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Special Issue:

Intellectual Humility

Guest Editors:
J. Adam Carter, Jesper Kallestrup, and Duncan Pritchard

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INTRODUCTION¹

J. Adam CARTER, Jesper KALLESTRUP, and Duncan PRITCHARD

While it is widely regarded that intellectual humility is among the intellectual virtues, there is as of yet little consensus on the matter of what possessing and exercising intellectual humility consists in, and how it should be best understood as advancing our epistemic goals.² For example, does intellectual humility involve an underestimation of one's intellectual abilities, or rather, does it require an accurate conception? Is intellectual humility a fundamentally interpersonal/social virtue, or might it be valuable to exercise in isolation? To what extent does intellectual humility demand of us an appreciation of how the success of our inquiries depends on features of our social and physical environment beyond our control?³

These are just a few of the many questions that are crucial to getting a grip on this intellectual virtue and why we might aspire to cultivate it. Furthermore, and apart from the nature and value of humility, it is worthwhile to consider how this notion, properly understood, might have import for other philosophical debates, including those about (for example) scepticism, assertion, epistemic individualism and anti-individualism, and the philosophy of education. This special issue brings together a range of different philosophical perspectives on

¹ The editors would like to acknowledge that this special issue has benefitted from two grants awarded by the Templeton Foundation—the 'Intellectual Humility MOOC' and 'Philosophy, Science and Religion Online' project—hosted at the University of Edinburgh's Eidyn research centre.

² For some representative discussions, see for example Ian M. Church and Peter L. Samuelson, *Intellectual Humility: An Introduction to the Philosophy and Science* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming); Dennis Whitcomb, Heather Battaly, Jason Baehr, and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91, 1 (2015); Alessandra Tanesini, "Intellectual Humility as Attitude," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 93, 1 (2016); Ian James Kidd, "Intellectual Humility, Confidence, and Argumentation," *Topoi* 35, 2 (2016): 395–402; Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³ For an overview of how knowledge might depend on such factors, see Jesper Kallestrup and Duncan Pritchard, "Robust Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Anti-Individualism," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 93, 1 (2012): 84–103. Cf., Mark Alfano, "Expanding the Situationist Challenge to Responsibilist Virtue Epistemology," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 62, 247 (2012): 223–249.

these and related questions to do with intellectual humility with an aim to contributing to this important and timely topic.

The volume begins with Ian M. Church's contribution "The Doxastic Account of Intellectual Humility," which defends a specific account of the nature of intellectual humility. Church begins by critiquing the 'low concern for status account'⁴ and the 'limitations-owning account'⁵ and defends by contrast a proposal according to which intellectual humility involves accurately tracking what one could non-culpably take to be the positive epistemic status of one's own beliefs.

In their contribution "I Know You Are, but What am I? Anti-Individualism in the Development of Intellectual Humility and *Wu-Wei*," Mark Alfano and Brian Robinson engage with the issue of how intellectual humility is acquired. Taking as a starting point Edward Slingerland's work on the paradoxical virtue of *wu-wei*,⁶ Alfano and Robinson note that certain ways of aiming to become intellectually humble might be paradoxical or self-undermining. Alfano and Robinson's way out of the puzzle is markedly anti-individualistic:⁷ on the proposal they sketch, other people and shared values are to be understood as partial bearers of a given individual's intellectual humility.

Modesto Gomez Alonso, in his contribution "Cartesian Humility and Pyrrhonian Passivity: The Ethical Significance of Epistemic Agency," connects the topic of intellectual humility with Cartesian and Pyrrhonian scepticism. In particular, Gomez Alonso argues that, in so far as intellectual humility is a virtue, we have reason to embrace a Cartesian rather than an ethically motivated Pyrrhonian model of rational guidance.⁸

In their contribution "Knowledge, Assertion and Intellectual Humility," J. Adam Carter and Emma C. Gordon argue that considerations about intellectual humility have a role to play in debates about epistemic norms governing

⁴ Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*.

⁵ Whitcomb et al., "Intellectual Humility."

⁶ Edward Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try: Ancient China, Modern Science, and the Power of Spontaneity* (New York: Crown, 2014).

⁷ For some contemporary discussions of anti-individualism more generally, see, along with Kallestrup and Pritchard, "Robust Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Anti-Individualism," also Sanford C. Goldberg, *Anti-Individualism: Mind and Language, Knowledge and Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and S. Orestis Palermos, "Spreading the Credit: Virtue Reliabilism and Weak Epistemic Anti-Individualism," *Erkenntnis* 81, 2 (2016): 305–334.

⁸ For an overview of the Pyrrhonian conception of 'belief', see for example the papers in Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede, *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

assertion.⁹ In particular, Carter and Gordon contend that the epistemic value of intellectual humility in social-epistemic practice poses a special problem for proponents of the knowledge norm of assertion¹⁰ according to which one is properly epistemically positioned to assert that *p* if one knows that *p*.

Alessandra Tanesini, in her contribution “Teaching Virtue: Changing Attitudes,” approaches the topic of humility via its modesty component, and its surrounding vices. Tanesini argues that modesty does not require underestimation of one’s epistemic abilities nor indifference toward one’s intellectual successes; rather, she argues that it is an attitude directed at one’s epistemic successes which serves knowledge and value-expressive functions, and whose opposing vices are arrogance and self-abasement.¹¹ Tanesini concludes by considering the pedagogical implications of her account.

Finally, in “Humility, Listening and ‘Teaching in a Strong Sense,’” Andrea R. English, like Tanesini, engages with pedagogical implications of intellectual humility; her central question is whether one must have intellectual humility in order to teach. English’s position is that humility is implied in the concept of teaching, provided teaching is construed in a strong sense such that it is linked to students’ embodied experiences, in particular students’ experiences of limitation. Furthermore, English argues that that humility is acquired through the practice of teaching.

⁹ See Jennifer Lackey, “Norms of Assertion,” *Noûs* 41, 4 (2007): 594–626 for an accessible overview of some of the key positions in this debate.

¹⁰ See, for example, Timothy Williamson, “Knowing and Asserting,” *Philosophical Review* 105, 4 (1996): 489–523; *Knowledge and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹¹ For some of Tanesini’s related work on intellectual arrogance, see Alessandra Tanesini, “I—‘Calm Down, Dear!’ Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing and Ignorance,” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 90, 1 (2016): 71–92.

THE DOXASTIC ACCOUNT OF INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Ian M. CHURCH

ABSTRACT: This paper will be broken down into four sections. In §1, I try to assuage a worry that intellectual humility is not really an intellectual virtue. In §2, we will consider the two dominant accounts of intellectual humility in the philosophical literature—the *low concern for status* account the *limitations-owing* account—and I will argue that both accounts face serious worries. Then in §3, I will unpack my own view, the doxastic account of intellectual humility, as a viable alternative and potentially a better starting place for thinking about this virtue. And I'll conclude in §4 by trying to defend the doxastic account against some possible objections.

