, and persistence are intrinsically valuable or universally valued; those arguments are not my concern here. However, if one is teaching students these non-cognitive dispositions because they are useful in order to succeed in the educational system and labor market, we need to ask ourselves why these traits are instrumentally valuable. Almagor thinks that some of these dispositions might be genuinely valuable but she suggests that some might not be:

> Some of it isn't about character at all, only the appearance of it. When we teach a kid to give a firm formal handshake, we are not strengthening his character. We are teaching him how to translate his strength into a language that people in power will understand. The deficit in this case is theirs, not his.[35]

One might argue that there is little we are trading off in the case of teaching students how to give a firm handshake; therefore, there might be little that recommends changing the unjust conditions that favor firm handshakes over teaching students to give firm handshakes, in particular, if changing the unjust conditions is very costly. However, the argument gets significantly more complicated when we are suggesting that students should learn to be more assertive or independent.

There is extensive evidence that cultures divide themselves between collectivist and individualist orientations and that these orientations have an effect on personality, cognition, and motivation.[36] Research on immigrant families shows that parenting styles also differ along these lines. Parents from collectivist cultures emphasize social relationships, while Anglo-American parents emphasize independence.[37] An argument can be made here that the instrumental value of assertiveness and independence depends on unjust background conditions that favor the dispositions valued by the dominant individualist culture. This cultural dominance

[34] Lelac Almagor, "Whose Character?" *Boston Review* http://www.bostonreview.net/us/lelac-almagor-character-education-inherent-flaws-schools (November/December 2013).

[35] Ibid.

[36] Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation," *Psychological Review* 98, no. 2 (1991): 224–53; Harry C. Triandis and Eunkook M. Suh, "Cultural Influences on Personality," *Annual Review of Psychology* 53, no. 1 (2002): 133–60.

[37] Lynn Okagaki and Robert J. Sternberg, "Parental Beliefs and Children's School Performance," *Child Development* 64, no. 1 (1993): 36–56.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

would be entrenched, or at the very least, not alleviated by teaching students from minority communities the noncognitive dispositions of the culturally dominant class. Furthermore, there is an arguably more just alternative that would not require that the culture of nondominant communities be eroded in this way. Increasing the economic and educational opportunities available within these communities would make it possible for children from minority cultures to access these opportunities without requiring such children to alter their noncognitive dispositions to match those valued by the dominant culture. Therefore, the argument that we should engage in noncognitive education for independence and assertiveness on instrumental grounds is inadequate because it assumes background conditions that we might have good reasons to change.

B. A justice-sensitive instrumental argument

We might be tempted at this point to exclude all instrumental arguments for noncognitive education since in using them we run the risk of justifying teaching noncognitive dispositions that have the potential to entrench existing unjust conditions that favor the politically and economically dominant class. Instead, we might rely solely on teaching those noncognitive dispositions that can be justified on noninstrumental grounds, for example, because they are an essential part of being a citizen. This would be a mistake because there are noncognitive dispositions which can be justified on the basis of their instrumental value but which are not subject to the worries discussed in the previous section. The key is finding a way to limit instrumental arguments to capture those noncognitive dispositions that are broadly instrumental in pursuing diverse ways of life under a range of *just* social, cultural, economic, and institutional background conditions. In order for an instrumental argument to provide sufficient justification for noncognitive education while avoiding the risk of exacerbating problematic injustices, the argument must exclude those dispositions whose instrumental value is dependent on unjust conditions. Evaluating the justice of the underlying conditions that make a particular noncognitive disposition instrumental divides noncognitive dispositions along an important fault line. Docility, independence, and assertiveness, for example, would not pass this test for justice-sensitivity if we can show both that the usefulness of these dispositions depends on unjust background conditions and that these dispositions would not be instrumentally valuable in pursuing a wide variety of good lives in a wide variety of just conditions. The modified argument is as follows:

Justice-Sensitive Instrumental Argument

1. Our educational institutions should develop the knowledge and skills in our students that will make a diversity of good lives open to them.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

2. In our society, employment and, increasingly, a higher education are necessary to make a diversity of good lives open to them.
3. Research shows noncognitive dispositions X, Y, and Z lead to higher educational achievement, higher rates of employment, higher wages, better health, and reported life satisfaction.
4. Dispositions X, Y, and Z are malleable and can be taught.
5. Some children do not acquire dispositions X, Y, and Z at home.
6. Noncognitive dispositions X, Y, and Z are broadly instrumental in leading a diversity of good lives against a wide background of just conditions.
7. The truth of (6) does not depend on justice-undermining conditions.

