

Principles of Classical Education at Nova Classical Academy: The Broad Outline as a Guide for the Curriculum¹

I. Classical Education: Its Aim

The aim of Classical Education is to produce the free or liberated person. It enables the student to properly apprehend, examine, acknowledge, and accomplish those things that would make him or her truly free. This education therefore has **two integral and interrelated dimensions: the perfection of moral character and the refinement of the intellect.**²

Classical Education is built on the premise that we share a common human nature and a universal human condition. We—children and adults—intuitively and inevitably are attracted to what is true, beautiful, and good (whether or not we consciously recognize those qualities, whether or not we can articulate what we mean by them, or whether or not we all agree on their exact nature). We all fundamentally desire to cultivate life and liberty and to pursue happiness. We inexorably wonder about first principles, ultimate purposes, and the limitations of life—the “why’s” and “wherefores” of who we are. As many have observed, we are philosophers by nature. And in a perhaps inexplicable way, we desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, to make a difference, to leave a

¹ This document is produced by the Curriculum Committee to be used in conjunction with other curriculum documents in constructing, developing, and revising the curriculum at Nova. This document therefore is not meant to stand alone. It provides: I) a foundational overview of what “classical education” is about, II) a description of its elements regardless of its specific methods, III) what Nova has adopted as a distinctive methodology (the trivium) and how it is applied at Nova, IV) how this distinctive methodology relates to the other distinctive features of Nova as a charter school, V) a note that the methodology is described in detail for each subject in the K-8 curriculum document, and VI) some definitional material on what we mean by the intellectual and moral excellences of classical education. Though it aims to provide the essential and salient points in each of the above areas, as well as what is necessary background at this point for understanding the main ideas, this document does not pretend to be exhaustive in any of these areas; indeed, one of this document’s functions is to provide the connecting point for numerous other documents, and it aims to serve as the starting point for more extensive work. Moreover, though it is available to the public, this document is not necessarily written in a fashion to be used by the general public as an introduction to Nova; this document is written in a more technical manner. Though this document is summarized elsewhere in bullet-point fashion for quick overview, we may very well write another version in an essay format that will be readily accessible to the public.

² In saying that “the aim of Classical Education is to produce the free or liberated person” and that it has “two integral and interrelated dimensions: the perfection of moral character and the refinement of the intellect,” we are making, first, an **historical claim**. Whether in its Greco-Roman manifestations, in its medieval and early modern (and predominantly Christian) manifestations, or in its late-modern (predominantly post-Christian or secular humanist manifestations), classical education has, historically speaking, always had this aim. Even though a Roman orator, a medieval schoolman, or an 18th-century deist would disagree about the precise definition of “perfection of moral character” or “refinement of the intellect,” they would agree on this two-fold aim. Furthermore, they would each possess the intellectual and personal skills—the common education— necessary to engage one another in the conversation—the “Great Conversation” [see footnote 3, below]—about the precise definition of two-fold aim. Moreover, in saying that “the aim of Classical Education is to produce the free or liberated person” and that it has “two integral and interrelated dimensions: the perfection of moral character and the refinement of the intellect,” we are also making a **philosophical claim**. We hold that this, and nothing less, is indeed the necessary foundation for a genuine classical education. Others may aim at one or other dimension (of either moral or intellectual excellence), or may seek to use some of the pedagogical methodology associated with classical education (such as the trivium), but the reduction of “classical education” to one dimension or to mere method is but a simulacra of what has traditionally been understood as classical education.

mark, to succeed at and pass on the best of who we are and what life is. We inherently desire to be excellent and to know what is excellent. We wish to enter the “Great Conversation” about the “Great Ideas”³ of truth, beauty, and goodness that spans cultures, times, and places. We hunger for the freedom to do so, for we hunger to achieve these ends in our very persons.

Therefore, the free person of classical education is not merely one who enjoys external license or legal freedom or freedom from duty, pain, oppression, or some other restraint—important as some of these things may be. Rather, freedom is here a more fundamental and internal quality: moral and intellectual excellence that enables us to pursue the true, the good, and the beautiful. **This is the freedom that is at the heart of what has traditionally been a “liberal arts” education.** This is the freedom from the internal desires, faults, and weaknesses that can enslave us and hinder us from acting wisely, justly, responsibly, generously, courageously, modestly, civilly and in all those ways that make for the mature adult, citizen of democracy, friend, family member, seeker of truth and happiness. This is also the freedom from ignorance, illogic, false impression, and the inability to learn or analyze or critique or understand or communicate; it is freedom to be able to understand how all knowledge is related, to possess the art of learning, to be able to take up and master any subject or field or interest, and to be a capable and even eloquent communicator. (See section VI at the end of this document for further explanation of what we mean by “cultivating moral and intellectual excellence”).