KEYWORDS: intellectual humility, intellectual arrogance, intellectual servility

Introduction: A Non-Starter?

In May of 2012, I was hired as a Research Fellow at the Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, in Pasadena California. I was hired as a philosophy post-doc on a major research and funding initiative on “The Science of Intellectual Humility.” To be honest, I hadn’t thought much about intellectual humility before. While my doctoral thesis focused on virtue epistemology, most of my work was on virtue-reliabilism¹ with relatively little focus on character virtues in general and none on the specific virtue of intellectual humility. So, naturally, one of the first questions I ended up asking during my time at Fuller was, “What is intellectual humility?”

While perhaps someone could develop a theory rich definition of intellectual humility by drawing from the mountains of literature on humility in general, the nature of intellectual virtues, or virtue epistemology, I decided—at least in the first instance—to start from my first impressions. Humility, it seemed

¹ See, for example, John Greco, “Knowledge and Success from Ability,” *Philosophical Studies* 142, 1 (2009): 17–26; John Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); John Greco, “A (Different) Virtue Epistemology,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85, 1 (2012): 1–26; Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Ernest Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ernest Sosa, *Knowing Full Well* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

to me, is a virtuous mean between arrogance and servility. The humble person doesn't think too highly of themselves (which would be arrogance) nor do they think too little of themselves (which would be something like servility, self-deprecation, or diffidence). Instead, it seemed to me that the humble person would think of themselves—*value themselves*—as they ought.

As rough and simple as that account of humility might be, I thought an intuitive account of intellectual humility naturally fell from it. Perhaps *intellectual* humility is also best thought of as a virtuous mean, between something like *intellectual* arrogance and *intellectual* servility. The intellectually humble person, so I thought, doesn't think too much of their beliefs (which would be intellectual arrogance) or do they think too little of their beliefs (which would be intellectual servility). Instead, it seemed to me that *the intellectually humble person would value their beliefs as they ought*.² What does this "valuing" amount to? Well, if you value something, then typically hold on to it and you don't let it go. So, for my very first attempt, I construed intellectual humility as the virtue of holding onto a belief as long as it's merited, in accord with how much value the belief enjoys by way of evidence, justification, or warrant.³

And this seemed to me like an initially plausible account of what intellectual humility might be. After all, it seems right to think that a quintessentially intellectually arrogant person would be someone who is completely unwilling to change her belief in the face of evidence, disagreement, or defeat. Likewise, it seems right to think that a quintessentially intellectually *servile* person would be someone who holds his beliefs loosely and revises or changes them at the proverbial drop of a hat. Intellectual humility, the thought was, would amount to holding beliefs as firmly as you ought. While my colleagues and I found that such a definition to have some resonance with folk conceptions of intellectual humility⁴ and empirical research on dual-process theory,⁵ it was unceremoniously dismissed as a "non-starter" by other theorists—claiming that

² But why focus on valuing *beliefs* and instead of valuing *intellectual capacities*? While I am indeed attracted to the idea of re-imagining intellectual humility in this way, we might worry that a single intellectual capacity can produce both intellectually humble and intellectually arrogant beliefs. Focusing on beliefs allows us to easily make this distinction.

³ See, for example, our discussion of intellectual humility in Peter L. Samuelson, Matthew J. Jarvinen, Thomas B. Paulus, Ian M. Church, Sam A. Hardy, and Justin L. Barrett, "Implicit Theories of Intellectual Virtues and Vices: A Focus on Intellectual Humility," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 10, 5 (2015): 65.

⁴ See Samuelson et al., "Implicit Theories."

⁵ See Peter L. Samuelson and Ian M. Church, "When Cognition Turns Vicious: Heuristics and Biases in Light of Virtue Epistemology," *Philosophical Psychology* 28, 8 (2015): 1095–1113.

the view is far too “general” to be “identical with anything as specific as [intellectual humility].”⁶

While having the view rejected in this way might have facilitated personal insights into *intellectual humiliation*, it didn’t do much to help me better understand *intellectual humility*. After all, I’m not at all put off by the idea that intellectual humility could be a very broad meta-virtue, so the worry that my proposed account was too general to be intellectual humility was more or less ineffectual. Nevertheless, while I don’t think the view that intellectual humility is roughly *valuing your beliefs as you ought* is a non-starter; it is, I heartily agree, under-described and in need of elucidation and modification. And that’s what I aim to accomplish in this paper. Given its specific focus on *beliefs*, the view that I’ll ultimately be unpacking and defending is what I’m calling the *doxastic account of intellectual humility*.

This paper will be broken down into four sections. In §2, we will consider the two dominant accounts of intellectual humility in the philosophical literature—the *low concern for status* account⁷ the *limitations-owing* account⁸—and I will argue that both accounts face serious worries. Then in §3, I will unpack the doxastic account of intellectual humility as a viable alternative and as potentially a better starting place for thinking about this virtue. And I’ll conclude in §4 by trying to defend the doxastic account against some possible objections. But before we get started on all of this, it’s worth asking ourselves some preliminary questions. First of all, are we safe in assuming that intellectual humility really is an intellectual virtue? We naturally assume that it is, but how safe is that assumption? In §1, we briefly consider these questions.

§1: Is Intellectual Humility a Virtue?

It’s easy to assume that intellectual humility is an intellectual virtue. And to be sure, that seems like a fairly safe assumption to make. Arguably, the onus is on anyone who wants to convince us otherwise; in other words, unless we have good

⁶ Dennis Whitcomb, Heather Battaly, Jason Baehr, and Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91, 1 (2015): 4.

⁷ See Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, “Humility and Epistemic Goods,” in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives From Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 257–279; Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).

⁸ See Whitcomb et al., “Intellectual Humility.”

reason to think otherwise, we're probably safe to assume that intellectual humility is indeed an intellectual virtue.⁹

That said, however, good reason to think otherwise might be forthcoming—specifically from empirical research. What if we discovered, for example, that intellectual humility was an evolutionary or biological vice? What if we discovered that people who are intellectually humble are less likely to be happy, are less ambitious, less successful, and are less likely to reproduce? Somewhat disturbingly, recent empirical research seems to suggest that intellectual arrogance might be deeply rooted in human psychology. Human beings are notoriously (and apparently naturally) disposed to over-estimate their intellectual strengths and under-estimate their weaknesses; indeed, the evidence is clear that there is a strong tendency even to under-estimate our liability to such biases. And insofar as overestimating one's intellectual strengths and underestimating one's intellectual weaknesses are incompatible with intellectual humility, it's easy to think that these biases show a natural tendency away from intellectual humility. Furthermore, we are susceptible to all sorts of biases that make intellectual humility difficult. For example, we tend to favour evidence or data received early in our inquiries (primacy bias), and we tend to discount the weight of evidence that counts against hypotheses we endorse (confirmation bias). Second, evolutionary psychologists have offered some intriguing arguments that these dispositions are embedded within our cognitive architecture in ways that can systematically lead us to biased thinking, in some cases for adaptive reasons. Third, some clinicians have argued that intellectual arrogance is necessary for maintaining mental health. The intellectual humble, who see themselves and their condition with unmitigated clarity, are more susceptible to forms of depression, for example. But if this is right, then it begins to look like intellectual humility might be a biological *vice*! And we might seriously wonder: can something be a biological vice and still be considered an intellectual virtue?

