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Speaking the Unspeakable: Intellectual Virtues of Unconventional Communication

Honors Senior Project by Mac Neaville

All language is but a poor translation - Kafka

Language is a fundamental part of living today -- this is undeniable. One may plausibly view language as the bridge between the minds of different people. This is no small feat when we consider the disconcerting alternative of living among others but in the solitude of our own experience. Without language, one can learn through observing the world and the other people, but language affords us deeper, more valuable, relationships. When we want to feel a connection with someone we talk to them, and when we want to acquire new knowledge we read something. There appears no better way to express such important things, like love or sadness, than through language. Because there is massive value in being able to express these things, the key role of language in our social lives is justified.

It may be further thought that language is the conduit through which we can learn anything beyond the most basic truths. For instance, without language a sighted-person could learn that "leaves are green". Of course, they would not apprehend those very words, but the greenness would become apparent to them upon seeing the leaf. To learn that "leaves are green because of their chlorophyll content", however, one would need language to mediate their

learning. With these considerations, our use of language seems good because it brings about good things, like knowledge and meaningful relationships.

This is not a controversial claim, nor should it be. While recognizing the value of language, it is possible to recognize areas in which language may inhibit us, though. In fact, we must be careful not to embellish the merits of language so as to neglect its shortcomings. Even if one has used a language their entire life, there are bound to be misunderstandings, for instance. Sometimes these misunderstandings can hurt feelings and lead to false beliefs, not to mention the countless ways in which language can be employed viciously: lying, insulting, threatening, etc. Further, many of us have experienced moments when language is inadequate for conveying what we would like. Feelings like loneliness, love, gratitude, passion, and countless others in all their intensity typically feel non-conveyable through propositional statements, or what I refer to as conventional language. If someone were to ask “What is it like to be in love with the love of your life?” or “What is it like to feel completely alone in the world?” there is no proposition or statement using conventional language that can adequately answer. From this we can see that there is more to be known than what can be conveyed through conventional language of propositions and statements. But of course we want to know the answers to these seemingly unanswerable questions, but we are left without a reliable method.

It is clear that there is knowledge beyond what can be conveyed through conventional language, so my goal in this paper is to show the nature of some varieties of such knowledge (referred to as unsayable knowledge) and provide methods of attaining it. Unconventional language, or uses language that cannot be reducible to propositional statements, can impart certain unsayable knowledge that cannot be reduced to a proposition and in other cases prompt

experiential attainment of certain unsayable knowledge. This knowledge should be understood broadly, as distinct from propositional knowledge which can be transmitted through testimony. What this leads to is an account of two intellectual virtues, which I call *Literary Elucidation* and *Ellipticality* that will help communicators to know *when* and *how* to use unconventional language to arrive at one's desired knowledge. As I will argue, a well-rounded intellectually virtuous agent should strive for more than conventional propositional knowledge. Unsayable knowledge is uniquely valuable and comes from various sources in different forms. Though the knowledge is unsayable, or non conveyable through testimony as with propositional knowledge, there exist many traditions that rely upon using language to do more than transmit propositional content. There are two primary methods I will examine: literary art as a source of unsayable knowledge, and the Zen kōan method of using cryptic language to mediate experiential attainment of unsayable knowledge. Since I find both to be useful methods for attaining unsayable knowledge, I propose two intellectual virtues that correspond to a characteristic mastery of these methods of promoting unsayable knowledge. Roughly, Literary Elucidation can be understood as the characteristic mastery of conveying unsayable knowledge through literary art, and Ellipticality can be understood as the characteristic mastery of leading others to unsayable knowledge through unconventional, often cryptic, language. Finally, I will examine the benefits of recognizing each as an intellectual virtue, showing how these virtues address a neglected area that is nevertheless important to intellectual life.

I want to make clear what I am *not* doing in this paper. I am not making a claim about all knowledge, but only a subset of the broad umbrella of knowledge. The methods I will discuss are not intended for attaining propositional knowledge, but rather a form of knowledge left (to my

knowledge) unaddressed in epistemological literature. Secondly, I want to clarify that the kind of unsayable truth I am concerned with should be distinguished from ineffable truths, which in principle are unrecognizable by humans.¹ Interesting as they are, ineffable truth is outside the scope of this paper.

In Section 1, I will present one basic picture of what unsayable truths may be. I will refer to this as *The Modest Picture* as it strikes me as much more widely acceptable and relatively agreeable with conventional epistemological notions. In Section 2, I present a radical picture of what unsayable truths may be, as articulated across esoteric religious traditions. I call this *The Ambitious Picture* because it conflicts with many conventional epistemological notions and may be thought to require a leap of faith. In Section 3, I will present a basic picture of intellectual virtue to lay the foundation for discussion of my proposed intellectual virtues. In Section 4, I will present my account of the intellectual virtue of *Literary Elucidation*. This virtue corresponds to attaining unsayable truths as depicted in the Modest Picture. In Section 5, I will present my account of the intellectual virtue of *Ellipticality*. This virtue is useful for helping others come to know unsayable truths as depicted in the Ambitious Picture. I conclude by discussing the significance of each of these virtues in completing a holistic picture of intellectual virtue. Ultimately, the category of unsayable truths may turn out to be broader than outlined here, and thus this discussion may serve as a basis for filling this lacuna in scholarship.

¹ For developed account of what ineffable truths may look like, see Hofweber (2015).

1. The Modest Picture of Unsayable Truths

A writer - and, I believe, generally all persons - must think that whatever happens to him or her is a resource. All things have been given to us for a purpose, and an artist must feel this more intensely. All that happens to us, including our humiliations, our misfortunes, our embarrassments, all is given to us as raw material, as clay, so that we may shape our art.

- (*Jorge Luis Borges, Twenty-Four Conversations with Borges: Interviews by Roberto Alifano 1981-1983*)

In this section, I hope to show first that there are unsayable truths conveyable through literary art, and that these unsayable truths are valuable. This will ground the virtue of *Literary Elucidation* that I will discuss later.

First, I must clarify what is meant by conventional and unconventional language. I take conventional language to be propositional statements that convey only that which is derived from their semantic contents, and can be plausibly deemed true or false. So, “that all apples are red” is conventional language since it is false and is meant to convey no knowledge besides that which is directly accessible by the semantic content, and “that pain is a bad feeling” is conventional language because it is true is meant to convey no knowledge besides that which is directly accessible by the semantic content.

Unconventional language, then, is use of language in which it would be imprudent to deem them true or false based purely upon semantic content because it is meant to convey or lead to knowledge that is not represented purely by the semantic content. What this looks like will be made clear in the following section, as I take literary art to be a primary example of unconventional language. To understand how knowledge can be sourced from literature, I will

begin by laying out the foundation that will help illuminate the significance of the account I will rely on.

Knowledge is traditionally divided into two varieties: “knowledge that” and “knowledge how”. For example, consider the knowledge of baking a cake. Knowing “that a cake is baked” is different from knowing “how to bake a cake”. Likewise, these different kinds of knowledge are both valuable, but in different ways. That is to say, in certain situations it may be useful to know “that a cake is baked”, and in different situations it may be useful to know “how to bake a cake”.

Beyond ‘knowledge that’ and ‘knowledge how’ some epistemologists claim there exists another kind: ‘knowledge of what it is like’. Using the previous example, some claim that consciously experiencing the process of baking a cake, one gets knowledge of ‘what it is like to bake a cake’ and this is different from the knowledge ‘that cakes are baked’ or ‘how cakes are baked’.

Some philosophers have claimed literature can be a source of knowledge, and seeing as there are at least a few varieties of knowledge, we must wonder what kind of knowledge literature could be the source of. One common set of theories can be deemed *Proposition Theories* which assert that literature contains implicit propositions that the reader is led to accept. It is best to illustrate this by example. Consider Kafka’s *The Trial*. A proponent of Proposition theory may plausibly claim that the novel contains the implicit proposition “that bureaucracy can become labyrinthian and perilous.” This is conveyed by the many instances the main character is subjected to rude and unhelpful bureaucrats, and ends up in a much worse position than before he was tangled in bureaucracy.

Catherine Wilson (1983) claims that the knowledge sourced from literature is best characterized as “knowledge of what it is like”.² So, while it seems clear that experience can yield ‘knowledge of what it is like’, Wilson goes further to say that literature can also yield this same knowledge. By Wilson’s contention, I may be able to get knowledge of ‘what it is like to bake a cake’ from a piece of literary art describing such an experience and so we do not *have to* (but certainly can) experience it firsthand to know what it is like.

This distances Wilson from proposition theories of literary knowledge which assert that literature contains implicit propositions that the reader is led to accept.³ While a proponent of proposition theory may claim that *The Trial* contains the implicit proposition “that bureaucracy can become labyrinthian and perilous,” Wilson would claim that the novel conveys to the reader “what it is like to be trapped in labyrinthian and perilous bureaucracy.” Wilson dismisses proposition theory as implausible; however, once I have laid out Wilson’s theory entirely, I will build off her theory in an attempt to account for propositional knowledge sourced from literature. For now, it will suffice to say that her account remains plausible and tenable despite what I find to be plausible in proposition theory.

On its face, Wilson’s theory is plausible. By reading *War and Peace*, one attains a different kind of epistemic good than by merely reading the encyclopedia entry on the Napoleonic Invasion of Russia. The act of composing literary art involves compiling statements that on their own may be deemed conventional language, but in their unity, convey something beyond the mere semantic content of the words used so as to impart the reader with something valuable: a different kind of knowledge. This helps make sense of why literary works are so

² Wilson (1983), 491

³ Wilson (1983), 490-1. She identifies Proposition theory’s incompatibility with non-cognitivism as an additional problem, but I do not see value in discussing this problem here -- sorry non-cognitivists.

universally valued across cultures. If the same knowledge could be conveyed through propositions of conventional speech more easily, why would it not? This points in favor of Wilson's theory.

Wilson anticipates a major objection to "knowledge of what it is like" itself. She points out that other kinds of knowledge can be easily evidenced while "knowledge of what it is like" cannot. For example, suppose a friend claims to know "how to bake a cake." To prove they know this, one may ask them to bake a cake, and if they sufficiently demonstrate that they know what they are doing, then we can say they have proven to know how to bake a cake. Compare that to the friend who claims to know "what it is like to bake a cake." There seems to be no reasonable way to demonstrate this knowledge as there is for "knowledge that" and "knowledge how". If demonstrability is a characteristic of other kinds of knowledge, we may question whether "knowledge of what it is like" truly is a form of knowledge.