Conclusion: Our educational institutions should teach noncognitive dispositions X, Y, and Z.

The inculcation of dispositions that are generally instrumentally beneficial in pursuing a diversity of ways of good lives against a wide variety of just background conditions is justified as long as the truth of the instrumental claim does not depend on conditions of injustice. Which dispositions this argument includes will depend on how inclusive we are in specifying the ends (i.e., which conceptions of the good are reasonable) and the contexts of evaluation (i.e., which background conditions count as just).[38] Of course, for this argument to have bite, it must be plausible that some noncognitive dispositions can pass the justice test captured by premises 6 and 7.

Fortunately, there are promising candidates, namely, the dispositions related to effective agency — industriousness, persistence, and the capacity to delay gratification — and those related to maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships — empathy and respect for others.[39] Most ways of life involve setting goals and pursuing them over time as well as maintaining and developing interpersonal relationships, regardless of the context in which these ways of life are being pursued. We can make a plausible *intrinsic* argument that we need to educate children to have the non-cognitive dispositions involved in interpersonal relationships because those dispositions are necessary for citizens of a liberal egalitarian state, whereas the

[38] It should also be noted that how far we think we can go in making sure citizens have these dispositions depends on other values that are pertinent to justice. For example, in conversation Ish Haji has raised the concern that this argument might justify genetic engineering of these dispositions. However, the scope of this argument is limited by the first premise to educational institutions, and there are good reasons for this limitation. The motivation for this argument is to limit the reach of coercive political institutions on the basis of liberal concerns. Genetic engineering would involve overstepping the bounds that a liberal state ought to respect.

[39] Harry Brighouse's presentation at the 2013 Central Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association helped me see that my justificatory strategy also applied to the capacities that support interpersonal relationships.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dispositions of effective agency are justified instrumentally in virtue of their value in allowing agents to pursue whatever way of life they choose. Interestingly, the dispositions of effective agency are also those which have been the focus of recent research and educational policy proposals. Consequently, I will focus on the dispositions of effective agency for the remainder of the essay because their justification is thoroughly instrumental.

It is because the dispositions of effective agency are instrumentally beneficial in achieving a wide variety of ends against a wide background of *just* conditions that their instrumental value is not dependent on problematic unjust background assumptions. We should not overstate this claim. The dispositions contrary to conscientiousness, persistence, and industriousness, such as spontaneity, impulsiveness, and leisureliness might be of intrinsic or instrumental value in some contexts or in the pursuit of some ways of life. Therefore, what recommends the dispositions of effective agency is not that they are instrumental in the pursuit of *all* ways of life in any context, but that they are broadly instrumental in the pursuit of most ways of life in a wide diversity of just contexts. But, why it is sufficient to show that these dispositions are instrumental in pursuing most ways of life but not all?[40] First, it should be pointed out that there are very few ways of life that do not involve the pursuit of long-term goals. Therefore, children who do not learn the dispositions of effective agency are at a serious disadvantage with respect to the opportunities they have available to them. It is unavoidable that in attempting to capture the means that will allow citizens to pursue most ways of life some will get left out by liberal egalitarian educational institutions, but this is justified as long as the state is intentionally attempting to be as inclusive as possible in the reasonable ways of life it leaves open for future citizens to pursue.

However, even if members of a particular group pursue a way of life that is reasonable and for which the dispositions of effective agency are useful, they might still resist noncognitive *education*.[41] In such cases, we need to consider why this community resists its children learning noncognitive dispositions that would help them pursue a way of life they value. The community might resist noncognitive education because its members see it as paternalistic or because they associate these noncognitive dispositions with the dominant majority culture which has shown disrespect for their way of life in the past. If failing to learn these dispositions would undermine that child's future opportunities and his or her capacity to pursue a conception of the good, then public educational institutions are justified in teaching these dispositions despite the group's objections. However, in doing so, we would have to be careful not to exacerbate unjust conditions that lead this group to feel unjustly treated. Offering a

[40] I am grateful to Zac Cogley for raising this worry in his comments at the 2013 Central Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association.