If intellectual humility is indeed a biological vice, and if we generally want intellectual virtues to be good for people in some significant way—a way that is sensitive to our biological needs and our evolutionary design—then there is a serious worry here that intellectual humility cannot be an intellectual virtue.¹⁰ To

⁹ To be sure, however, the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition in Western thought surely contributes to why we intuitively see intellectual humility as an intellectual virtue. The ancient Greeks, for example, arguably would not share in this assumption.

¹⁰ To be sure, even altruistically-oriented virtues arguably are good for people from a biological / evolutionary point of view. Take, generosity as an example. If people are *generous* with their resources, then the entire community will be more resilient and able to guarantee reproductive success for its members.

be sure, intellectual virtues qua intellectual virtues are often taken to aim at truth, and moral virtues qua moral virtues are often taken to be aimed at some form of the good. As such, perhaps the worry that intellectual humility is a biological vice—such that it leads to a *decrease* in the overall well-being of an agent—isn't really a worry that intellectual humility isn't an *intellectual* virtue. So long as intellectual humility really does help agents reach the truth, then perhaps it can still be an intellectual virtue even if it is a biological vice.¹¹ But that feels somewhat like an awkward position to be in—to hold something as an intellectual virtue even if it is bad for us at a biological or evolutionary level. And insofar as we want to see intellectual virtues as a subset of moral virtues—as some prominent theorists do¹²—then such a response may not be available to us.

Thankfully, however, the worry that intellectual humility might be a biological vice—and subsequently *not* an intellectual virtue—can be assuaged in other ways. First of all, having a view of intellectual humility as a virtuous mean—as the virtue between the vices of intellectual arrogance and intellectual diffidence—seems to dissolve the worry. For example, ease of measurement in empirical research often drives a view of intellectual humility that simply views it as the opposite of intellectual arrogance.¹³ But such measures struggle to pull apart the distinction between being intellectually humble and being intellectually servile. So just because people who *lack intellectual arrogance* are more likely to suffer from depression, doesn't mean that *intellectually humble* people are more likely to suffer from depression. Perhaps some of those who lack intellectual arrogance aren't intellectually humble, perhaps they are intellectually self-deprecating, diffident, or servile. Second of all, there is a growing body of research that suggests that intellectual humility is a tremendous biological virtue. Psychologists have discovered traits and behaviours associated with intellectual humility that facilitate learning, personal growth, and social interaction. Being an arrogant jerk, unsurprisingly, generally causes social ostracization. While we

¹¹ Our focus, here, is whether or not intellectual humility can be conceived of as an intellectual virtue. There is, to be sure, a much broader worry in the literature: whether, given our natural proclivity toward heuristics and biases, intellectual virtues are possible for creatures like us (see Mark Alfano, "Expanding The Situationist Challenge To Responsibilist Virtue Epistemology," *Philosophical Quarterly* 62, 247 (2012): 223–249.) This is a serious worry, but it is not my focus here. For an explanation as to how virtue epistemology can account for and make sense of our proclivity toward heuristics and biases, please see Samuelson and Church, "When Cognition Turns Vicious."

¹² See Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹³ The issue of measuring intellectual humility will come up again in §4.

might be able to think of arrogant jerks that have achieved success seemingly *by being* arrogant jerks—usually television personalities, political pundits, etc.—being an arrogant jerk does not *generally* lend itself to broad personal, holistic thriving. For the time being, at least, I think we can put the worry that intellectual humility might be a biological vice on the shelf; the research doesn't ultimately seem to support such a conclusion at this time. And as such, following our intuitions and lacking significant reason to think otherwise, let's continue to assume that intellectual humility is indeed an intellectual virtue.

§2: Current Definitions

Working under the assumption that intellectual humility is indeed a virtue, I think we have strong motivation to try to define it. And over the past thirteen years, two dominant accounts of intellectual humility have emerged out of the philosophical literature. In this section, we will consider these two dominant accounts of intellectual humility and highlight a few worries facing them. Now, the goal here is not to show that these accounts are necessarily wrong—it might very well be possible to intelligently and cogently disarm the worries I'll raise. Nevertheless, I hope that highlighting some of the worries facing contemporary accounts of intellectual humility might (i) give us a snapshot of the on going debate about intellectual humility and (ii) incline us to consider an alternative account, specifically what I've been calling the doxastic account of intellectual humility, with new interest.

The two accounts of intellectual humility that we're going to consider are: the low concern for status account¹⁴ and the limitations-owning account.¹⁵

Let's start with the former: the low concern for status account of intellectual humility. In their 2003 article "Humility and Epistemic Goods" and their 2007 book *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, Robert Roberts and Jay Wood give us what is the seminal account of intellectual humility in the literature. According to their account—the low concern for status account—intellectual humility is viewed as merely the opposite of "intellectual arrogance" or "improper pride." According to Roberts and Wood, these vices are centred on promoting the social wellbeing of the possessor. As such, intellectual humility is "a striking or unusual unconcern for social importance, and thus a kind

¹⁴ Advocated by Roberts and Wood in "Humility and Epistemic Goods"; *Intellectual Virtues*.

¹⁵ Advocated by Whitcomb, Battaly, Baehr, and Howard-Snyder in "Intellectual Humility." Another account of intellectual humility that is worth considering, which I sadly did not have time to discuss in this paper, is Alessandra Tanesini, "Intellectual Humility as Attitude," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 93, 1 (2016).

of emotional insensitivity to the issues of status.”¹⁶ The thought here is that the intellectually humble person isn’t concerned about the status that might be accrued via pursuing various intellectual endeavours. Instead, they pursue intellectual goods for their own sake.