Wilson responds by asserting that perhaps the way this knowledge is demonstrated is through literary art. Because this is a skill requiring cultivation, though, we cannot expect all people to be able to demonstrate their "knowledge of what it is like" through literary art, though. The natural next question is why would we value such knowledge if it is not demonstrable nor practically usable for most people when "knowledge that" and "knowledge how" are clearly practical and valuable? Is it not a waste of time to pursue this sort of formless knowledge?

Following Wilson, I assert that this knowledge is valuable for its ability to force one to "revise or modify" their concepts and/or convictions. Let us look to what this might look like for someone who reads *The Trial* and gains knowledge of "what it is like to be trapped in labyrinthian and perilous bureaucracy." What concepts and convictions may be affected?

For one, someone who had no desire to agitate politicians to refine bureaucracy may now hold a strong conviction that it is necessary to agitate for the refinement of bureaucracy. After all, one who knows “what it is like to be trapped in labyrinthian and perilous bureaucracy” must know by extension that it is an unsavory experience, and thus will alter their convictions to reflect the resulting desire to avoid such experiences. Secondly, their conception of the reasonability of bureaucratic systems may be altered. In gaining knowledge of “what it is like to be trapped in labyrinthian and perilous bureaucracy,” they would plausibly recognize the illogic of many bureaucratic processes, and so in dealing with bureaucracy personally, our reader of Kafka may approach it with mistrust because they no longer conceive of bureaucracy as governed by reason.

These changes in conceptions and convictions are valuable given that they are altered to better engage with reality. After all, truth is a precondition to knowledge, including “knowledge of what it is like” and so changing concepts in light of knowledge should be understood as a changing of concepts in light of the truth. This validates our intuitive recognition of the value of literature as it seems to impel us to reconsider and perhaps alter our concepts to allow us to better engage with the world around us.

Wilson seems to unnecessarily limit what knowledge can be attained through literature by her dismissal of proposition theory, though. She deems proposition theory untenable for two primary reasons that I will highlight and briefly evaluate:

1. Even if a piece of literature makes a claim, it gives the reader no outstanding reason to believe it.

2. If one piece of literature implies x there is likely and certainly possibly one to imply $\sim x$.⁴

I find Wilson's dismissal of proposition theory on these grounds premature. At the very least, it seems that propositional knowledge is implicit in the knowledge derived by Wilson's theory. To demonstrate, consider "knowledge of what it is like to be trapped in a labyrinthian and perilous bureaucracy." If one attains this knowledge, do they not implicitly know "that bureaucracy can become labyrinthian and perilous"? Certainly, knowing what it is like to experience x entails knowledge that x is a thing that can be experienced. This is because one can only ascribe qualities to an experience if they accept that it is an experience in the first place.

Furthermore, I am unconvinced by her claim that literature provides no outstanding reason to believe any implicit propositions it contains. Consider this passage from *The Trial*:

"An elderly official, a kind, quiet man, had worked continuously day and night on a difficult case that had been made particularly complicated by the submissions of an advocate -- these officials really are hard-working, more than anyone else.

Well, towards morning, after twenty-four hours of probably not very profitable work, he went to his front door, hid behind it, and threw every advocate who tried to come in down the stairs. The advocates gathered at the foot of the staircase and discussed what they should do. On the one hand they had no actual right to be admitted, and so they could scarcely take legal action against him -- as I have already mentioned, they must be careful not to antagonise the officials; on the

⁴ Wilson (1983), 490-1. She identifies Proposition theory's incompatibility with non-cognitivism as an additional problem, but I do not see value in discussing this problem here -- sorry non-cognitivists.

other hand, however, every day not spent in court is a day lost for them, and it was most important that they should be let in. In the end, they agreed to tire the old gentleman out. Again and again an advocate was sent running up the stairs and, while putting up all possible, albeit passive, resistance, was thrown back down again. This went on for about an hour, when the old gentleman, who was in any case already tired out by working through the night, became exhausted and went back into his chambers. Those below would not believe it at first, and sent someone up to look behind the door to see that there was really no one there. Only then did they go in, and probably did not even dare to complain.”

It is abundantly clear that this absurd bureaucratic system is undesirable. The official, an overworked old man who has no formal obligation to help the advocates, is antagonized by the preposterously adamant advocates. Regardless of the necessity to see this official, there is no guarantee the advocates will meet with him and indeed do not in the end after enduring physical harm. By depicting bureaucratic processes in such a way, Kafka may be thought to implicitly assert a reason to believe the implicit claim, as he places Herr K., a seemingly ordinary citizen ignorant of the inefficiencies of bureaucracy at first, in the middle of this. What this suggests is that anyone can find themselves entrapped in such a perilous system. Wilson may rebut by claiming that Kafka has no authority on bureaucracy, and so we have no outstanding reason to believe the proposition he asserts over any other unqualified author who may put forth a contradictory proposition. But I claim it is a mistake to locate the justifier of belief in the author’s authority. Rather, it is because Kafka presents a convincing picture of how easily

bureaucracy descends into absurdity, paired with the reader's experiences, that gives a reader sufficient reason to believe the proposition.

My claim can be boiled down to this: that in providing knowledge of “what it is like to be trapped in labyrinthian and perilous bureaucracy” we must accept the implicit claim “that bureaucracy can become labyrinthian and perilous”; further, the knowledge of what it is like provides reason to accept the implicit claim. In this way, I believe that Wilson's theory and proposition theory are actually interdependent and “knowledge of what it is like” and other forms of knowledge mutually reinforce each other. In fact, I believe that Wilson's neglect of this interconnectedness causes her to severely underestimate the value and breadth of knowledge sourced from literature. Not only is a unique form of knowledge imparted by literature, but more common forms of propositional knowledge are more robustly imparted.

I believe the intuitive power of literary methods in imparting propositional knowledge will be made clear in considering the Socratic method. In Plato's dialogue *The Theaetetus*, Socrates and Theaetetus, his interlocutor, ponder the question “What is knowledge?”⁵ By the end, Socrates asks Theaetetus whether “knowledge is neither sensation nor true opinion, nor yet definition and explanation accompanying and added to true opinion?” to which Theaetetus concedes that it must not be.

Why does Plato take us through this meandering and cumbersome dialogue to impart us with the mere knowledge that knowledge is *not* reducible to these things? Could he not have made it easier on us and Theaetetus by simply saying this from the beginning? Part of the answer

⁵ Plato, *The Theaetetus*, Project Gutenberg ed. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1726/1726-h/1726-h.htm>

to this is that Plato seeks to demonstrate why exactly this account of knowledge is most plausible. I propose, though, that there is another component that justifies Plato's Socratic method: it results in a more robust uptake of knowledge, evidencing a superior epistemic good being imparted through following the dialogue as opposed to merely assenting to the proposition. Who can deny that the Socratic method imparts students with a stronger kind of knowledge or understanding? Personal experience surely verifies this truth. As Socrates concludes the dialogue, "if ... you should ever conceive afresh, you will be all the better for the present investigation, and if not, you will be soberer and humbler and gentler to other men, and will be too modest to fancy that you know what you do not know." What this conveys is that the Socratic method results in a modification of the interlocutor's concepts, such that their attitudes and actions are altered in light of them. Both Wilson and Plato show this more robust uptake of epistemic goods as a unique benefit of unconventional language as a means to knowing. That is to say that methods using literary art to impart knowledge are more effective in inducing change in the learners concepts and convictions. With change in convictions particularly, one is more likely to act decisively in light of their new knowledge than if they attained it through more conventional methods. In the following sections, I will extend this concept of robust uptake as a common thread of unsayable knowledge that has been identified by numerous figures across scholastic traditions, and investigate the various ways in which this has been identified and promoted.

To sum up what I have discussed, the "knowledge of what it is like" that literature imparts is valuable for its ability to force revision of our concepts and convictions. Differing from Wilson, however, I assert that literature provides additional epistemic value in implicit

propositions that we accept in the form of “knowledge that” and “knowledge how”. These implicit claims and the implicit reasons the literature provides seem to be inseparable from “knowledge of what it is like”. Laden with additional epistemic goods, “knowledge of what it is like” seems a particularly robust and valuable form of knowledge.

We must consider the possibility that what is really going on here is that these sources are providing the same knowledge that could be conveyed simply through a proposition, but the difference between these methods and simply expressing a propositional truth is that the methods simply enhance their internalization of such knowledge. This is a salient objection that deserves credence. So, I will explore why we may think this is the case, and ultimately why it is not.

To explain this objection, consider the proposition “that one million people perished in the Battle of Stalingrad.” One student, let’s call him Paul, reads this proposition and gains the propositional knowledge. Another student, let’s call him Umberto, reads *Stalingrad*, a narrative re-telling of the battle from the eyes of a resident of the city. From this, Umberto comes to know “that one million people perished in the Battle of Stalingrad”. Unlike Paul, however, Umberto is more affected by this knowledge from his attaining the knowledge from literary art. He becomes an anti-war activist motivated by the grief he feels about the one million that perished. He vigorously opposes any peers that suggest the Soviets were not a main force in opposing Nazi expansion in WWII, appealing to the fact that their cities such as Stalingrad experienced such atrocious loss of human life. Paul, on the other hand, carries on in virtually the same way he did before attaining this knowledge.

What can we say explains the difference between Paul and Umberto? Here are three candidates:

1. Paul does not *actually* know “that one million people perished in the Battle of Stalingrad” -- if he did, it would be the case that he would be motivated to change his actions and attitudes in light of this knowledge.
2. Paul and Umberto both know the same thing. It’s just the case that Umberto’s method of learning the knowledge was conducive with a much more robust uptake of the knowledge, and so Umberto was much more affected in actions and attitude than Paul.
3. Paul and Umberto both know this proposition, but Umberto gained unsayable knowledge from the literary art that, paired with the propositional knowledge “that one million people perished in the Battle of Stalingrad”, leads to altering actions and attitudes.