The free person of classical education therefore readily takes up the responsibilities of adulthood: raising a family; working and earning a living; embracing a religious or philosophical tradition; engaging the duties and privileges of citizenship and friendship; living a life of learning; pursuing the accomplishment of great things; facing the challenges of suffering, failure, and death itself; searching for the true, the good, the beautiful. This is what we desire for our children.⁴

II. Fundamental Elements of Classical Education:

- Classical Education is **methodical and systematic**, for it builds upon the natural developmental stages of the child (both intellectual and moral) and it builds upon the fundamental structure of all subject matter, whether this subject matter is language, the arts, the empirical sciences, philosophy, theology, mathematics, history, the social sciences, or any applied subject such as medicine, law, or a technical art.
- It is **language-based**, for all subjects (and not simply languages themselves) employ language (even if only symbolic as in mathematics, music, or science) as a tool of organizing and communicating.

³ The terms “Great Conversation” and “Great Ideas”—and the related term “Great Books”—were popularized by Mortimer J. Adler, Robert M. Hutchins, and others in the mid-20th century movement to engage the most significant works on the most significant—perennial and universal—ideas in western history and, by extension, in world history. The terms themselves, however, had been used in similar fashion for at least a hundred years prior to this.

⁴ The wording of this last paragraph has been taken—with additions—from Veith and Kern_____.

- Because it *trains* the mind rather than simply *informs* the mind, classical education is **method-focused rather than subject-focused**. It teaches a universal method of thinking, organizing, deliberating, arguing, and expressing conclusions rather than teaching a series of subjects themselves; though subjects are necessary for learning how to use the tools of thinking, the acquisition of the tools is the first goal. Once one learns how to use the tools, all subjects are at one's disposal, and mastery of content is readily achieved.
- It is **cohesive and comprehensive, that is, the method applies to all subjects and the method shows the interrelatedness of all subjects**. All elements of curriculum are attentive to the methodological structure and to the overarching goal of cultivating moral and intellectual excellence. Because all learning is based on the same tools, it understands that all subjects are in some ways related and that how and what we learn in one subject will be related to how and what we learn in another subject. It consistently aims to prepare us to engage the "Great Ideas" in the "Great Conversation."
- It is **universal, that is, trans-cultural, in its scope**. Though rooted in the western tradition, classical education is alive to excellence across history and cultures, for we share the universal human condition. It is also alive to and ever open to the universal pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty in all their diverse and shared articulations. By its very methodology, it does not presume that there is one particular articulation of the true, the good, the beautiful; it also does not presume that there is not one possible articulation. The classically trained person does not stop at simply gathering the data on what people and traditions around the world have thought about a given subject. Rather, the classically trained person is equipped to plunge in and engage the truth claims of any subject. We will not simply do history of philosophy, we will do philosophy.
- Because Classical Education is inherently rigorous and open-ended, it **inherently cultivates the moral qualities** necessary to participate in its very activity. It inculcates self-discipline, cooperation, humility toward the other learners and toward knowledge of the world; it fosters integrity, sound judgment, civility, and responsibility for one's own actions and ideas. It stirs the desire to attain higher things and indeed to sacrifice for the good of others and of society. In this sense, character education is integral to classical education and is not an "added" element. Classical education also presumes the moral and intellectual excellence of the teacher, for the student models him or herself after the master and the method, not after the subject.

III. Distinctives of Classical Education at Nova:

- Nova **employs the methodology of the trivium**, the three foundational arts or building-blocks for the language of learning: **grammar, logic (dialectic), and rhetoric**.

Although they are studied as formal subjects at their appropriate stages, grammar, logic (dialectic), and rhetoric are the structure of every subject and discipline. Grammar is the foundation of a subject - the collection of its parts and the mechanics of how they work. Logic is the organization of these parts into a whole and an understanding of the relationships between the parts. Rhetoric is the ability to apply the foundational knowledge and logical understanding of a subject purposefully and creatively to solve a problem, express an opinion with clarity or create something new. Every subject we attempt to

learn, at any time in our lives, has its grammar, logic and rhetoric, from reading and math to gardening, law, music or auto mechanics.⁵

Another way of describing the trivium: grammar considers the *what* (knowledge of any subject). Logic takes up the questions *why?* and *how so?* (understanding of any subject). Rhetoric considers *what of it?* (the creative application of any subject and persuasion to the truth of the subject).