[41] I am grateful to Harry Brighouse for raising a version of this worry.

justification that is sensitive to the concerns of justice is the first step, but the way in which noncognitive education is carried out is equally important. A liberal egalitarian state respects the varieties of ways of life present in a multicultural society not only by offering the appropriate justification for its educational policies but also by enacting these policies in a sensitive and respectful way.

III. Objections

In this section I consider and respond to three important objections. The first objection raises the concern that effective agency should not or cannot be taught independently of teaching particular ends or ethical virtues. The second objection concerns the level at which we should aim in teaching the dispositions constitutive of effective agency. The final objection concerns nonideal conditions and the noncognitive dispositions whose instrumental value does depend on unjust conditions.

A. Untethered effective agency

Aristotle argued that "cleverness," the name he gave to the ability to effectively pursue one's goals, is laudable if the goals toward which it aims are good, but not laudable otherwise.[42] An objector might reply to the Justice-Sensitive Instrumental Argument I have presented by pursuing this Aristotelian line and arguing that the value of being an effective agent cannot be assessed independently of assessing the goals toward which such agency is directed. Kieran Setiya, for example, argues that efficiency might be a vice because it involves the disposition to pursue one's goals regardless of whether they are good or bad.[43] Someone who is good at pursuing his or her goals by being industrious and perseverant could also pursue nasty goals. There are no guarantees in education that the knowledge or skills imparted to children will not be used for goals other than the pursuit of reasonable conceptions of the good. However, the deeper point of the Aristotelian line of thought is that education cannot partition cognitive ends or effective agency from ethical goals and virtues — education must aim at shaping the whole person. Being a good thinker or an effective agent involves being a virtuous person; children cannot be taught the former without being taught the latter. Kyla Ebels-Duggan and Randall Curren argue for versions of this claim in this volume.[44]

In contrast, the argument I have been making assumes that we have reason to limit the coercive power of public educational institutions by

[42] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1144a 23.
[43] Kieran Setiya, "Is Efficiency a Vice?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (2005): 336.
[44] Randall Curren, "Judgment and the Aims of Education" and Kyla Ebels-Duggan, "Educating for Autonomy: An Old-Fashioned View," both in the present volume.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

partitioning educational aims, some which the state is justified in taking up and some which it is not. I follow Rawls in thinking that public educational institutions should not and cannot be committed to giving children a comprehensive set of ends to pursue without the appropriate justification if these institutions are to maintain their commitment to respecting the various conceptions of the good present in a multicultural society. That is not to say that there are not some ethical ends that public educational institutions should not teach; there are some that are plausibly construed as necessary to being a citizen of a liberal egalitarian state such as empathy and tolerance. However, the state should be wary of taking it upon itself to decide which ends and ethical virtues to teach without appropriate justification. To meet this justificatory burden, Aristotelians would have to show that the ethical virtues they propose are either universal or that they can be grounded in central liberal egalitarian commitments. I cannot fully argue against this alternative Aristotelian picture here, but I do not think I need to.

What I have argued for is not clearly incompatible with conceiving of the aim of education as aiming at the whole person. My argument seeks to limit the aims of *public* educational institutions, that is, of the state's coercive power in shaping future citizens. But we should not lose sight of the fact that the state shares the work of educating children with families and communities. That there are limits to how much of the work public educational institutions take on, does not mean that children's education is limited in this way. In most cases, children are being taught what ends to pursue and which virtues to develop by their parents. When that is not the case, the state has an obligation to stand in *loco parentis* for the child, but those are not the cases that raise the worry that the state is overstepping its bounds in undermining reasonable conceptions of the good. In order for the Aristotelian argument to be an argument against the view I have presented here, it would have to show that sharing the work of education in this way cannot be done, so that schools themselves must aim at educating children on the full range of virtues.