From here, I hope to show that the most plausible explanation is (3) by pointing out problems with explanations (1) and (2). I see (1) as easily dismissable. Whatever account of knowledge you subscribe to, it seems that Paul could meet the requisites for knowledge without a robust uptake. For instance, perhaps his professor is a leading scholar of the Eastern Front of WWII, and so Paul has ample justification in believing the proposition. This still may not ensure that Paul would be motivated to change his actions and attitudes. In short, (1) would seem to require an unreasonably high bar for any kind of knowledge.

To consider (2), we must consider what could explain the difference in uptake between Paul and Umberto since it is not differing kinds of knowledge. One hypothesis is that reading the book allows Umberto to better recognize the implications of the proposition “that one million people perished in the Battle of Stalingrad”, while Paul does not. On its face, this seems

plausible when we consider this in other instances of knowledge. If John knows “that smoking cigarettes causes cancer” without knowledge of the practical implications of having cancer, it is plausible that Mary who knows “that smoking causes cancer” with knowledge of the implications of having cancer will be substantially more affected in actions and attitudes. Mary knows having cancer means she may be in perpetual pain, that she won’t be able to partake in her favorite physical activities, that she will have to undergo countless discomforting procedures. John knows of cancer scientifically, but is not aware of these practical implications. From this, one could contend that John and Mary have the same knowledge, but Mary just has more understanding of the implications of that knowledge. Likewise, in the initial example, Paul and Umberto ultimately share the same knowledge but differ in awareness of implications.

But what is awareness of implications if not additional knowledge? This example meant to demonstrate the plausibility of (2) seems to better substantiate (3), though. Certainly Paul and Umberto share one same piece of knowledge; however, to leave it at that and not recognize Umberto’s deeper understanding of the implications of that knowledge as an additional instance of knowledge itself is a mistake. Umberto’s knowledge of the implications of the proposition is best characterized as a “knowledge of what it is like”. Put in other words, Umberto knows “that one million people perished in the Battle of Stalingrad”, but also knows “what it is like for one million people to have perished in the Battle of Stalingrad” and the latter knowledge amounts to full knowledge of the ramifications of that proposition.

We must consider whether this case could have gone otherwise. Could Paul have been moved to action by his new knowledge, while Umberto wasn’t? There is a chance that this could happen, of course. Since there is a major responsibility on the recipient of knowledge in how

they apply it and how strongly they situate it within their body of knowledge, it could be the case that Paul is disposed to more robustly take up the propositional knowledge he gained through his professor's testimony, and Umberto may be disposed not to robustly take up the knowledge he gained robustly. What I mean to claim, though, is that if Paul and Umberto had equal capacities to take up knowledge, then Umberto would end up taking it up more robustly because of the method it was imparted.

From this, I hope to have shown that any attempt to explain the robust uptake of knowledge from literature by methods differing in effectiveness is insufficient. The most plausible explanation is that literature imparts a "knowledge of what it is like" that itself brings about more robust uptake than mere propositional knowledge.

Having established the existence and value of knowledge from literature, we are led to wonder how to best promote and attain such knowledge. On its face, we may think this knowledge is more difficult to attain and promote as it is a more robust form of knowledge. Further, Wilson herself recognizes the difficulty in expressing this knowledge through literature, and beyond that, the reader's apprehension of this knowledge seems potentially troublesome.

By recognizing literary elucidation as an intellectual virtue, these difficulties may be surmountable. In section (3), I will return to these questions by showing that positing a virtue that needs cultivation and reinforcement from other intellectual virtues is plausible as the best way for us to practically strive toward promoting knowledge from literature.

2. The Ambitious Picture of Unsayable Truths

Cast away all speech.

Our words may express it,

but cannot hold it.

The way of letters leaves no trace,

yet the teaching is revealed.⁶

- Dōgen, 13th century Zen master

In this section, I will present how unsayable, ultimate truth has been characterized throughout various traditions, paying particular attention to Zen Buddhism. I will present their more radical and ambitious conception of unsayable truths, and discuss motivations and problems with accepting this picture. I posit this conception of unsayable truth as more ambitious for two reasons: (1) learning these truths requires is more demanding than learning both sayable truths and the conception of unsayable truths in the previous section, and (2) these truths have been characterized as extremely valuable, and even supremely valuable within various traditions. I believe the pervasiveness of the notion of ultimate unsayable truths across cultural traditions warrants a charitable examination of such truths in an epistemological investigation of unsayable truths such as this. A difficult issue is figuring out why this ultimate truth is so uniquely valuable, as its unsayability renders discussion of it virtually impossible. For this discussion, it will suffice to say that the ultimate truth is so uniquely valuable because it is often thought of as a truth that explains the origin and nature of all reality. I will primarily be examining the *kōan* as a method of attaining this form of unsayable knowledge, and can be understood in contrast to

⁶ Sam Hamill and J.P. Seaton, *The Poetry of Zen* (Boston: Shambala Library, 2004), 119.

literary art. Briefly, where literary art itself can bring a reader ‘knowledge of what it is like’, the kōan uses unconventional language and literary techniques to indicate that certain knowledge can only come through firsthand experience. In examining an alternative conception of unsayable truths, we may better understand the modest picture or find compromise somewhere between the two pictures.

The Zen Buddhist tradition is unique within the Buddhist tradition for its methods of leading practitioners to an esoteric ultimate truth that is unsayable.⁷ Why is this? Because the ultimate truths are nonverbal information, and nonverbal information can only be known and understood through exemplification or experience rather than verbal expression.⁸ To understand, consider the color green. Someone who cannot perceive green may know that leaves are green, but they cannot know what the greenness of the leaf is like. The greenness of the leaf, then, is a piece of nonverbal information that cannot be expressed verbally⁹ and the knowledge of this information may be deemed experiential knowledge. The truth of what something is like that we can gain knowledge of through literature is a kind of nonverbal information, some nonverbal information can only be apprehended through direct experience. One way to understand the Zen ultimate truth may be as a truth of what something is like that can only be known through direct experience, not through literary art.

Of course, *the* ultimate truth that Zen posits as the most excellent epistemic good is not as easy to apprehend as greenness is. We have perceptual faculties to facilitate our apprehending of

⁷ Chris Mortenson, “Zen and the Unsayable,” in *Pointing at the Moon: Buddhism, Logic and Analytic Philosophy* ed. Jay L. Garfield, Tom J. F. Tillemans, and Mario D’Amato (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

⁸ Mortenson (2009), 7. The phrase ‘nonverbal information’ is not ideal because it fails to recognize the existence of nonverbal language. I would say ‘nonlinguistic information’ is a better fit, but to avoid confusion since I am relying on Mortenson’s concept, I will use his terminology.

⁹ Mortenson (2009), 8.

the truth of what greenness is like, but nothing of the sort for the ultimate truth of reality posited by Zen Buddhists. If one thing is clear, it is that this ultimate truth is not apprehended with ease, or through conventional methods.

If that is the case, then how is this ultimate truth apprehended? This is where the two major schools of Zen today, Sōtō and Rinzai, differ. The Sōtō school emphasizes meditation, following zen master Dōgen's (1200 - 1253) teachings. Dōgen saw zazen, the unique Zen method of meditation, as the most important practice in attaining enlightenment, i.e. apprehending the ultimate truth.¹⁰ A lesser part of Sōtō Zen practice is the study of kōans.

Kōans are the unique literary teachings of Zen Buddhism, and can be understood as a sort of case study or public record.¹¹ Chinese master Chung-feng Ming-pen likens kōans to the case records of a court. Just as a court defers to the information of wise old judges by utilizing case records, kōans are thought to preserve the wisdom of wise old masters for study today.¹² The cases depicted in kōans typically follow one of the following formats:

1. The students ask the master a question or pose a philosophical problem to the master. The master responds, typically in a fashion that prima facie disregards the content of the question or problem.
2. The master poses a challenge to the students. The students initially fail to overcome the challenge in the master's desired fashion, and either one student will immediately grasp what they must do or say or the teacher will punish them for not grasping it.

¹⁰ Isshū Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *The Zen Koan: Its History and Use in Rinzai Zen* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), 19.

¹¹ Isshū (1965), 4

¹² Isshū (1965), 4-7.

Where the Sōtō school posits zazen practice as most conducive to apprehending the ultimate truth, the Rinzai school posits kōan study as most conducive. Kōans are a prime example of unconventional language, and lead to unsayable knowledge in a different way than most literary art. In a metaphorical sense, kōans *point* to the means of attaining ultimate knowledge while literary art is itself the source of unsayable knowledge. For this reason, I will be investigating the kōan methodology of promoting unsayable knowledge in the following paragraphs.

The distinction between the literary method and the kōan method of attaining unsayable knowledge is crucial, so I will explain it further. To do so, I must clarify the picture of unsayable knowledge I am basing this all on. For any x such that there is knowledge of “what it is like to x ”, there can be multiple levels to this knowledge:

1. “Knowing y about x ” for instance, “knowing that one million people perished in the Battle of Stalingrad”
2. “Knowing what x is like” *from the account of another*, for instance “knowing what it was like for one million people to perish in the Battle of Stalingrad” *from the account of the book Stalingrad*
3. “Knowing what x is like” *from firsthand experience*, for instance “knowing what it was like for one million people to perish in Stalingrad” from first handedly experiencing the Battle of Stalingrad.

I posit *at least* (but not limited to) three classifications ranging from conventional knowledge to unconventional to help understand the relation between “knowing *x*” and “knowing *what x is like*”. Literary art may convey knowledge characterized by (2), while kōans are *do not* seek to convey such knowledge. Kōans themselves do not impart knowledge, but rather work to accelerate attainment of the knowledge characterized by (3) by indicating that experiencing reality is the source of knowledge one desires. This classification allows us to recognize the value in the knowledge imparted by literary art, as asserted by Wilson, but captures the fact that the knowledge it provides is not as robust or in-depth as the knowledge from firsthand experience that kōans are ultimately concerned with. It also allows us to clearly distinguish the aims of intellectually virtuous literary art and kōans. Further, it allows us to distinguish between various levels of unsayable knowledge. The more immediate the source of knowledge of “what *x is like*”, the stronger the knowledge imparted is, and that is why we may call the literary method of attaining unsayable knowledge the modest picture, and the kōan method the ambitious picture.