And there are quite a few things to like about this view—for example, it seems to rightly highlight a social dynamic to the virtue—but, I think, it also has some serious problems. The first question we might have is: can’t someone be too humble? As I noted in the introduction, I think we generally tend to think of intellectual humility as a virtue, between intellectual arrogance on the one hand, and something like intellectually servility on the other. Someone, it seems, can be *too* humble, they can be so self-deprecating and so self-lesening that they’re vicious (not virtuous). However, since the low concern for status account sees intellectual humility as merely the opposite of intellectual arrogance, then it’s not clear how it can capture this idea.

And as we saw in §1, whether or not intellectual humility is understood as a virtuous mean can significantly shape empirical research on intellectual humility and its conclusions. Again, if we view intellectual humility as merely the opposite of vices like intellectual arrogance and improper pride, then there is a real worry that empirical research will suggest that intellectual humility isn’t a virtue but a biological vice. Again, some clinicians have argued that intellectual *arrogance* is necessary for maintaining mental health, because the intellectual humble, who see themselves and their condition with unmitigated clarity, are more susceptible to forms of depression. But insofar as it’s difficult to see how something could be an intellectual virtue while being a biological vice, I think this is a conclusion that Roberts and Wood would want to reject. A good way to reject it, as I suggested in §1, is to think of intellectual humility as a virtuous mean. The argument could be made that the only reason clinicians think intellectual humility is more likely to lead to depression is because they are lumping intellectual humility in with intellectual servility, which is giving them this misleading result. Given that the low-concern for status account doesn’t view intellectual humility as a virtuous mean, an advocate of such a view cannot make this argument.

In addition to the problematic conclusions such a view leads to if adopted by psychologists, I think we can also make the case that it’s simply counterintuitive to think of intellectual humility as *merely* the opposite of vices like intellectual arrogance. Consider the following example:

DERMATOLOGY: Paul is a highly acclaimed dermatologist with a litany of medical achievements and an almost unmatched knowledge of skin cancer;

¹⁶ *Intellectual Virtues*, 239.

however, Paul cares nothing for social status or the accolades of his peers. Saul, on the other hand, is a medical student and a novice dermatologist at best. (Saul's father is extremely wealthy, and essentially bought Saul's place in medical school). Truth be told, Saul is a bit of a dolt. But to make matters worse, Saul is fiercely obsessed with his status and deeply intimidated by Paul's accomplishments, which regularly results in Saul being antagonistic toward Paul. One day, Saul is shadowing Paul at the clinic when they see a patient with an odd looking mole. Paul looks at the mole and thinks that it looks suspicious enough to warrant further testing. Saul, aiming to be antagonistic to Paul, resolutely denies that the mole looks worrisome at all. Caring nothing for his intellectual status and accolades (or Saul's lack of status), Paul takes Saul's dissent seriously and treats him as an intellectual peer.

If Paul is caring so little for status that he fails to recognize his expertise over and against Saul's ignorance and takes his dissent seriously, treating him like a peer, then perhaps Paul is being too humble here. Actually, we might think that it's *vicious* (and not virtuous) for Paul to take Saul to be a peer when it comes to dermatology and the status of their patient's mole. But given that intellectual humility is seen as merely the opposite of intellectual arrogance, it is not clear how the low concern for status view of intellectual humility could account for this idea: that someone can be *too intellectually humble*.

Another worry facing the low concern for status account of intellectual humility arises when we consider scenarios where there is no social status to be had or cared about. While intellectual humility plausibly has an important social dimension, the low concern for status view seems to make a social context absolutely essential. Consider another scenario:

NO STATUS: Let's say that tragedy has befallen Saul—the ignorant, yet conceited wannabe dermatologist—and he has been shipwrecked on a small deserted island. He is entirely alone. And with no social status to care about, Saul can no longer be obsessed with his status amongst his peers and how much they think of him.

According to the low concern for status account of intellectual humility, Saul, given that he is trapped on his deserted island with no social status to care about, cannot help but be intellectually humble. If there's no status to be cared about, Saul cannot help but have a low concern for his social status.¹⁷ And what is more, it is conceptually impossible for Saul to be intellectually arrogant according to this view, because, being intellectually arrogant requires a concern for social status and there is no social status to be concerned about on Saul's deserted island.

¹⁷ Note: if you think that Saul's previous social environment is still relevant, simply re-imagine the case to make Saul as alone as you please, devoid of any social status to be concerned about.

Aside from creating a strange asymmetry regarding when someone can be humble or arrogant, such a scenario might also make the low concern for status view seem counter-intuitive. It seems like as Saul the dermatological dunce sits alone on his deserted island, telling himself that all of his dermatological judgements are right and true, *he could be intellectually arrogant*. But, worryingly, that's not a possibility that the low concern for status view seems to allow.

Let's now turn to consider the limitations-owning account of intellectual humility. According to this view, intellectual humility is a "proper attentiveness to, and owning of, one's intellectual limitations."¹⁸ As Whitcomb et al. summarize: "When life calls for one to be mindful of a limitation, then, and only then, will it appear on the ideally humble person's radar. And what goes for humility in general goes for [intellectual humility] in particular."¹⁹ And, thankfully, this means that intellectual humility isn't just the opposite of intellectual arrogance; it's a virtuous mean! If you are completely oblivious to your intellectual limitations, then, on this view, you will be intellectually arrogant. Whereas, in contrast, if you are *overly* attentive to and owning of your intellectual limitations, then, on this view, you will be intellectually servile. You will be "too humble" so to speak. So it doesn't fall victim to the same sort of worries we saw with Paul the dermatologist.

That said, however, the limitations-owning account of intellectual humility faces its own unique set of worries. Vices like intellectual arrogance and intellectual servility are sensitive to both intellectual strengths *and* intellectual limitations, on this view; if you fail to recognize your limitations *or* over own or attend to your strengths you will be intellectually arrogant. And if you fail to recognize your strengths *or* over-own or attend to your limitations you will be intellectually servile. *But, according the limitations-owning account, intellectual humility is only sensitive to the attending to and ownership of intellectual limitations.* Intellectual humility, on this view, is *blind* to intellectual strengths. And this leads to some results that I'm not sure we should own in a viable account of intellectual humility. Let's consider two of these worries.

The first worry is that the limitations-owning account of intellectual humility allows people to be intellectually humble and intellectually arrogant about the same thing at the same time. Someone just needs to be duly attentive to and owning of her intellectual limitations but radically overestimating and bragging about her intellectual strengths. And insofar as someone is intellectually

¹⁸ Whitcomb et al., "Intellectual Humility," 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

arrogant if they radically overestimate and brag about their intellectual strengths, then it looks like the limitations-owning account leads to this odd conclusion: it's possible for someone to "be at once intellectually humble and intellectually arrogant."²⁰ And that might seem like a straightforward reason to reject the view. The inability to rule out someone being at once intellectually arrogant and intellectually humble is a limitation that we may not want to own in our accounts of intellectual humility.²¹

Of course, a defender of the limitations-owning view might argue (as Whitcomb et al. do) that such a result is metaphysically impossible for an agent who is "fully internally rational."²² In other words, someone might argue that if I'm appropriately attending to and owning of my intellectual limitations, then, if I'm *fully internally rational*, I simply *can't* over-estimate my intellectual strengths. Conversely, if I am over-estimating my intellectual strengths, then, if I'm *fully internally rational*, I simply can't be intellectually humble—I can't appropriately attend to and own my intellectual limitations.