B. Overly controlled, gritty, and hardworking students

Even if we accept the need for students to learn how to be effective agents, we might worry that too much grit, conscientiousness, and hard work can undermine many reasonable conceptions of the good that put a value on flexibility, leisure, and spontaneity. Psychologist Jack Block argues that being too controlled is as maladaptive as lacking self-control.[45] In order to address this concern, we must keep in mind that the argument

[45] Jack Block and Adam M. Kremen, "IQ and Ego-Resiliency: Conceptual and Empirical Connections and Separateness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70, no. 2 (1996): 349-61.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I have offered here is instrumental; the development of these dispositions is justified insofar as they allow the student to advance his or her ends when she becomes an adult. Students will have to decide for themselves the extent to which they want to exercise these dispositions as adults. Therefore, part of what a student should be taught in developing these dispositions is to be responsive to whether she is in fact advancing her goals. If her goals include having a life that includes leisure, spontaneity, and flexibility, then the extent to which the student should exercise these dispositions is more limited. The more serious problem arises when students do not have the dispositions constitutive of effective agency sufficiently developed to successfully pursue their long-term goals. Therefore, in seeking to educate for effective agency we are aiming to find a suitable level that gives students the choice to effectively pursue long-term goals without undermining their capacity to pursue ways of life that include leisure, spontaneity, or flexibility.

This gives us a way of responding to the worry that educational institutions might be worse at developing the dispositions of effective agency than parents. Though some children will benefit from this kind of noncognitive education, other children might find that their education is made worse, or leveled down.[46] The first thing to say here is that the argument thus far establishes a goal for education; research on how best to achieve this goal would have to be carried out to determine an appropriate educational method.[47] This is the only way we can find out if it really is an unavoidable consequence of noncognitive education in the public school system that some children will end up being less effective. If the evidence were to show that it is an inevitable result, the argument for noncognitive education would be subject to a version of the leveling down worry.[48]

Though the leveling down worry is compelling with respect to cognitive ends, it is less compelling with respect to effective agency because in this case we have good reasons to aim for adequacy. A child that does not have the dispositions of effective agency sufficiently developed faces a serious disadvantage with respect to getting an adequate level of education and securing employment. However, developing these dispositions beyond a certain level does not advance one's ends and might even damage them. Being too self-controlled, driven, and conscientious can inhibit engagement with some of the values already mentioned, namely leisure, flexibility, and spontaneity, and others, such as engagement with one's community and leading a well-balanced life. Therefore, adequacy is justified because, in this case, more is not better. Parents should be free to push their children to be more self-controlled, gritty, and effective if they so wish, but they do so at their own peril since it is not obvious that

[46] I am grateful to James Tooley for raising this objection.

[47] Adele Diamond and Kathleen Lee, "Interventions Shown to Aid Executive Function Development in Children 4 to 12 Years Old," *Science* 333, no. 6045 (2011): 959–64.

[48] Debra Satz, "Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship," *Ethics* 117 (2007): 623–48.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

their children will have better lives as a result. Public educational institutions must ensure that all children reach an adequate level in developing the dispositions of effective agency. If some children end up, as a consequence, being less effective than they otherwise would be, despite their parents best efforts to push them over the level of adequacy, that cost is justified if it avoids the more serious harm faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not reach that level of adequacy.

C. Ideal versus nonideal conditions

I have argued that liberal egalitarian educational institutions are justified in teaching certain noncognitive dispositions in our current unjust conditions if those dispositions are generally useful means in pursuing a diversity of ways of life in a wide range of just conditions. This argumentative structure — that what is justified in nonideal conditions is justified because of what is true in a certain set of ideal conditions — raises concerns over the extent to which claims made about ideal conditions can tell us anything about what to do in the nonideal case. For example, Amartya Sen in *The Idea of Justice* argues that ideal theory is neither necessary nor sufficient to understand and advance justice claims in the nonideal case.[49] I will not be able to address here the set of complex issues that arise regarding the relationship between ideal and nonideal theory. However, the argument I have advanced suggests one way in which ideal theory is necessary for thinking about the nonideal case. Ideal theory can allow us to distinguish between empirical claims whose truth is due to justice-undermining conditions and those whose truth is not. If we are not able to draw this distinction, we risk exacerbating unjust conditions by having our educational institutions respond to these empirical claims in a way that further entrenches certain injustices.