The first thing to note about kōan study is that the apprehension of the ultimate truth from the kōan typically takes a very long time. Master Nanshinken once asserted, “The practice of Zen is just like making a fine sword. The raw iron must be heated until it becomes red hot; then it must be beaten into shape, then put in the fire again, then thrust into cold water, then beaten into shape again -- tempered and polished over and over and over again to bring it to complete.”¹³ Through this simile we can see that the Zen process of attaining ultimate knowledge is strenuous and complicated. Nevertheless, these Zen masters are adamant that, with time and dedication, kōan study can result in attaining the ultimate truth.

¹³ Isshū (1965), 58-9.

This method is discussed by Zhi (2013), as he points out that “the leap from the conventional system of words to a poetic insight corresponds to the leap from ordinary experiences to enlightenment.”¹⁴ As we will see, this method of metacognizing the pedagogical method as an example of the pedagogy itself is also characteristic of Zen. According to Zhi, the absurdity and irrationality of the kōan are meant to puzzle the reader so much to cause them to revert to a pre-linguistic consciousness to understand, and so anything one comes to understand by the kōan is inexpressible.

Without further ado, we can look at one kōan as an example to begin to understand:

A monk once said to Fuketsu Oshō: “Speech and silence tend toward separation [from It] or concealment [of It]. How shall we proceed so as not to violate It?

Fuketsu replied with the following verse:

‘I always remember the Kōnan in the spring,

The partridges crying and flowers spilling their fragrance.’¹⁵

In kōan study, the following Zen parable is useful to keep in kind: when a master points his finger at the moon, only a fool mistakes the finger for the moon. The lesson of this is that “to understand reality one must grasp it with one’s own hands, or better, be it. Otherwise, as Buddhists aptly illustrate, we shall be taking the finger for the moon; the finger is the pointer and not the moon itself.”¹⁶ This idiom articulates Zen’s relationship with language, as they rely on

¹⁴Yong Zhi, “The Poetic Transmission of Zen Buddhism” *Asian Culture and History* 5, no. 2 (2013), 27.

¹⁵ Isshū (1965) 54-5.

¹⁶ D.T. Suzuki and Richard M. Jaffe, *Selected Works of D. T. Suzuki, Volume I: Zen*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 354.

language in using kōans, but to take the words themselves to be the object of importance is a woeful mistake. What the kōans metaphorically *point to* is the object of importance. As such, we must figure out what it is this kōan points to.

Consider the above kōan. The monk brings a philosophical problem to Fuketsu, appearing confused about how to apprehend the ultimate truth, spoken of as “It” in the kōan. He makes a pertinent point: how can one hope to attain the ultimate truth when it’s the case that both speaking and silence tend to lead one away from attaining the ultimate truth? Fuketsu responds with a poetic verse entirely unrelated to the monk’s question, so on its face, it seems that Fuketsu simply has ignored the question. How frustrating!

Really, though, Fuketsu has not ignored the question. What he has done can be understood as a flouting of Gricean rules of conversation.¹⁷ Indeed, he has not ignored the question but not answered it either. What we may understand Fuketsu as doing is *pointing* to the answer using language unconventionally. I believe the answer Fuketsu is pointing to is *experience* -- by experiencing reality, one will not violate or distance themselves from the ultimate truth. The verse recited by Fuketsu is a recollection of an experience he clearly regards as positive, and by responding to the question as such, he draws the monk’s attention toward the benefits of experiencing phenomena as opposed to intellectualizing about phenomena. D.T. Suzuki asserts satori or enlightenment can only be had by personal experience, showing how experience is valued as the means of attaining ultimate knowledge in the Zen tradition.¹⁸

¹⁷ H.P. Grice, “Logic and Conversation,” in *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Arts*, ed. Peter Cole, (Elsevier, 1975): 41–58.

¹⁸ D.T. Suzuki and M. Jaffe, *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki, Volume I: Zen*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 107.

One may ask why can't Fuketsu simply state that experiencing phenomena is the way to knowledge? Would this not be a much more certain way to lead the monk to his desired knowledge? Allow me to explain why I think not. By responding in the manner he did, Fuketsu neglects to engage in conventional speech -- after all, it may seem hypocritical to say that experience is the conduit of truth while trying to impart a truth through conventional language. By referring to an experience and ignoring the content of the question, Fuketsu indicates that asking and theorizing about answers to questions is the wrong method. In short, Fuketsu is addressing where the monk goes astray: in the unstated premise of the question, which is that conventional language can help him attain ultimate knowledge. To illustrate, if a police officer came to you and asked "Why did you set fire to the school?" it would be wise to reply "I did not set fire to the school." This response does not directly answer the officer's question, but rather addresses the unstated assumption. In a similar way, Fuketsu intervenes on the implicit assumption of asking such a question. Priest (2015) articulates a message of major Buddhist scriptures as that "The duality of speech/silence is transcended precisely by showing how both of these things are the same."¹⁹ This issue is reflected in the monk's question, and what Fuketsu is doing can be understood as a transcendence of this issue brought up by the monk. In this way Fuketsu shows one way to treat intellectual questions if one seeks ultimate truth, thus providing a tangible example for students to model their own actions on.

If he had directly answered the monk's question, Fuketsu may not be successful in leading the monk to enlightenment. This is because of something that we have already seen demonstrated in the *The Modest Picture* by examining Plato's Socratic Method. That is, by

¹⁹Graham Priest, "Speaking of the Ineffable, East and West," *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (2015), 18.

simply leading the student to the experience that will impart them with the knowledge they seek, the uptake of the knowledge is much stronger than if simply told through conventional language. The depth of Fuketsu's answer becomes evident when we consider that he certainly had an understanding of this phenomena: on the first level, he points to experience as the answer to the monk's question; on a second, deeper level, he is pointing to the necessity to understand the value of experience itself *through experience*, not because some master told him to. This will allow the monk to find that it is experience itself that will lead him to apprehending the ultimate truth. More could certainly be said about this kōan, as I expect more is being pointed to than I can identify, but for our purposes, this discussion will suffice.

Naturally, one may now wonder about the efficacy of such a method. Would the answer not be in vain if the monk was not sensitive to the methodology of Fuketsu? I expect that it is for this reason the attainment of enlightenment through kōan study is difficult. It takes a considerable understanding to even begin grasping what they point to. This is to be expected, though, as more valuable epistemic goods are behind more formidable barriers.

One more objection to the kōan method may be directed at my treatment of this kōan as follows. The truth conveyed by the kōan is *not* unsayable as evidenced by my explaining it in conventional language. In other words, if we take the knowledge imparted by the kōan to be "that experience is the sole means to attaining ultimate knowledge", how can such knowledge be unsayable? Perhaps this explanation is no more than pointing to the answer -- to take the answer to be the words themselves is to make the woeful mistake of taking the finger for the moon. I expect a Zen master would contend the profound truth promoted by kōan study is not understood through my explanation as words can only bring limited understanding. Obviously,

if this is true, I am unable to aptly characterize the depth of this ultimate truth with language, which is why this ultimate truth is so valuable even though it may seem unclear. The valuable knowledge one is to be led to by the kōan is *how* experiencing phenomena can bring knowledge of the ultimate truth. I extend this claim to knowledge beyond an ultimate truth. Even if there exists no ultimate truth as conceived by Zen Buddhists, it is plausible that there exists some uniquely valuable knowledge only apprehendable through direct experience. All people, regardless of epistemological commitments, can find value in this experiential, unsayable knowledge.

While conventional knowledge is undeniably valuable, epistemology has allowed a great blind spot on unconventional knowledge to manifest. From the Zen Buddhist tradition, I believe we find resources for more successful methods of attaining valuable experiential, unsayable knowledge. For this reason, I believe we must have a means of redirecting our pursuits of knowledge to capture the pursuit of both conventional and unconventional knowledge. The following sections are dedicated to using intellectual virtues as these means.

3. A Primer on Intellectual Virtue

In the following sections, I will present the case for the recognition of two new intellectual virtues (IV's) both fitting under the heading of utilizing unconventional language. I call these virtues *Literary Elucidation* (LE) and *Ellipticality* (Ellipticality), each respectively representing the different accounts of unsayable knowledge I have discussed. In order to show what is plausible about accepting these as IV's, I will present several mainstream conceptions of

IV and show how the IV's I propose can fit into all of these plausible accounts. Ultimately, I hope to provide a useful and illuminating heuristic for promoting unconventional knowledge or unsayable truths.

Discussion of virtues typically concerns moral virtue. We often understand moral virtues as excellences of character that perhaps make someone a good person. This idea can easily be imported into discussion of intellectual excellence. As such, we can understand intellectual virtues broadly as excellences of the mind. This is very broad, but intentionally so because there exist many conceptions of what exactly intellectual virtue is, just as there is with moral virtue. So as not to limit the scope of the IV's I will propose, I will present two mainstream conceptions of IV that I will go on to show that my proposed IV's can accommodate. From this, I hope to show that the IV's I propose are plausible because they can be characterized as IV's by quite different conceptions.²⁰ The two accounts of IV I will consider are the following four:

Baehr's Personal Worth Conception: an IV is a character trait that contributes to its possessor's "personal intellectual worth", or that makes its possessor an intellectually good or better person.²¹

²⁰ One preliminary distinction to make is between "Reliabilist" and "Responsibilist" accounts of IV. Reliabilist accounts identify IV's with cognitive faculties like memory, hearing, and reasoning. By Reliabilist accounts, IV's are faculties an agent must rely upon to attain epistemic goods, and are typically not the sorts of things one can deliberately cultivate. By Responsibilist accounts, IV's are character-based traits like open-mindedness, humility, and curiosity. As the name implies, the agent has a responsibility and ability to cultivate these virtues. These two camps are not necessarily at odds, as one can simply recognize that there are both Reliabilist and Responsibilist virtues. The IV's I am considering should be considered Responsibilist virtues. Being so, I will only consider Responsibilist accounts to accommodate.

²¹ Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 112.