Such a response, however, might seem initially unsatisfactory because, sadly, most of us are less than fully internally rational. So, such a response doesn't do anything to disarm the result that most everyone can be at once both intellectually humble and intellectually arrogant. But what is more, even if we *grant* that it'd be metaphysically impossible for a fully internally rational agent to be both intellectually humble and intellectually arrogant, we might still worry that, pre-theoretically, intellectual humility should just be *incompatible* with being simultaneously intellectually arrogant. Just imagine someone said to you: "You need to meet Christopher! He's such a kind and humble guy. Watch out, though, he's an arrogant jerk." You'd think whoever said this just contradicted themselves! You wouldn't think, "Well, I guess Christopher must be less than fully internally rational." You'd think that whoever said such a thing is either using "humble" and "arrogant" in an extremely unusual or unorthodox way, or that they simply don't understand the words that they're using. It seems like there is something wrong or counter-intuitive with a definition of intellectual humility that does not preclude someone—even a less than fully internally rational someone—being at once

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

²¹ To be sure, there isn't anything counterintuitive about the possibility of someone being intellectually arrogant within one domain (say, facts about basketball) and intellectually humble within another (say, astrophysics). The problem arises when a view allows for someone to be intellectually humble and intellectually arrogant *within the same domain*.

²² Whitcomb et al., "Intellectual Humility," 25.

intellectually humble and intellectually arrogant. And if the limitations-owning view gives us such a definition, then that seems like a serious strike against it.

Unfortunately, that's not the only worry facing the limitations-owning view; there is a different but related worry lurking in this neighbourhood: the limitations-owning account of intellectual humility not only allows for someone being at once intellectually humble and intellectually arrogant, it also allows for someone being at once intellectually humble and *intellectually servile*. Remember, intellectual servility is sensitive to both intellectual limitations and intellectual strengths on this view—where someone can be intellectually servile by *either* over owning / attending to their limitations or by under owning /attending to their strengths. But, remember, intellectual humility, is *blind* to intellectual strengths. As such someone could appropriately attend to and own their intellectual limitations (and be intellectually humble) while completely failing to attend to their corresponding intellectual strengths (which would make them intellectually servile).

And it's worth noting that appealing to fully internally rational agents doesn't seem to be *any* help in this case. Even if a fully internally rational person can't appropriately attend to and own their limitations while overestimating their strengths, it's not at all clear that a fully internally rational person can't appropriately attend to and own their limitations while simply failing to attend to their strengths. There is nothing irrational about not attending to the logical consequences of one's beliefs.

The two leading theories of intellectual humility in the philosophical literature each face two worries. The low concern for status view faces (i) worries about the possibility of someone being too humble and (ii) worries about scenarios devoid of social status. And the limitations-owning view faces worries about (i) allowing for cases where someone can be at once intellectually humble and intellectual arrogant and (ii) allowing for cases where someone can be at once intellectually humble and intellectually servile. To be sure, I don't intend for these worries to be knock-down arguments against these views (again, there might be viable ways to disarm them); however, I raise these worries to help motivate the search for another, alternative account of intellectual humility. In the next section, I'm going to explore one such alternative: *the doxastic account of intellectual humility*.

§3: An Alternative Definition

I think intellectual humility is important. All too often, when faced with difficult questions, people are prone to dismiss and marginalize dissent. And around the

world, politics is incredibly polarizing and, in some places, extremely dangerous. And whether it's Christian fundamentalism, Islamic extremism, or militant atheism, religious dialogue remains tinted by a terrifying and dehumanizing arrogance, dogma, and ignorance. And if intellectual humility is that relevant and important, then we should be motivated to figure out what such a virtue could be. In the previous section, we considered two leading philosophical accounts of intellectual humility, and highlighted some worries that face them. In this section, I want to give a brief sketch of an alternative, philosophical account of intellectual humility, which I (humbly) hope such an account might serve as a better starting place for understanding this virtue.

As I said before, the account I want to explore is not theory-rich. I just want to follow our intuitions, stake a claim, and ultimately see how it holds up against criticism. Think of the act of creating a pot on a potter's wheel. At the beginning, you have a rough and messy lump of clay, which you then throw on the wheel and try to make something a bit nicer. In the introduction to this paper, I noted how according to my earlier view intellectual humility is best thought of as a virtuous mean between intellectual arrogance and intellectual servility. The intellectually humble person, so I thought, doesn't think too much of their beliefs (which would be intellectual arrogance) or do they think too little of their beliefs (which would be intellectual servility). Instead, it seemed to me that *the intellectually humble person would value their beliefs as they ought*. While not a non-starter, such an account of intellectual humility is indeed a very rough and messy piece of clay, so to speak. In this section, I want to shape that clay a bit further to see if we can make something out of it. And, running with the metaphor, in the next section we'll see if what we make explodes in the kiln when faced with objections.

As I said, we might easily imagine that intellectual humility is the virtuous mean between intellectual arrogance and intellectual servility. The intellectually humble person, then, doesn't overly value her beliefs (intellectual arrogance) nor does she under-value them (intellectual servility). Instead, she values her beliefs, their epistemic status, and her intellectual abilities as she ought. Let's call this basic, messy view DOXASTIC ACCOUNT:

DOXASTIC ACCOUNT: *Intellectual humility is the virtue of valuing one's own beliefs as he/she ought.*

A rough piece of clay, indeed. Perhaps the first thing we will want to know is what this "valuing" amounts to. We might easily wonder, for example if this *valuing* has something to do with how firmly someone holds a given belief—how resistant a given belief is to revision or relinquishment. And to some extent, that

would make a lot of sense. After all, it seems right to think that an intellectually arrogant person would be someone who is completely unwilling to change her belief in the face of disagreement or evidence to contrary. Likewise, it seems right to think that an intellectually servile person would be someone who holds his beliefs loosely and revises or changes them at the proverbial drop of a hat. Intellectual humility, then, would amount to holding beliefs as firmly as you ought.