However, as my argument has shown, ideal theory is also limited in the guidance it can afford us in nonideal cases. My point with respect to these noncognitive dispositions whose instrumental value depends on unjust conditions has been negative — teaching them cannot be justified *solely* instrumentally. The Crude Instrumental Argument is not sufficient. The Justice-Sensitive Instrumental Argument provides one sufficient instrumental justification for teaching noncognitive dispositions, but only for those that are useful under just conditions and whose instrumental value does not depend on justice-undermining conditions. So what are we to do about noncognitive dispositions, such as assertiveness, that are beneficial in the current unjust conditions? My argument leaves room for noninstrumental justifications for some of those noncognitive dispositions, for example, if they are essential to citizenship. However, the justificatory burden can also be met if we are able to argue that we can teach some of

[49] Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press

these noncognitive dispositions as a way of eradicating injustice instead of entrenching it. Although I have not developed this kind of argument here, I have done so elsewhere.[50] What is important to note is that in contrast with the Crude Instrumental Argument, this line of argument does not justify teaching noncognitive dispositions solely because they are instrumentally valuable for most of ways of life while failing to be sensitive to unjust background conditions. This alternative kind of argument meets the justificatory burden raised by unjust background conditions by attempting to show that teaching some noncognitive dispositions can be a way to mitigate those very conditions.

What is problematic about arguments put forward in the public sphere for noncognitive education is that they paint the noncognitive dispositions at stake as innocuous because they are instrumental to most ways of life, without acknowledging the important role that background conditions of injustice play in the truth underlying such statements. Our educational policymakers, even if they are ultimately justified in proposing that some of these dispositions be taught, should acknowledge the ways in which our educational institutions and the labor market are responsible for creating the unjust conditions that lead to the disadvantage that children growing up in poverty face. They should offer arguments that attempt to deal with those injustices instead of sweeping them under the rug of an instrumental justification.

IV. Conclusion

The emerging empirical research on the importance of noncognitive dispositions to educational and labor market achievement raises a challenge for a liberal egalitarian education committed to inculcating students with the skills they need in order to have an equal opportunity at a good life, while respecting the diversity of ways of life that exist in a multicultural society. Some worry that this research is leading to a form of oppressive pedagogy that aims to inculcate white middle-class values among minority children. Others use this research to advocate character education as a way of eradicating poverty and disadvantage. However, we cannot treat all noncognitive dispositions in the same way when engaging in this debate. We need to understand why a particular noncognitive disposition is instrumental in opening up educational and labor market opportunities. Instrumental arguments that appeal to the instrumental value of a particular noncognitive disposition in opening up these opportunities must be sensitive to the unjust conditions that can underlie the truth of the instrumental claims they make.

I have argued that some noncognitive dispositions can be justified solely based on their instrumental value insofar as they help agents pursue most

[50] I develop this argument in "Cultural Code-Switching: Straddling the Achievement Gap," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, doi: *10.1111/jopp.12019* (2013).

reasonable conceptions of the good in a wide range of just conditions. Ideal theory can guide us in distinguishing different kinds of instrumental claims by specifying which conditions are just. Empirical research also plays a role by investigating the underlying causal mechanisms at play and engaging in more cross-cultural work to show us which noncognitive dispositions are broadly instrumental in pursuing most reasonable ways of life under a variety of background conditions. I contend that the dispositions related to effective agency and empathy are probably the only noncognitive dispositions that will pass this stringent justice-sensitivity test. However, the question remains of what we are to do in cases in which the noncognitive dispositions rewarded by the labor market depend on unjust background conditions. Shouldn't students be given the skills they need to have an equal opportunity in the actual nonideal conditions they face? Ideal theory is limited in what it can tell us about those cases, but it helps us see that we need a more robust justification than those that have been offered in the public arena.

Philosophy, City College of New York — City University of New York

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000119 Published online by Cambridge University Press