The trivium is so very effective because this three-tiered structure parallels the natural maturation of mind from childhood to adulthood. It also reflects the structure of any subject matter and therefore equips us with the tools of deciphering and mastering whatever subject we encounter.

The Nova website has a lengthier description of the trivium under “The Curriculum” link. Dorothy Sayers’ article “The Lost Tools of Learning” (available on-line) is a fine and brief introduction to how the trivium works.

- At Nova, the curriculum scope and sequence is modeled upon that given in the text [The Well-Trained Mind](#) by Jessie Wise and Susan Wise Bauer (New York: Norton, 1999). The precise extent of this modeling is explained in the document: “Nova Founders’ Statement.”
- At Nova, the three stages of the trivium correspond to grade levels in this way:
 - Grades K-4: Grammar stage
 - Grades 5-8: Logic (dialectic) stage
 - Grades 9-12: Rhetoric stage
- Nova understands that **the further one progresses in the stages of the trivium, the more flexible and, to some degree, the more individualized the methodology becomes.** Pedagogical tools in the classroom can and will be tailored accordingly. For example, Socratic method and the elements of Paideia education can be employed with increasing fruitfulness in the latter grades without prejudice to the overarching methodology.
- Nova makes **specific provision for both accelerated and differentiated learning.** The methodology of the trivium implies and therefore easily lends itself to both acceleration and differentiation. The definitions of and policies governing acceleration and differentiation can be found in the Acceleration and Differentiation Policy document.
- Nova **organizes the curriculum around the framework of world history**, the study of which is repeated in four cycles corresponding to the three stages of the trivium in this way:
 - Grades 1, 5, 9: Ancient history
 - Grades 2, 6, 10: Medieval history
 - Grades 3, 7, 11: Modern history: 1600-1850
 - Grades 4, 8, 12: Modern history: 1850-Present

⁵ The wording of this paragraph is taken from Teresa Schulte, Nova founder. It can be found on the Nova website under “Curriculum: What Is Classical Education?”

In keeping with the cohesiveness and comprehensiveness of this education, all subjects will be studied with attention to their historical context. Scientific and philosophical ideas and great literary stories and texts will be repeatedly visited with increasing depth at the corresponding stages.

For example, in 1st grade students would encounter the story of the Trojan War and its leading characters; in 5th grade students would return to the story at greater depth and in a lengthier retelling; in 9th grade they would then read the *Iliad* in translation. In addition to the sheer drama of the history, at each stage students would progressively consider such things as: Greek history, the nature of heroism and virtue and vice, the development of epic, the interweaving of causes and effects in history, limitations and advances in technology, mankind's understanding of the divine, the idea of justice.⁶

In the upper grade levels, some classes and seminars will necessarily focus more on the subject *per se* rather than on the historical context as the primary framework, even as the class continues to be aware of historical context. For example, an Advance Placement 12th grade science seminar might focus on cellular biology and biochemistry in and of themselves, even as it gives necessary attention to key historical advances in these fields and their relation to other scientific, social, and philosophical ideas.

Wherever possible, the first choice will be to **focus on primary texts** (literary, scientific, philosophical, poetic, religious, historical, musical, artistic, autobiographical) rather than on secondary works or textbooks.

- Given our common roots in both American public education and in the classical tradition, **Nova will impart a well-formed understanding of the great ideas, texts, events, and people of western civilization as part of its emphasis on the study of world history and of the great civilizations.** Specific attention to the heritage of western civilization is consistent with the broader emphasis on the great world civilizations, and it is a necessary tool for engaging the heritage of those civilizations fruitfully and well. Genuine familiarity with the western heritage is necessary to engage in the “great conversation,” and the “great conversation”—both in its western and its worldwide manifestations—will in turn illuminate the achievements and the failures of the western heritage as it stands. The aim throughout will be greater self-awareness, greater appreciation of others, and greater engagement in the universal vocation of the free person.