What is it to be an intellectually good person? To Baehr, it involves a “positive psychological orientation toward epistemic goods.”²² So, a virtue is something that does not necessarily reliably bring about epistemic goods, namely knowledge, but something that contributes to the possessor’s positive orientation toward knowledge. Notably, epistemic goods in this context is *not* restricted to just those that the possessor attains; rather, a trait that allows the possessor to bring more epistemic goods to others may count as an IV by Baehr’s Personal Worth Conception.

Let’s consider an example of a clear IV that Baehr examines. While of course there is not unanimous assent,²³ many virtue epistemologists consider open-mindedness to be a clear example of an IV. To avoid lengthy discussion of what exactly open-mindedness (OM) is, I will simply consider it as Baehr conceives of it: “An OM person is characteristically willing and (within limits) able to transcend a default cognitive standpoint in order to take up or take seriously the merits of a distinct cognitive standpoint.”²⁴

Now I will consider OM is an IV by Baehr’s account. One major way OM can contribute to a positive orientation toward knowledge is by its ability to lead its possessor to conceiving or imagining “otherwise inscrutable or unidentifiable possibilities or explanations.”²⁵ From this, I think it is intuitively plausible to see how this could fit into the account. Suppose someone simply could not imagine a way in which the earth was round. In their close-mindedness, they reject all demonstrations of the earth’s roundness because it completely goes against their picture of the world around them. Suppose one day they begin working to transcend their default

²² Baehr (2011), 102.

²³ See Jeremy Fantl’s (2018) *Limitations of the Open Mind* for a well-argued (though personally, unconvincing) case that open-mindedness is *not* an intellectual virtue.

²⁴ Baehr (2011), 152.

²⁵ Baehr (2011), 147.

cognitive standpoint (i.e. exercising OM) that the earth is flat. Upon seeing evidence and demonstrations of the earth's roundness, their transcendence of their default standpoint allows them to recognize an entirely new way to see the world around them. Without OM, they would be unable to move to a more true understanding of the world. This is an enriching and fulfilling experience, and I find it plausible that someone who comes to more knowledge by being OM in a similar way to this will be motivated to continue exercising OM in recognizing the intellectual fulfillment of coming to know more things. Thus, they will be more positively oriented toward knowledge, and a better person intellectually. This is one example of what an IV by Baehr's account may look like.

Now, let's examine the second account of IV that I will consider:

Driver's Consequentialism: an IV is a character trait that enables one to realize their capacity for intellectual development and attainment of true belief.²⁶

A trait is only an IV if it promotes good epistemic consequences by this account. One notable point that helps explain why Driver and Baehr diverge is their view on the role of luck. Driver views luck as an essential "fact of life" that one must be sensitive to while going through life if one truly seeks to promote the best consequences.²⁷ Baehr, alternatively, sees it as somewhat unfair to factor luck and other external factors that can affect outcomes into an account of virtue.²⁸ Whether something counts as an IV can be largely determined by external

²⁶ Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtues*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 126.

²⁷ Driver (2004), 104.

²⁸ Baehr (2011), 123.

factors for Driver, and for Baehr external factors are irrelevant to whether something counts as an IV. Because there seem to be benefits to each view, I find it useful to consider both.

To show what an IV may look like by Driver's account, I will consider another widely accepted IV: intellectual humility. One plausible conception of intellectual humility (IH) is the *Limitations-Owning* conception which states that "IH consists in proper attentiveness to, and owning of, one's intellectual limitations."²⁹

How can Limitations-Owning IH lead to attaining true belief? Let's consider an example of a philosophy professor who creates an account of the phenomenology of perception. At a conference, a neuroscientist presents empirical evidence that the philosopher's account is impossible. This philosopher has built a coherent set of beliefs around this account, and to abandon it will amount to abandoning many beliefs he finds plausible. Nevertheless, recognizing his own intellectual limitations in empirical neuroscientific study, the philosopher accepts the neuroscientist's claim, and abandons his account and the associated beliefs accordingly.

In this example, the philosopher has better realized his capacity for intellectual development by recognizing that in fact he lacks the answers to many empirical questions. When faced with evidence that he overlooked because of his limitations, he amended his beliefs. Whether or not the new account he accepts is true, he has abandoned a false belief and has moved closer to realizing true beliefs. The philosopher's IH can be considered an IV by Driver's account because of this.

²⁹ Dennis Whitcomb, Heather Battaly, Jason Baehr, and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 94, no. 3 (2017), 520. While Whitcomb et al. 's conception of IV diverges from Driver's as is made clear soon after their bare account is articulated, the bare articulation of their account remains plausible by other accounts of IV.

Having explained these various conceptions and used examples to illustrate concrete instances of IV's, I hope to use this foundation to discuss the two IV's that I will propose.

4. Intellectual Virtue of Literary Expressibility

In this section, I will present my account of *Literary Elucidation* (LE). I will then discuss how this trait can be intellectually virtuous by the various accounts of IV I outlined in the previous section. Finally, I will present the motivations for accepting LE as an IV and then anticipate and respond to objections regarding LE as an IV.

I define LE as follows:

Literary Elucidation is the characteristic ability to (a) promote “knowledge of what it is like” through literary expression, and (b) generate reflective knowledge from an animal “knowledge of what it is like”, where (a) and (b) are interrelated.

While this may appear to simply be a skill useful for an author to possess, I believe it can be useful for all people to strive to embody and cultivate as a consistent character trait. Each person has unique experiences, and from those experiences, may have unique knowledge. Because it can be beneficial for others to gain that knowledge as well, I believe anyone striving to be an excellent intellectual agent should strive to be able to aptly convey such unsayable knowledge. As argued in Section I, literary art appears the best way to do so. As Borges articulates so well, all that happens to us may be a resource, and I further claim that it can be an epistemic resource for the author as well as the reader.

One aspect of my account that needs explanation is how animal and reflective knowledge fit into the picture. Since this distinction was introduced by Ernest Sosa, understanding this distinction requires some understanding of Sosa's conception of knowledge. One necessary condition for knowledge is as follows:

A belief amounts to knowledge only if it is true and its correctness derives from its manifesting certain cognitive virtues of the subject, where nothing is a cognitive virtue unless it is a truth-conducive disposition.³⁰

This account can be thought of as more characteristic of animal knowledge than reflective knowledge, as reflective knowledge goes beyond this mere necessary condition and requires a consideration of the source of the belief and an endorsement of that source. Sosa further outlines the some candidates for the various degrees of knowledge, or in other words, the things to consider in order to move from an animal to reflective knowledge:

- (a) how sure one is about the matter known,
- (b) how safe or unsafe is one's belief, how easily one might have been wrong,
- (c) how rationally justified one is in so believing: e.g., how strong one's evidence is, and
- (d) how reliably truth-conducive is the way in which one acquires or sustains one's belief.

³⁰ Ernest Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge*, New York: Clarendon;Oxford University Press (2009), 136.

For one to exercise LE intellectually virtuously, then they must generate reflective knowledge by considering (a)-(d), or something relevantly similar, in regards to their animal “knowledge of what it is like”. To see what this would look like and that this is plausible, let us consider Hemingway’s short story “The End of Something”. In this story, Hemingway’s autobiographical alter ego Nick Adams melancholically ends his relationship with a woman named Marjorie. Let us suppose that this is based off of a real experience of Hemingway’s. From real experience, Hemingway certainly generated some animal knowledge -- perhaps “that ending a relationship is difficult,” “that it is difficult to articulate dissatisfaction,” as well as “what it is like to end a relationship in such a way.” In elucidating this experience with literature, though, if we posit Hemingway as a virtuous possessor of LE, then he must have reflected on this animal knowledge. He may have considered what the basis is for believing “that ending a relationship is difficult” and consider whether his emotions distort his beliefs about things like how he believes Marjorie took the break up. Autobiographical authors have attested to the ability of such work to enrich understanding of themselves, and certainly this has epistemic value.³¹ From this, I find the term “elucidate” to be most characteristic of this phenomena: elucidation is the process of explaining experience, where an author is both clarifying it for themselves as well as bringing to light new knowledge for a reader. While it may seem odd to consider such actions a character trait, I believe that it can be plausible to consider it so. There may not be many people who characteristically reflect on and elucidate their knowledge through literature, but it is clear that the world would be a better place if more people did so. In short, LE can epistemically benefit an

³¹ Andy Begg, “Reflecting on Writing Autobiography”, *Policy Futures in Education*, vol. 9 no. 2, 2011.

author because the process of elucidating experience through literature must involve an honest reflection on their “knowledge of what it is like”.

The knowledge promoted by LE extends beyond the author, of course, and perhaps the greatest recipient of knowledge is the readers. I contend that LE may be considered particularly valuable in virtue of how it promotes knowledge both for the possessor who elucidates their experience with literature, and the reader who gains “knowledge of what it is like” from the literature. While promoting epistemic benefits for readers is the central aim of LE, the author should benefit as well. By making generation of reflective knowledge a necessary condition of LE, it allows the most epistemic benefits for both readers and authors.

Instances of LE being practiced involve an existing foundation of knowledge. I think it best to conceptualize it as clarifying an existing form of knowledge for the author (as required by the transformation from animal to reflective knowledge) and bringing to light new knowledge for a reader. So while LE does not concern the unexamined spinning of stories, the writing of fictional literature can be captured under this understanding. Consider Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* series. The novels are set in a dystopian future where youth are chosen by lottery to compete in a fight to the death that is broadcast for entertainment. The world Collins constructs is rich in detail, examining the lives across the strata of society and eventually delving into the political foundations of this society as the series progresses. A worry for my account may be this: there is certainly some epistemic value in *The Hunger Games*, but Collins does not have “knowledge of what it is like to live in the dystopian future of *The Hunger Games*” since she never has personally experienced such a reality, and thus Collins is *prima facie* excluded from virtuously exercising LE.

I believe this worry is overcome once we more closely examine the nature of fiction like Collins' *The Hunger Games*. In short, speculative fiction such as this amalgamates “knowledge of what it is like” from actual experience to create a product that plausibly conveys “knowledge of what it is like to live in the dystopian future of *The Hunger Games*.”