While that was once my view, conflating valuing, in DOXASTIC ACCOUNT, with belief firmness leads to some serious problems. Consider the following scenario:

HYPOCHONDRIAC: Tim suffers mightily from hypochondria, and he knows this about himself. Nevertheless, whenever Tim has a headache he cannot help but believe that he has an aneurism in his brain. He's spoken to his doctor, he's had his head scanned thoroughly, and medical experts have confirmed that Tim's headaches are actually a product of tension in his neck (caused by his anxiety). Even though Tim knows that he has no good reason to think he has an aneurism in his brain (and that he has excellent reasons to think to the contrary), his hypochondria nevertheless makes his belief that he has a brain aneurism incredibly resilient.

In HYPOCHONDRIAC, Tim's belief is extremely firm. His hypochondria simply renders him psychologically unable to resist the belief that he has a brain aneurism. Is he being intellectually arrogant then? I don't think so, because he is entirely sensitive to all of the relevant reasons or evidence or justification against his belief and sensitive to the dearth of any reasons or evidence or justification in favour of his belief.

So perhaps the "valuing" in DA should not be a function of belief firmness. Maybe, instead, it should be some function of being sensitive to the relevant reasons or evidence or justification, for or against one's belief. Or, to use a catch-all phrase, we might say that intellectual humility is some function of being sensitive to the "positive epistemic status" for or against one's beliefs. So maybe we can shape our rough piece of clay a little bit along these lines. Consider the following revision:

DOXASTIC ACCOUNT': *Intellectual humility is the virtue of attributing positive epistemic status to one's own beliefs as he/she ought.*

Still a rough piece of clay, no doubt, but I think this might be getting somewhere. According to DOXASTIC ACCOUNT', if you attribute far more evidence, justification, or positive epistemic status to a belief than it merits, then

you are being intellectually arrogant about that belief. Conversely, if you attribute far less evidence, justification, or positive epistemic status to a belief than it merits, then you are being intellectually servile when it comes to that belief. Intellectual humility, on this view, is the virtue of attributing positive epistemic status to one's own beliefs as you ought—as the beliefs deserve.

But this still isn't entirely satisfying. First of all, what is determining the "ought" in DOXASTIC ACCOUNT"? In other words, can we say anything further to describe the normative component? And secondly, is "attribution" the right word to use for intellectual humility? After all, "attributing positive epistemic status" to a given belief seems like a highly reflective (System 2) activity, one that simply couldn't be done subconsciously. And insofar as that seems like an unnecessary restriction on intellectual humility, maybe we should consider a different term.

To address that first question (at least partially), it seems like the positive epistemic status (or evidence or justification) someone *ought* to attribute to their own beliefs is the positive epistemic status such beliefs *actually have*. So, at the very least, perhaps a doxastic account of intellectual humility should be most concerned with whether or not someone is accurately tracking—be it consciously or subconsciously—the positive epistemic status that their beliefs actually enjoy. And what is more, to address the second question, *accurately tracking* positive epistemic status, perhaps unlike *attributing* positive epistemic status, does not seem to require highly reflective activity; *accurately tracking* positive epistemic status, perhaps unlike *attributing* positive epistemic status, seems like the sort of thing that can be done implicitly and subconsciously.

With this in mind, we might shape our "clay" a bit further. Now consider DOXASTIC ACCOUNT":

DOXASTIC ACCOUNT": *Intellectual humility is the virtue of accurately tracking the positive epistemic status of one's own beliefs.*

On this view, if you think that one of your beliefs enjoys a tremendous amount of evidence, justification, or positive epistemic status when it actually *doesn't*, then you're intellectually arrogant about that belief.²³ And in contrast, if you think that one of your beliefs enjoys a paltry amount of evidence, justification, or positive epistemic status when it actually enjoys a tremendous amount, then

²³ The "thinking" involved here doesn't have to be deeply introspective navel-gazing. Someone might be extremely other-focused and outward looking when it comes to evaluating their beliefs (even if it's subconscious), and they can still satisfy the conditions for intellectual humility.

you're intellectually servile about that belief. Intellectual humility, again, is the virtue of accurately tracking the positive epistemic status of one's own beliefs.

While I think this all seems relatively intuitive, we still need to make some sort of caveat to DOXASTIC ACCOUNT'' in order to account for situations where someone has been non-culpably deceived—that is, deceived in a way that they cannot be blamed for. Consider another scenario:

REVIEWS: Aaron wants to buy a new cordless phone and is shopping online. He sees a particular model, the *Speak-Easy 3000*, that is in his price range, has all the features he's looking for, and has excellent reviews. Aaron orders the phone. And given that excellent reviews almost always reflect excellent quality, Aaron believes that he has just made an excellent purchase. Unbeknownst to Aaron, the company that makes the *Speak-Easy 3000* is profoundly dishonest and has programmed bots to comb through the reviews of all of their products to leave four compelling positive reviews for every negative review. As such, the reviews of the *Speak-Easy 3000* are drastically inflated and incredibly misleading.

In order for DOXASTIC ACCOUNT'' to rightly handle scenarios like this, we need Aaron's strong belief (i.e. belief which is taken to have a lot of positive epistemic status) to not count as intellectual arrogance simply because he was non-culpably deceived. However, someone might worry that since Aaron's belief is based on fabricated product reviews, that it enjoys far less positive epistemic status than Aaron imagines. To avoid such a worry, we can make a final adjustment to our clay, to the doxastic account of intellectual humility:

DOXASTIC ACCOUNT''': *Intellectual humility is the virtue of accurately tracking what one could non-culpably take to be the positive epistemic status of one's own beliefs.*

And since Aaron is non-culpable in believing the fabricated reviews (given that online product reviews are usually reliable), DOXASTIC ACCOUNT''' helps guarantee that Aaron won't be wrongfully ascribed with intellectual arrogance. According to this way of thinking, intellectual humility can be assessed along two axes: how much positive epistemic status a given belief enjoys, and how much positive epistemic status a given agent *thinks* (consciously or subconsciously) it enjoys. So, for example, if I ascribe my idiosyncratic religious belief with far more positive epistemic status than it really enjoys, then I'm guilty of intellectual arrogance. Alternatively, if I ascribe my belief that microwaves are safe with far less positive epistemic status than it really enjoys—perhaps because I perused the back-allies of the Internet and took the unsubstantiated anxieties of a blogger seriously—then I'm guilty of intellectual servility.

While there is certainly more work that needs to be done—in other words, there is certainly more shaping we could do to the lump of clay—I think this account of intellectual humility (what I’ve been calling the *doxastic* account of intellectual humility) can track our intuitions across a wide range of scenarios. And what is more, it does not seem to fall victim to the same worries that afflict the low concern for status or the limitations-owning accounts. Since the doxastic account represents intellectual humility as a virtuous mean and does not require a social context, then it does not fall victim to the same worries as the Low-Concern for Status account. And since the doxastic account does not afford scenarios where someone can be at once intellectually humble and intellectually arrogant *or* scenarios where someone can be at once intellectually humble and intellectually servile, then it does not fall victim to the same worries as the limitations-owning account. Does this mean that the doxastic account is the final word when it comes to intellectual humility? As much as I’d like to think so, there are plenty of serious worries we might have against the doxastic account that we haven’t spoken to yet. Let’s consider some now.