“Western Civilization” here means the heritage that is comprised of the historical interweaving of the Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian, Renaissance and Enlightenment, and Euro-American legacy spanning roughly 3500 B.C.E./B.C. to the present, with its increasingly global dimensions and interactions. Furthermore, ideas, texts, events, and people from other cultures, times, and places will be chosen and studied based on their excellence as understood in those cultures, times, and places. Again, wherever possible, the first choice will be to focus on primary texts.

- Because the study of language is so central both to the formation of mind and to the development of culture, **Nova will teach Latin** as an integral part of the curriculum. At Nova, we

⁶ The wording of this paragraph, with additions, is taken from Jessie Wise and Susan Wise Bauer, *The Well-Trained Mind* (New York: Norton, 1999), p. 45.

will begin teaching Latin in the third grade. Students who enter the school at a later grade will be given the opportunity to do independent study as a means of attaining the corresponding grade level of study.

- Nova understands that **parents are the primary educators of their children**, and it seeks to aid and not to hinder parents in this all-important task. **Topics of special formational significance, including but not limited to religion, would proceed with deference to the diverse student body, neither discouraging nor endorsing any body of belief.** Any discussion of such topics due to the demands of the curriculum would proceed in a non-judgmental and factual manner. Because this is a classical education, in the latter grades, perennial questions of philosophical and religious and theological nature will inevitably arise, both in their own right and in terms of their relation with other subjects. We do not fear such questions and topics, for they are the inevitable fruit of the very educational project we undertake at Nova. The classically trained person will not pre-judge claims and beliefs, but she may also agree civilly to disagree. This is a lesson we value. Faculty will be selected and retained in part for their ability to engage impartially in this dimension of the “Great Conversation.”

- Nova **seeks to create a community of learners** that includes not only students and faculty, but also parents, staff, board members, and the community at large. The very project of a Classical Education will invite on-going discourse about its own character, as well as the pursuit of any number of subjects. With this in mind, we will provide supplemental learning opportunities for both students and adults during the summer months and in the evenings.

IV. A Note on the Other Distinctives of Nova:

Nova’s Mission Statement describes **six distinctive elements** of the Nova undertaking.

Two of these, the use of a **Classical Model of Education** and **Integrated Character Development**, go hand in hand and are described in broad outline in this present document.

A third distinctive, the provision for **Accelerated and Differentiated Learning**, easily meshes with the classical model of education, as described above. The specific definitions and policies related to Accelerated and Differentiated Learning are described in the policy document on this distinctive.

A fourth distinctive, the delineation of **Defined Benchmarks of Mastery**, enables us to make concrete the achievements of this education and enables us to mesh these achievements with Minnesota State Standards. The Defined Benchmarks are described in the policies governing each specific dimension of the curriculum and in the K-12 curriculum document.

A fifth distinctive, the use of **Ongoing Assessment**, ensures that students are in fact continually challenged to attain their potential. The method of Ongoing Assessment is also described in the K-12 curriculum document.

The sixth distinctive, that Nova is designed to serve as a **College Preparatory Education**, is indeed part and parcel of the rigorous nature of the classical model of education described here. We expect that graduates of Nova will have encountered and mastered material and, more importantly, a method of learning that many college graduates unfortunately never attain. Nevertheless, to say that Nova is a College Preparatory education also means that we will shape some elements of the curriculum, particularly at the upper level, to prepare for specific requirements or opportunities that mark the university system in America today. (The use of Advance Placement seminars, for example, may be such a thing). These specific “college preparatory” dimensions of the curriculum will be developed in concert with the development of the rhetoric stage of the curriculum.

V. Specific Dimensions of the Classical Curriculum at Nova:

The specific skills, goals, and benchmark achievements germane to the various subjects as each is studied at each stage of the trivium are described in the policy document governing each subject area. Thus, the skills, goals, and benchmark achievements pertaining to Art & Music, Physical Education, Math and the Sciences, Language Arts, History and Philosophy, and so forth, are given in those documents. These specific skills, goals, and benchmark achievements then guide the k-12 curriculum. **The overarching goal will always be to teach the method of learning, even as specific skills and subject matter are identified for mastery.**

VI. A Note on “Cultivating Moral and Intellectual Excellence”

In traditional language, “excellence” is synonymous with “virtue,” an interior disposition and capability that issues in behavior and accomplishment. Thus, **classical education cultivates the intellectual and the moral virtues. These are the virtues necessary for excellence in thinking and excellence in acting and being (or, as we might say, in character). These are the excellences of the free person, the person who exercises the liberal arts of thinking and acting well.**

Definition:

A **virtue** is a settled disposition, a habit, or an internal capability to recognize what is good and to choose for it consistently, easily, and joyfully. A virtue empowers us to do what is right in spite of our baser inclinations. Each virtue perfects or empowers a particular dimension of our being, that is, in our knowing, desiring, deciding, and doing. Each virtue involves both restraint from error or excess and an orientation toward and capability to choose for the good and true. The virtuous person performs with excellence consistently, not just occasionally; the virtuous person is one who acts “by second nature,” so to speak. Though rooted in interior dispositions and capabilities, virtue is manifest in outward behavior and accomplishment.