Let's consider another example to illuminate this one. Suppose I have two instances of “knowledge of what it is like”: (1) what it is like to run a marathon, and (2) what it is like to walk the route of the Boston marathon. Is it plausible, then, to say I have “knowledge of what it is like to run the Boston marathon”? I am hesitant to say that this is absolutely true -- while these two instances of knowledge may give some degree of new knowledge from amalgamating experiences, there is still epistemic value in *actually* experiencing the Boston marathon. Nevertheless, I think there is some significant knowledge gained from amalgamating experiential knowledge even if that knowledge can be further supplemented. Having the two previously stipulated instances of knowledge, I would certainly have the superior epistemic position regarding “knowledge of what it is like to run the Boston marathon” than someone who does not have those instances of knowledge.

In the same way experiential knowledge is amalgamated in this example, I believe experiential knowledge is amalgamated into new, though not comprehensive, knowledge that is elucidated through speculative fiction. Collins has said that she developed the idea of *The Hunger Games* from flipping through TV channels and seeing one program with young people on a game show competing, and another with footage of young people fighting an actual war.³² Seeing what these situations are like, Collins then gained some understanding of what a

³² Suzanne Collins, “A Killer Story: An Interview with Suzanne Collins, Author of ‘The Hunger Games,’” interview by Rick Margolis, *School Library Journal* (September 2, 2008).

combination of the two would be like. Of course, there was much more knowledge Collins relied upon to develop the complex world of *The Hunger Games*, like what it is like to have relationships like those depicted in the books as much of the series' value is in the conveyed knowledge about interpersonal relationships. In this way, knowledge of what it is like to be in situations that do not exist can be attained to some degree and elucidated through literature.

One way to sum up what speculative LE achieves is allowing us to wrap our heads around ideas that are typically very difficult to understand. What this shows is that there is a particularly valuable good resulting from the intellectually virtuous production of fictional literature. From this, there should be no question whether the characteristic production of fiction as well as true accounts can be deemed LE. It should be noted, though, that there is a fine line an author must toe in order to virtuously engage in LE. If their elucidation promotes a mistaken understanding or does not accurately characterize reality, then it cannot be virtuous. Suppose *The Hunger Games* is built on a foundation of Collins' false beliefs about young people and war -- this would render the books epistemically vicious since it would promote false beliefs. To both the reader and author, it will be exceedingly difficult in most cases to determine which works promote knowledge and which confound it. In fact, it may be the case that we cannot know whether much fiction, even *The Hunger Games* are virtuous instances of LE. To know so, we would have to have a strong idea of what the author's knowledge they rely on to write the work is. For this reason, it is important to cultivate various IV's in conjunction with LE to discern epistemically virtuous and vicious instances of literature.

Now that I have sketched what LE looks like and what it may capture, let us consider the two accounts of IV it must fit into to plausibly be considered an IV.

4.1 Literary Elucidation within Baehr's Personal Worth Conception

Baehr's conception of personal worth is based on having the appropriate orientation toward that which is good and that which is bad. In other words, to be a good person is to love or be positively oriented toward what is good and to hate or be negatively oriented toward what is bad.

³³ How might possessing LE contribute to a positive orientation toward epistemic goods?

We may defer to empirical research, such as Saddler & Graham's (2007) study that greater writing ability is correlated with greater knowledge in general and knowledge of the benefits of writing.³⁴ Of course, this doesn't establish a causal connection, but comports with the idea that writing ability is a part of being a comprehensively intellectually virtuous agent. But it's unnecessary to defer to empirical research anyway. Because this paper is an investigation of unsayable knowledge, I want to find a character trait that contributes to one's intellectual worth (i.e. is a virtue by Baehr's account) because it promotes unsayable knowledge. I will first show how each requirement to possess LE is necessary to achieve this, and show how exactly LE as I have articulated it does so.

Because there are parts (a) and (b) to the account of LE, we can imagine four possibilities for fulfillment of LE's requirements. P₁ fulfills neither (a) nor (b); P₂ fulfills (a) but not (b); P₃ fulfills (b) but not (a); P₄ fulfills both (a) and (b), successfully possessing LE. I will consider how well each possibility of fulfillment can contribute to the possessor's intellectual worth.

³³ Baehr (2011) 97.

³⁴ Bruce Saddler & Steve Graham, "The Relationship Between Writing Knowledge and Writing Performance Among More and Less Skilled Writers," *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 23:3, 231-247 (2007), 244-5.

First, it is clear that P_1 's lack of fulfilling both (a) and (b) does *not* contribute to their intellectual worth. Failing to both promote “knowledge of what it is like” to generate reflective knowledge will not make P_1 more positively oriented toward epistemic goods like knowledge. It seems intuitively true that refraining from bringing knowledge to others as well as oneself when there is a possibility to do so in and of itself cannot make someone better disposed toward knowledge.

Second, P_2 's fulfilling (a) but not (b) does not contribute to their intellectual worth. To promote a “knowledge of what it is like” through literature, one must reflect on their animal knowledge. Otherwise, they are bound to promote false beliefs because our recollections of experiences are certainly rife with misremembrances without critical evaluation. What I mean to say is that it actually seems impossible to characteristically promote a “*knowledge* of what it is like” without characteristically generating reflective knowledge for oneself because their literature will often not be truthful if the experiences they rely on are not reflected on.

Third, P_3 's fulfilling (b) but not (a) may contribute to a possessor's intellectual worth, but on its own is unable to promote unsayable knowledge. To reflect on animal knowledge and generate reflective knowledge is certainly a useful exercise, and someone who characteristically does so will be more positively disposed to attain knowledge. Consider times in which you have reflected on an experience that you had. Many times, close reflection brings realization that the idea of the experience previously held was flawed. Perhaps you were overly critical of yourself, or perhaps you had been looking back on it with rose-colored glasses, so to speak. In reflecting and considering Sosa's questions (a)-(d), you will come to see the situation more accurately. From this, you can feel better about yourself if you were overly critical, or abandon your

idealistic memory and thus attain a more realistic expectation of the present and future. In any case, generating reflective knowledge will amount to a positive experience in sum, and thus it seems likely that it will make an agent more positively oriented toward attaining more reflective knowledge, and perhaps knowledge in general. While this may be an IV by Baehr's account, it is decidedly not the phenomena I am capturing. It fails to bring an unsayable knowledge to others, which is the hole I hope my IV's can fill. So, while P_3 may become a better intellectual agent, they are not promoting unsayable knowledge to others and so is not of my concern here.

Finally, P_4 's fulfillment of both (a) and (b) contributes to their intellectual worth and promotes unsayable knowledge. Because P_4 generates reliable, reflective knowledge, they will be disposed to continue to do so. Furthermore, if they see how the process of LE generates this reflective knowledge for themselves *and* brings a new "knowledge of what it is like" to others, they will be positively oriented toward these forms of knowledge that come from LE. For instance if someone of a marginalized identity elucidates their experience through literature, thereby promoting a "knowledge of what it is like to be of that marginalized identity", in bringing this knowledge to other people and being robustly taken up by them, others will be motivated to work toward justice for people of that identity. Since this is good, the possessor of LE will see the benefits of the knowledge they promote as well as the benefits of reflective knowledge for themselves as outlined in the previous paragraph. It thus seems plausible that these benefits will make the possessor more positively disposed to generate reflective knowledge for themselves and promote knowledge for others.

As I have shown, it is necessary to fulfill both (a) and (b) in order to fulfill Baehr's conception of IV in virtue of promoting unsayable knowledge. From this, we can see that LE

contains the necessary and sufficient conditions for an intellectually virtuous promotion of unsayable knowledge by Baehr's account.

4.2 Literary Elucidation within Driver's Consequentialist Conception

To accommodate Driver's Consequentialism, we must show that LE can be an IV by enabling one to realize their capacity for intellectual development and attainment of true belief. In other words, an agent's possession of LE must cause intellectual development and attainment of true belief. Because I am concerned with the promotion of unsayable knowledge in this paper, I will show how fulfilling LE entirely is a reliable means of promoting the attainment of unsayable knowledge for readers, and causes intellectual development in both the readers and the author. I will consider the various possible fulfillments of requirements (a) and (b) to show how only fulfilling both and possessing my conception of LE can comport with Driver's conception because of its promotion of unsayable knowledge. As with the previous section, I will consider four possibilities: P_1 fulfills neither (a) nor (b); P_2 fulfills (a) but not (b); P_3 fulfills (b) but not (a); P_4 fulfills both (a) and (b), successfully possessing LE.

First, P_1 's failure to fulfill (a) and (b) does nothing itself to cause intellectual development and attainment of true belief, for the same reasons that P_1 fails by Baehr's conception. I think it unnecessary to discuss it further.

Second, P_2 's fulfillment of (a) but not (b) does not cause intellectual development and true belief in the form of unsayable "knowledge of what it is like". Because cannot aptly elucidate with literature, or promote actual knowledge, without reflecting on and clarifying their

experience, it seems unlikely that their P_2 's literature could bring true belief and intellectual development. In fact, their literature could be intellectually vicious because it is in some capacity just the unexamined spinning of tales.

Third, P_3 's fulfillment of (b) but not (a) may cause intellectual development and true belief in the author; however, because it does not promote unsayable "knowledge of what it is like" without fulfilling (a), P_3 may possess some other IV that could fit into Driver's conception but not the kind I am concerned with.

Finally, only P_4 's fulfillment of both (a) and (b) causes intellectual development in both author and reader, and promotes an unsayable "knowledge of what it is like" for the reader. When the author reflects on experience in the process of elucidating their experience through literature, they will personally intellectually develop. This is because it will give them a more reliable reflective knowledge than the unrefined animal knowledge, and thus their knowledge of their own experience will be enhanced and developed. The author's fulfillment of (a) and (b) must promote a true belief in the form of unsayable knowledge in the reader. Because they are generating reflective knowledge, and thus reliably conveying truth in their knowledge, it seems that their literature will succeed in promoting a "knowledge of what it is like" within the readers.

So, I have shown that LE as an IV can comport with Driver's conception of consequentialist IV because the possession of LE allows the author to promote true belief in the form of unsayable knowledge. I believe that as with Baehr's conception, Driver's conception can allow us to recognize the unique value of LE as an IV in that it epistemically benefits the author in a more conventional way, and in the process of doing so, epistemically benefits the reader in an unconventional way (i.e. by promoting unsayable "knowledge of what it is like").