§4: Objections

I’d like to suggest (humbly, of course) that the doxastic account—specifically as expressed in DOXASTIC ACCOUNT’—is the best way to think about intellectual humility. But while the doxastic account is not vulnerable to the same worries that face the low-concern for status account or the limitations-owning account, it does seem to face its own serious worries. In the previous section, we shaped our rough piece of clay to see what we could make out of it; now we need to see if what we’ve made can stand against criticism. In this section, I try to address three of the major worries that have been levelled against the doxastic account of intellectual humility, arguing that we need not worry about them.

Worry 1: Is the doxastic account an account of intellectual humility?

Philosophers can disagree about nearly anything. So if a single philosopher finds something to criticize in my work, I may not worry too much (unless, of course, it just seems like a crushing objection). However, when I find that people are systematically, across contexts and audiences clustering around the same criticism, then I have serious reason for concern. And there *is* such a criticism facing the doxastic account; there is a worry that people do indeed seem to cluster around, and I am truly concerned. Namely, *is the doxastic account of intellectual humility really an account of intellectual humility?*

When presenting my account of intellectual humility, many philosophers seem to have the same sort of worry (though there are important difference): that perhaps I am not *really* talking about intellectual humility at all, that perhaps I am talking about another virtue and just calling it intellectual humility. Some (as we saw in the introduction) have worried that perhaps my account highlights a feature of intellectual virtues *in general* and that I'm not picking out intellectual humility *in particular*. Others have suggested that I am picking out a particular virtue, but that I'm really just talking about something like *intellectual honesty* and not intellectual humility. Similarly, in a Big Questions Online discussion, Jay Wood suggested that my proposed account is actually honing in on a virtue like *intellectual accuracy* or *intellectual firmness*, but not intellectual humility.²⁴

So, does this give us good reason to give up on the doxastic account of intellectual humility as an *actual* account of intellectual humility? I don't think so, not yet anyway. The philosophy of intellectual humility is currently something like a wild frontier. As Bob Roberts noted in his discussion summary for the Big Questions Online piece, "What is it to be Intellectually Humble?," "One of the most striking things to emerge from our discussion of intellectual humility is the lack of consensus on what 'humility' and 'intellectual humility' mean."²⁵ As the conversation develops, it has become manifestly clear that there is no shared or even entirely dominate view of intellectual humility in the literature; the low concern for status view is different from limitations-owning view, which is different from the doxastic view, etc. So it seems like the state of play right now is to try to stake a claim and defend it best you can! And that's what I am trying to do.

Of course, if there was consensus regarding what I'm confusing intellectual humility *with*, then perhaps I should still back off from my account. For example, if it was manifestly clear to everyone but myself that I was really talking about open-mindedness and not intellectual humility, then (even if there was no consensus regarding what intellectual humility actually is) I might yet worry that I've gotten something deeply wrong. But, as I've already noted, that's not the situation faced by the doxastic account. There is no consensus regarding what the doxastic account might be confusing intellectual humility with.

²⁴ See W. Jay Wood, "How Might Intellectual Humility Lead to Scientific Insight: Discussion Summary," *The Big Questions Online*, December 2012, <https://www.bigquestionsonline.com/node/177/comment/summary/all>.

²⁵ "What Is It to Be Intellectually Humble: Discussion Summary," *The Big Questions Online*, June 2012, <http://www.bigquestionsonline.com/node/135/comment/summary/all>.

Worry 2: What about a social dimension?

Recent empirical research (including some recent empirical research that I've had a hand in) seems to strongly suggest that folk conceptions of intellectual humility contain not only a doxastic/epistemic dimension but also a clear social dimension.²⁶ Intellectual humility, in the folk mind, often seems to be connected with how we engage with and treat other people. And that seems right. It is a serious worry for my account that it seems so very focused on the doxastic or epistemic dimension of intellectual humility, with seemingly no mention of a social element.

There are, I think, a few ways I might be able to respond to this worry. First, I could just back off on giving a 'full blown' account of intellectual humility and be content with the claim that the doxastic account is merely a *necessarily* condition on intellectual humility. Allowing that perhaps another condition could be added to it in order to account for a social dimension. Ultimately, what I want to argue in this paper is that whatever social or moral dimensions the virtue of intellectual humility might have, that it should be built alongside of or understood within the doxastic account.

Alternatively, I could take a less conciliatory approach and argue that it's not so obvious that intellectual humility really does have a social dimension. Think of someone who is completely socially oblivious, someone who finds the social world, social norms, and subtle social cues entirely baffling. Perhaps someone like Sheldon Cooper, from the television show the Big Bang Theory. Such a person, it seems, could have the very best of intentions, but come across to everyone as an arrogant jerk. And while I certainly can see that everyone might *think*, such a person is an arrogant jerk; it's not entirely clear to me that he truly *is* an arrogant jerk. My intuitions here are that such a person could do absolutely everything wrong on a social level and still have a heart of gold—a heart of intellectual humility.

Put it another way: In China, I'm told, tipping a waiter or waitress is an extremely jerky thing to do—the sort of thing you do only when you're looking to insult someone. In the US, in contrast, *not* tipping a waiter or waitress is an extremely jerky thing to do—the sort of thing you only do when you are looking to signify your sever distaste for the service you received. Now, if I didn't know about the social norms surrounding tipping in China, and I visited a restaurant and tipped handsomely for what I thought was excellent service, I would be considered a raging jerk. But would I really be a raging jerk? I don't think so. It

²⁶ See Samuelson et al., "Implicit Theories."

seems like my heart was in the right place, I just didn't know the social norms. To be sure, our actions often go hand-in-hand with our intentions—if I like the service at a restaurant I usually know what I should do in response—and that might explain why we tend to think intellectual humility has a social component. Usually, if someone is acting like a total, arrogant prig, it's because they *are* a total, arrogant prig! But I wonder if examples like these—the Sheldon Cooper example, and the China tipping example—might actually suggest that the so called “social dimensions” of intellectual humility are not actually necessary for intellectual humility.

Worry 3: The doxastic account cannot easily be empirically measured

In the first section of this paper, we saw how there can be tension between psychologists who want an account of intellectual humility that is easy to measure and philosophers who want to fully elucidate the virtue. I suggested that psychologists and clinicians who put forward an overly simplistic account of intellectual humility—viewing it as merely the opposite of intellectual arrogance, for the sake of easy measurement—were lead to an uncomfortable conclusion: that perhaps intellectual humility is not actually an intellectual virtue. As I suggested, however, once we see intellectual humility as a virtuous mean, we can plausibly expect these sorts of worries to disappear.