Traditionally, **the virtues are divided into two groups.**

The **first group is comprised of the intellectual virtues** which include **wisdom** (apprehension of the first things), **understanding** (relationships between subjects and fields), and **science** (ordered knowledge of any subject). These three virtues **perfect our ability to know and to think well**. They enable us *to apprehend what is so*. They perfect and free our *speculative intellect*. We would then group under these three all the other related virtues or intellectual skills so vital to any given subject matter but, more importantly, to all rational thinking in general. Thus, they would include analyzing, judging, organizing, evaluating, questioning, and so on. In modern parlance, these would comprise the skills of critical thinking and reasoning that free us from error.

The **second group is comprised of the moral or human or cardinal virtues** which includes **prudence** (sound judgment for acting and choosing well), **justice** (fairness and responsibility), **fortitude** (courage, patience, toughness), and **temperance** (moderation of the appetites, self-control, balance). These four virtues are called the cardinal virtues (from the Latin word for “hinge”) because all the other character traits that we associate with **acting** (desiring, deciding, and doing) **and being well** hinge on these four. They are often called the “human” virtues because they make for genuinely good human quality of life and character. They enable us *to choose for what is good*. They perfect and free our *practical intellect and our capacity for acting and desiring*. Thus, honesty, loyalty, capacity for friendship, generosity, modesty, chastity, diligence, respectfulness, compassion, trustworthiness, patience, humility and so forth depend on or are related to these main four virtues. They free us from our baser tendencies and for excellent behavior regardless of circumstances.

Character qualities or dispositions that we value so much today, such as tolerance and respect, were never considered virtues in their own right. Rather, they are the fruit of the prudent, just, courageous, and self-controlled person who can think well.

Each virtue tends to have its opposite vice, or more precisely, vices of either excess or defect.

Although it is important to gain an intellectual understanding—a vision for—what the **moral virtues** are and how they work, the actual **cultivation of these virtues** depends upon sustained practice, proper modeling (both from literary sources and, more importantly, from those around us), direct training, and an atmosphere in the home and school and society that honors, upholds, and facilitates these virtues.

The **intellectual virtues**, on the other hand, can be cultivated by immersion in a comprehensive and systematic method of learning such as the trivium. Although they depend to some degree on innate ability, the intellectual virtues can be imparted to anyone who has a willingness to learn, provided that the method is not reduced to one dimension of learning as, sadly, is so often the case today even in our universities.

A note on measuring the virtues:

It is important to realize that in describing the two-fold aim of intellectual and moral excellence as the goal of the curriculum, we are not describing inherent benchmarks or standards so typical of modern curricula. One does not quantify virtue, even though we can have a modicum of agreement on concrete virtuous behavior, even though we can recognize the virtuous person, and even though we can readily recognize the absence of either intellectual or cardinal virtues.

For instance, we cannot identify a benchmark or an SAT score that says one possesses understanding, though we can recognize the absence of understanding (in the narrow or parochial person or in the isolated specialist) and we can recognize—and assess—over time someone’s thinking, writing, and speaking so that we have confidence to say she grasps how various fields of knowledge relate to each other.⁷

The nature of the moral or cardinal virtues does not lend itself to quantification: “You scored 7 out of 12 on the Justice exam.” Indeed, to grow in the moral virtues one needs to gain a deep and comprehensive picture over time of what the particular virtue looks like, what kind of behavior is incompatible with it, what kind of circumstances demand it, what kind of person one becomes when one possesses it. Training and formation in virtue—particularly with young people—*can* entail specialized exercises, but the “school of virtue” is life itself, and the Nova environment provides a specific setting within this larger “school.” The school practices and atmosphere, the structure of the curriculum itself, and the discipline of learning can be construed in such a way that participation in the school will require and will therefore cultivate the necessary character traits.