4.3 Literary Elucidation and the intellectual phenomena it helps explain

Having shown LE's plausibility as an IV by different mainstream accounts, we have substantial reason to recognize LE as an IV. In recognizing this IV, we can explain intellectual phenomena that go unexplained without recognizing LE.

There are many reasons it would be valuable to recognize LE as an IV. First, it allows us to account for the benefit we derive from elucidatory literature, and it allows us to orient ourselves toward deriving the epistemic goods found in literature. In other words, it allows us to rationalize and justify spending our time and resources on cultivating LE. Without recognizing LE or something like it, we would be hard-pressed to justify dedicating time and resources toward producing literature since the epistemic goods it warrants are not immediately clear.

Furthermore, LE works in accord with various other mainstream IV's such as open-mindedness and intellectual humility. It may even be said that for one to successfully possess LE, they must possess a degree of each of these IV's. This seems to follow from requiring generation of reflective knowledge as a condition for possessing LE, as one who is not open-minded or intellectually humble may very well not successfully reflect on their animal knowledge with an earnest reconsideration of the basis of their knowledge and beliefs.

The primary importance of recognizing LE as an IV, though, is how instrumental it is to a holistic picture of the intellectually virtuous life. Possessing LE, the virtuous agent helps fill an epistemic lacuna of "knowledge of what it is like" for readers. This is particularly valuable because without virtuous writers to promote this knowledge, the only other way another may attain it is through experience. Of course, subjective experience is finite -- I cannot experience both a music festival in Chicago and a film festival in Hollywood that are occurring at the same

time, and so my potential “knowledge of what it is like” is necessarily limited without literature to give me some “knowledge of what it is like”. Literature exponentially expands the potential “knowledge of what it is like” that we can attain, and as I hope to have shown, this knowledge is certainly valuable. To be good epistemic agents, we ought to promote this knowledge.

Producing literature that promotes knowledge can be conceptualized as contributing to a body of literature or literary tradition. By contributing, one is not only giving others access to epistemic goods, but enriching the tradition in a way that compels others to produce literature that promotes epistemic goods. Not only does producing literature affect the generation of current and future knowledge, but it can elicit a deeper understanding of past literature to generate knowledge. Jorge Luis Borges writes:

“The fact is that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.”³⁵

No author writes in a vacuum -- for instance Borges argues that ideas expressed by Zeno of Elea, Kierkegaard, and Robert Browning resemble that of Kafka.³⁶ To recognize the remarkability of this, let us consider the chronology of these figures: each of the three thinkers identified by Borges preceded Kafka, and so if anything they perhaps influenced Kafka (though there is not evidence of this). Kafka then influenced Borges. Borges then elucidates the work of Kafka by arguing that Kafka’s work elucidates works that preceded him. The elucidation Kafka provides appears to be the hermeneutical frame associated with Kafka and his ideas, and by applying this

³⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, (New York: New Direction Publishing Co., 1964), 201.

³⁶ Borges (1964), 200-4

frame to the works of his precursors, Borges identifies resemblance that would have otherwise gone unrecognized if Kafka's hermeneutical frame had never come into existence.

What do we make of this seemingly tangled mess of a tradition where Kafka influences Borges but Borges elucidates Kafka, and likewise with Kafka and his precursors? From this it seems that contributing to a body of literature can have profound implications -- not only can an author's work impel another to respond and promote future epistemic goods, but it can elucidate earlier works as well as elucidate one's own experience and knowledge.

The final motivation for recognizing LE as an IV I will note is that it can help explain the important role of literature in politics. Maureen Whitebrook (1996) argues that literature and political theory may work together to promote both more robust political theory as well as deeper internalization conducive to political action. To Whitebrook, a shortcoming of political theory on its own is its inability to practically reconcile individualist responsibility and collective or political responsibility.³⁷ She writes,

“Just as Nussbaum maintains that it is not possible to talk about love in the analytical, diagrammatic mode for formal philosophy, so the discussion of political choices cannot be restricted to the conventional mode of political theory.”³⁸

This fits into the picture of LE as intellectually virtuous literature will give the reader a “knowledge of what it is like”. Jonathan Ingle, for instance, argues that writing “is probably the

³⁷ Maureen Whitebrook, “Taking the narrative turn: what the novel has to offer political theory,” in *Literature and the Political Imagination* edited by John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister (New York: Routledge, 1996), 42.

³⁸ Whitebrook (1996), 46.

only method open to [George Orwell] to expose us to ‘the truth’ of imperialism,” and that Orwell sought to share his experience of imperialism through writing.³⁹ In other words, Orwell shares his “knowledge of what imperialism is like” through literature.

From the information or knowledge one gains from literature, following Whitebrook I contend that it is the work of political theory to take people from a mere recognition of alternatives to a justification for acting on the knowledge.⁴⁰ For instance, if one attained such knowledge from *1984* then studied political theory of imperialism, they may come to know not just that imperialism is unjust, but what should be done to remedy it. In this way, LE can help us make sense of the important pairing of literature and political theory -- the robustly internalized knowledge that is possible by LE paired with political theory can better motivate action. From this, it should be clear that LE is not some inconsequential ability; rather, the epistemic goods promoted by possessing LE virtuously are profound and undeniably central to our epistemic life. By recognizing LE as an IV, we are doing justice to these important intellectual phenomena by recognizing the importance of these phenomena in intellectual life.

5. Intellectual Virtue of Ellipticality

To mirror the discussion of the modest and ambitious picture of unsayable truths, the discussion of IV’s mirror this -- LE as the modest IV and Ellipticality as the ambitious IV. In light of my discussion on the ambitious picture of unsayable truths, I will present Ellipticality as an IV that

³⁹ Stephen Ingle, “The anti-imperialism of George Orwell,” in *Literature and the Political Imagination* edited by John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister (New York: Routledge, 1996), 234.

⁴⁰ Whitebrook, (1996), 45.

aims to attain the epistemic goods identified in the Ambitious Picture section. I hope to show it can fit within mainstream accounts of IV and present some motivations for recognizing it as an IV. In the end, I hope to make a persuasive case to recognize Ellipticality as an IV.

Without further ado, here is how I define Ellipticality:

Ellipticality: the characteristic ability to (1) identify situations in which conventional communication will not confer sufficient knowledge, and (2) use unconventional communication to impel another to the circumstances that will confer sufficient knowledge, where (1) and (2) are interrelated.

Explaining why I use ‘Ellipticality’ may help understand the nature of this IV. There are two senses of elliptical language. First, to say someone is employing elliptical writing is to say they omit excess words for conciseness. If someone were to write "Sarah went swimming and Sam did too" this would be technically elliptical because the sentence could have been crafted as "Sarah went swimming and Sam went swimming too."⁴¹ This is not the sense I want to use.

In a second sense, elliptical language may also refer to stylistically elliptical writing, however, where the object of concern for the author is never explicitly spoken of. Elliptical storytelling, then, can be characterized as employing "artfully obtuse language to dance around certain subjects."⁴² I posit the koan method as a kind of elliptical language that employs such a style to confer superior epistemic goods, and other example of employing elliptical language for epistemic ends may be considered intellectually virtuous.

⁴¹ Example adapted from <https://www.enago.com/academy/elliptical-construction-in-academic-writing>

⁴² Masterclass, “How to Write an Elliptical Sentence: Improve Your Writing” (2019), <<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-write-an-elliptical-sentence#3-examples-of-elliptical-language>>

One way to conceptualize the difference between LE and Ellipticality is that a virtuous possessor of LE is the source of knowledge they are promoting, whereas a virtuous possessor of Ellipticality is *not* the source of knowledge ultimately, but merely facilitates one's reaching the source of the knowledge. From this it may seem like the possessor of LE is more intellectually virtuous because of their more prominent position in promoting knowledge; however, I think this is mistaken as the possessor of Ellipticality promotes more robust and valuable knowledge which accounts for the possessor's lack of prominence in promoting the knowledge.

Ellipticality is fundamentally centered on leading someone other than yourself to experiential knowledge. The archetypal example to best understand the phenomenon I hope to capture in Ellipticality is the kōan. Relying on the kōan examined previously, I propose that the master intellectual virtuosity exemplifies Ellipticality. He fulfills (1) by considering the knowledge his monk interlocutor seeks -- that is, Ultimate, unsayable knowledge. Recognizing this, the master knows any way in which he could communicate through conventional communication will be insufficient, and perhaps even confound, the monk's attainment of the knowledge he seeks.

Fulfilling (1) leads to the master's fulfillment of (2), satisfying the necessary interrelatedness. To fulfill, (2), the master uses poetic language that, by its semantic value, does nothing to answer the monk's question. As discussed previously, this language is meant to point to experience as the source of the knowledge he seeks. This can be seen as a pedagogical move meant to motivate the monk to cease reliance upon language by both (a) forcing him to attain experiential knowledge that is more robust and conducive to attaining the knowledge he seeks,

and (b) exemplifying himself as not relying upon language to help the monk understand what such ways of attaining knowledge may look like.

From here it seems that Ellipticality captures the seminal example of the Zen master. This does not help establish why Ellipticality should be considered an IV, though, and that is the aim of this section. Now that I have sketched what LE looks like and what it may capture, let us consider the two accounts of IV it must fit into to plausibly be considered an IV.

5.1 Ellipticality within Baehr's Personal Worth Conception

How might Ellipticality make the possessor a better person to accommodate Baehr's personal worth conception of IV? Let's revisit what it is to be a 'better person' in Baehr's understanding: to be a good person is to love or be positively oriented toward what is good and to hate or be negatively oriented toward what is bad.⁴³ It is plausible that Ellipticality impels a unique positive orientation toward what is good, and I will make this case in a less systematic way than for LE in the previous section. To agree with this, one must agree on the value of the primary objects Ellipticality orients one toward. The primary object Ellipticality orients one toward is language, and specifically language as a means to knowledge. Initially, this may come off as bad since conventional language yields so many things that make one a better person.

To counter this worry, we must consider the degree of negativity toward conventional language Ellipticality is conducive to. Rather than a wholesale rejection of conventional language, I believe Ellipticality leads one to have a healthy skepticism towards the efficacy of

⁴³ Baehr (2011) 97.

conventional language. Throughout different traditions of philosophy of language, there is one constant observation: that language is not entirely sufficient in clear communication. David Hume, for instance, writes

“there is a species of controversy, which, from the very nature of language and of human ideas, is involved in perpetual ambiguity, and can never, by any precaution or any definitions, be able to reach a reasonable certainty or precision. These are the controversies concerning the degrees of any quality or circumstance.”⁴⁴

To Hume, matters of greatness, for example, are fundamentally unresolvable through linguistic communication. One may contend that Aristotle is a very great Greek, while another contends that he is just a somewhat great Greek. Because this is a matter of degrees, the two cannot come to sufficient understanding of each other’s intended meaning and thus cannot resolve their apparently different convictions.

In the Madhyamaka Buddhist tradition, conventional language is criticized as well. Nāgārjuna, the seminal figure of Madhyamaka, established a critique in language’s inherently relational nature that causes contradictions when pushed. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to characterize Nāgārjuna as a “mystic who renounces thought and its expression in language”⁴⁵; rather, there are certain truths that are inexpressible through language and a fixation on language brings us further from apprehending these truths. His methods involve relying on concepts and theory to illuminate the shortcomings of concepts and theory -- in other words, turning concepts

⁴⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (London: Longman’s, Green, and Co., 1878), 458.

⁴⁵ Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, "The Dialectical Method of Nāgārjuna," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1971), 217.

and theory against themselves. Nāgārjuna brings out the shortcomings of language by presenting puzzles in which language and concepts are self-undermining when pushed. at very least a reason to be wary of unreflective reliance on language as the means to knowledge.

Certainly, whatever you believe about language, there are shortcomings. That is to say that while there is undeniable value in conventional language, we must employ it with a critical lens to attend to its possible shortcomings. I stipulate that many people fail to do this and have an overly-positive orientation towards language. What Ellipticality is able to do is bring a radically different perspective on language that is conducive to recognizing its shortcomings. As such, Ellipticality will further bring the possessor to having the appropriate orientation towards conventional language, recognizing that it produces bad outcomes in certain circumstances, but good outcomes in others. Ellipticality will bring an agent much closer to appropriate orientations in these circumstances. In conclusion, Ellipticality can accommodate Baehr's conception of IV because it makes the possessor better oriented toward language, bringing a more critical perspective that breaks away from the unequivocally positive orientation held by most people today. This makes the possessor a better person.

5.2 Ellipticality within Driver's Consequentialism

We must now consider how Ellipticality may satisfy (2) and fit into Driver's Consequentialism. Does Ellipticality reliably and systematically produce true belief? Ellipticality problematically runs into the same issue identified with LE's accommodation of this account: Ellipticality's producing a true belief depends very much on the receiver's ability. As noted

previously, kōans, as the seminal example of Ellipticality being expressed, require intensive effort and training in order for a student to apprehend the intention behind it. In most cases, using a kōan to bring knowledge to a layperson will decidedly not produce true belief and perhaps only confuse them.

Ellipticality can only lead to attainment of true belief with proper conditions. Only under such conditions is Ellipticality intellectually virtuous by Driver's Consequentialism. Under what conditions can Ellipticality be virtuous? One condition I propose is sufficient IV in the receiver of the expression of Ellipticality. I do not mean to say I know exactly what IV's are conducive to promoting knowledge through exercise of Ellipticality. In considering how certain IV's seem to significantly contribute to a receiver gaining knowledge from methods such as the kōan, though, we can begin to see how a receiver's holistic possession of IV is the condition in which Ellipticality is virtuous.

Two IV's that can help demonstrate this are intellectual humility (IH) and open-mindedness (OM). First I will consider IH, and rely upon the Limitations-Owning conception in which "IH consists in proper attentiveness to, and owning of, one's intellectual limitations."⁴⁶ One manifestation of IH, then, may be owning one's limitations in understanding the meaning conveyed in unconventional language. Owning this limitation will prevent an agent from prematurely concluding that instances where Ellipticality is being exercised, such as kōans, are nonsensical. By avoiding this, one is in position to continually consider and work to understand the value of such instances that they otherwise would not be. While possessing IH does not necessarily lead to attaining knowledge from instances of Ellipticality being exercised,

⁴⁶ Whitcomb et al. (2017), 519.

we can see it is one of the many traits one must have in order to attain this knowledge. Thinking intellectually virtuous agent as a mosaic of traits that contribute to gaining knowledge, it is plausible to see IH as a piece of this mosaic, and identify its contribution to this mosaic that holistically leads to new knowledge.

OM may be thought of as another piece of this IV mosaic. One plausible account of OM is Baehr's transcendent account articulated as follows:

An open-minded person is characteristically (a) willing and (within limits) able (b) to transcend a default cognitive standpoint (c) in order to take up or take seriously the merits of (d) a distinct cognitive standpoint.⁴⁷

If someone is to attain knowledge from expressions of Ellipticality, then they must be OM. Using the example of a kōan I will show how this is true. To attain the knowledge that concerns the use of a kōan, one must first have an understanding of the Zen tradition and the kōan within that. This is a separate condition that must be satisfied by the receiver for an exercise of Ellipticality to be virtuous, but this itself will not ensure the receiver will attain knowledge. This along with OM make are central to a receiver's ability to attain knowledge from a kōan. Of course, this is dependent on whether one recognizes what is called the Ultimate Truth in Zen is a truth in actuality. I don't seek to argue for this further, but for kōans to be a virtuous expression of Ellipticality, one must assent to this controversial proposition.

⁴⁷ Baehr (2011), 152.

If one does take kōans to point to genuine knowledge, then only someone who is willing to transcend their default cognitive standpoint can attain this knowledge. This is true because the unsayable knowledge can only be hypothetically attained by abandoning a reliance on language to bring this knowledge. Some Zen practitioners, such as D.T. Suzuki, believe “The essence of Zen Buddhism consists in acquiring a new viewpoint”⁴⁸ In the kōan considered earlier, it is clear that it is pushing the receiver to transcend their standpoint rooted in valuing propositional knowledge. One who is OM will be receptive to this, while one who is not OM will be unreceptive. Just as with IH, we can see that OM contributes to this mosaic which holistically is conducive to arriving at true belief from a virtuous agent’s Ellipticality.

What does this mean for my account? Since Ellipticality is a character trait, it seems wrong to say its status as a virtue is dependent upon a different person’s IV. To capture this in a character trait, we may say that intellectually virtuous Ellipticality further requires the agent to characteristically evaluate and discern the receptiveness to Ellipticality of a possible receiver and only employ it when sufficiently receptive. Because this addition responds to a worry just from Driver’s Consequentialism, I propose that the base account need not be altered; rather, only those subscribing to Driver’s Consequentialism or a relevantly similar consequentialist account of IV should add this condition. This resolution is plausible to me as the consequences of traits being exercised is affected by external factors, necessarily forcing consequentialism accounts of IV to control for confounding external factors. This control for confounding external factors is *not* characteristic of most other mainstream accounts that are solely concerned with internal factors

⁴⁸ Suzuki & Jaffe (2015), 105.

under the responsibility of the agent. Being so, it makes sense to include this condition when relying on a picture Ellipticality and other IV's as consequentialist, but not so in other pictures.

In this section, I hope to have shown that Ellipticality can accommodate different mainstream accounts of IV. Baehr's Personal Worth Conception and Driver's Consequentialism can help explain why Ellipticality is an IV, and creates a plausible picture of the holistic intellectually virtuous agent. I did find ways of overcoming the challenges posed by Consequentialist IV, but some may still doubt the efficacy of Ellipticality in bringing about epistemic goods. But an intellectually virtuous possessor of Ellipticality possesses an ability to discern when and how it will be helpful. Since there is uniquely valuable unsayable knowledge that can *only* be apprehended through experience, Ellipticality is uniquely suited to promote this knowledge that otherwise seems entirely dependent on individual abilities. I see this as a motivation, as recognizing Ellipticality may open up the field of epistemology to new possibilities of community and socially based intellectual virtues. This can make for superior epistemic environments and allow us to recognize the interconnectedness of knowledge within groups of people. This uniquely valuable unsayable knowledge is claimed to be true by numerous esoteric traditions, but it should not be thought to be restricted to their interpretation. One may recognize uniquely valuable experiential knowledge in a different way than these traditions do, and from this may subscribe to recognizing Ellipticality as an IV.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have made a number of claims and explored the implications of those claims. I first established the existence of knowledge that cannot be expressed through

conventional language. Being unsayable, it seems that this kind of knowledge is difficult to attain through conventional epistemic methods. From here, I distinguish between a modest and an ambitious picture of unsayable knowledge. The modest picture is that there is a “knowledge of what it is like” that can be conveyed through literature. This knowledge is stronger than “knowledge that” and “knowledge how”, but still not as robust as “knowledge of what it is like” stemming from direct experience. To fit this knowledge into discourse on intellectual virtue, I posit the IV of Literary Elucidation as a way to identify promoting “knowledge of what it is like” through literature as intellectually virtuous. I then go on to explore the ambitious picture of unsayable knowledge involving a kind of ultimate, unsayable truth that can only be apprehended through experience. This is the kind of knowledge valued by esoteric traditions such as Zen Buddhism. The existence of this kind of knowledge is much more difficult to establish and questionable as true knowledge. For those that believe such gnosis is true knowledge, then I posit Ellipticality as a way to recognize promoting this kind of knowledge as intellectually virtuous.

From this, one may critically evaluate these two pictures and determine whether to sign onto just one picture of unsayable knowledge, both, or neither. Furthermore, new virtues geared toward attaining this often overlooked breed of knowledge may be further developed. My own accounts of LE and Ellipticality may be problematized and built stronger in following literature as well. What I hope to have made clear, though, is that we should take seriously the notion of unsayable knowledge, recognize that traditional epistemology has largely overlooked this potentially valuable knowledge, and identify the nature and means of attaining this unconventional knowledge. Furthermore, we may look to establish novel intellectual virtues similarly centered upon fostering knowledge and understanding within communities of people.

This unsayable knowledge shows us that even knowledge which seems antithetical to social dissemination is primarily brought about through cooperation and guidance. To be virtuous agents, we must broaden conceptions of knowledge within ourselves and those around us.

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