As prime models, teachers themselves ought to embody the moral virtues, and they ought to be able to make simple assessments of expected virtuous behavior, some of which is embodied in the practices and codes of the school. Moreover, we can readily recognize—and should correct—the vices of injustice, lack of self-control, lack of sound judgment, pusillanimity, and so forth. Teachers and staff ought to be hired and retained in part for their ability to demonstrate the necessary excellences and to make such assessments of students. This ability may require specific instruction and formation.

This expectation of assessment is possible even though we may not have entire agreement on the theoretical basis of the virtues—does justice, for example, depend on eternal or natural law, on divine volition, on non-demonstrable imperatives, on constructed agreements, on the will of the strongest, on biological necessity?—or on their concrete content in all circumstances.

The Educated Person:

Furthermore, under this framework, one can readily see how the traditional notion of what it means to be educated includes so much more than simply having a Ph.D. Indeed, one can have multiple degrees and be brilliant in many subjects, but still be unaware of how those subjects relate to one another or to other fields of knowledge. More importantly, one can be intellectually brilliant in many areas but still be avaricious, lustful, gluttonous, envious, narrow, mean, angry, self-centered, vain, and generally the kind of person we don’t want to be like or to be around. In classical terms, this would be an “uneducated person,” an “enslaved and un-free person.” In fact,

⁷ Traditionally, the Master’s Degree would indicate that someone has measurably mastered the science of a particular subject—music, theology, a natural science, an art—and a Doctorate would indicate that someone demonstrably grasps both the philosophical underpinnings of a subject and its contribution to the perennial questions of human living to such a degree that one is qualified to lead others into mastery. Note, however, that in the classical system, the conferral of a degree hinges upon successful public examination and demonstration of mastery, not upon the simple accumulation of a certain number of “credits” or the completion of a checklist of required projects. Traditionally, one could “do all the work” and still not receive the degree if one failed to demonstrate mastery.

one can be rather un-intellectual and un-knowledgeable—that is, can lack quite a bit of the intellectual virtues—and still be prudent, just, courageous, and self-controlled (the kind of person we would like to be and to be around). The most free person possesses both the intellectual and cardinal virtues to a high degree, and, ideally, lives within a modicum of external political and economic freedom.

According to the classical vision, therefore, the truly educated and free person is one who:

- acts with wisdom, not simply possesses a degree or technical prowess.
- acts with understanding, does not simply accumulate facts.
- attains ordered knowledge, does not simply know about a lot of things or even a lot about one thing.
- acts with prudence and sound judgment so as to do the right thing in all circumstances regardless of cost, and does not simply choose what is self-serving, convenient, or easy.
- acts with responsibility, sacrifice, duty and consistent fairness, does not simply do what is needed to get by.
- acts with gratitude and generosity, does not simply satisfy wants and needs.
- acts with perseverance and discipline, does not simply rest on laurels or turn to an easier way simply because it is easier or more pleasant.
- acts with self-motivation and purposefulness, does not simply wish to be entertained.
- learns to desire what is noble, true, excellent, praiseworthy, and does not simply want whatever I wish in the moment or presume that because I have these desires I *ought* to have them.

More than simply Intellectual and Moral Virtues:

To round out the picture, there are analogous character qualities that perfect and free us for particular practical tasks. Though of secondary value, these would be the **practical virtues** of any specific art or technical or physical skill such as playing the violin, shipbuilding, surveying, hitting a baseball, singing opera, bricklaying, managing finances, designing computer software, doing engineering, cooking, and so forth. These practical virtues free us for the excellence of the particular craft or skill.

To further round out the picture, within the historical spectrum of thought on the intellectual and cardinal virtues, different philosophers, religious traditions, and political and social thinkers have different understandings of the relationship between one virtue and another, of how the virtues work in concert (or not), and on the broader context of the virtues altogether. Depending upon how a tradition understands the goal or nature of human living itself, there will be divergent views of the importance of virtue in the grand scheme. Some traditions hold that there are other essential virtues (Christian tradition, for example, holds that there are three more supreme virtues for living: faith, hope, charity), whereas some traditions do not recognize the value of some virtues (Greco-Roman thinkers tended to see humility as a vice). There is also great divergence of understanding on the relationship of virtues to norms, law, and custom. Nevertheless, the very general framework given here is fairly common to the heritage of western thought (with parallels in eastern traditions) over the last two thousand years.