However, psychologists and clinicians might *now* be worried that the doxastic account is too complex to be of any use to scientists working on intellectual humility. The worry is that the doxastic account of intellectual humility is too complex to be empirically measured and used “in the real world” of the lab and the clinic. Consider the following quote from Don Davis and Joshua Hook's forthcoming paper:

Our main reaction to Church's model of [intellectual humility] was we struggled to understand how this model would work “in the trenches.” As researchers, we are interested in definitions and models of [intellectual humility] that lead to clear strategies for measuring the construct and developing an empirical research program. As clinicians, we are interested in how [intellectual humility] is perceived and judged in actual relationships and communities, such as religious discussions and interfaith dialogue....Church's definition of [intellectual humility] is complex. We call it a “goldilocks definition”: [intellectual humility] is not a unitary construct but rather the ‘just right’ combination of several constructs interacting with each other (e.g., whether or not someone was misled by false evidence). Complex definitions that include many moderators (i.e., qualifications) are difficult to measure, so we tend to prefer to simplify definitions and treat qualifiers as different constructs that may moderate the relationship between [intellectual humility] and other outcomes. As

psychologists, *we fear it may be impossible to define and measure this aspect of Church's model in a psychologically meaningful way.*²⁷

And this isn't a problem that is localized to intellectual humility. Many concepts that share interest across scientific and philosophical communities run into similar problems—with the scientists being unhappy with the scientific usefulness of armchair philosophical theorizing.²⁸

Now, since I like my armchair theorizing, let me try to say something against this sort of worry. Contrary to what Davis and Hook say, I would like to suggest that the complexities and limitations of the doxastic account actually enjoy *admirable* fit with the real world—and that demanding *less* from an account of intellectual humility actually doesn't account for what we find “in the trenches.” Life in the trenches, in the real world, is messy. It's complex. Properly understood, virtues are often going to be *extremely* difficult to viably measure across personality types, social dynamics, cultural contexts, etc. In giving an abstract and complex view of intellectual humility, it seems to me that *I am actually tracking the complexity we find in the trenches, in the real world.* When Davis and Hook complain that my account of intellectual humility is too complex to be easily measure, my *first* response is, “That's life in the trenches!” We shouldn't always expect virtues to yield easy measurements. Sure, we can give a simple definition of intellectual humility so that it yields easy measurements, but *if ease of measurement is what's driving our definitions, then there is a real chance our definitions won't fully capture the virtue.* Even if there is some insurmountable hurdle blocking a straightforward means of measuring intellectual humility as I've described it, that doesn't mean that there isn't plenty of extremely valuable measurement work to be done. For example, we might think that intellectual humility *largely* corresponds with the absence of dogmatism; as such, developing a straightforward measure along these lines would be extremely valuable and relevant. But, I think we'd simply be remiss if we tried to straightforwardly conflate intellectual humility with the absence of dogmatism. If we are going to try to develop an account of intellectual humility that applies across contexts, cultures, personalities, and belief types—from the belief that $2 + 2 = 4$ to political beliefs—then we are simply going to *need* an open-ended and sufficiently abstract account to work with. In the end, I consider it a *virtue* of my account that it provides a broad enough framework of intellectual humility that it can apply

²⁷ Don E. Davis and Joshua N. Hook, “Intellectual Humility in the Trenches: A Reply to Church,” *Biola University Center for Christian Thought* (forthcoming).

²⁸ The literature on the nature of trust is an excellent example of this.

across a full range of cases and track the complexities and stalemates of life “in the trenches.”

Conclusion

Far from being a “non-starter,” the doxastic account of intellectual humility seems to track our intuitions across a wide range of cases, and I’d humbly suggest that it is well situated to be an excellent starting place for understanding intellectual humility—perhaps as much if not more so than the other accounts in the contemporary literature. As we saw in §2, the low concern for status account of intellectual humility seems unable to make sense of the idea that someone can be too humble or situations that are devoid of any social status. Likewise, the limitations-owning view faced its own serious worries: allow for counter-intuitive situations where someone can be at once intellectually humble and intellectually arrogant and counter-intuitive situations where someone can be at once intellectually humble and intellectually servile. As such, in §3, I drew from some of my previous work and developed the doxastic account of intellectual humility, to stand as an account that avoided the problems faced by the other accounts. Of course, the doxastic account of intellectual humility faced its own, unique set of worries; however, in §4, I argued that such objections can be assuaged or otherwise mitigated.

Intellectual humility is a hot topic right now—with a host of philosophers, psychologists, theologians, and cognitive scientists taking up research projects centred around this topic—and it seems like an incredibly important virtue with significant real-world potential. It is important, then, that we do our theorizing or our empirical research from a good conceptual basis. It is my hope that the doxastic account of intellectual humility might be at least a small step in that direction.²⁹

²⁹ I would like to thank J. Adam Carter, Jesper Kallestrup, and Duncan Pritchard for their helpful comments. This work was supported in part by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

I KNOW YOU ARE, BUT WHAT AM I? ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY AND *WU-WEI*

Brian ROBINSON and Mark ALFANO

ABSTRACT: Virtues are acquirable, so if intellectual humility is a virtue, it's acquirable. But there is something deeply problematic—perhaps even paradoxical—about aiming to be intellectually humble. Drawing on Edward Slingerland's analysis of the paradoxical virtue of *wu-wei* in *Trying Not To Try* (New York: Crown, 2014), we argue for an anti-individualistic conception of the trait, concluding that one's intellectual humility depends upon the intellectual humility of others. Slingerland defines *wu-wei* as the “dynamic, effortless, and unselfconscious state of mind of a person who is optimally active and effective” (*Trying Not to Try*, 7). Someone who embodies *wu-wei* inspires implicit trust, so it is beneficial to appear *wu-wei*. This has led to an arms race between faking *wu-wei* on the one hand and detecting fakery on the other. Likewise, there are many benefits to being (or seeming to be) intellectually humble. But someone who makes conscious, strategic efforts to appear intellectually humble is *ipso facto* not intellectually humble. Following Slingerland's lead, we argue that there are several strategies one might pursue to acquire genuine intellectual humility, and all of these involve commitment to shared social or epistemic values, combined with receptivity to feedback from others, who must in turn have and manifest relevant intellectual virtues. In other words, other people and shared values are partial bearers of a given individual's intellectual humility. If this is on the right track, then acquiring intellectual humility demands epistemic anti-individualism.

KEYWORDS: intellectual humility, virtue, *wu-wei*, anti-individualism, modesty

1. Introduction

While growing up, one of the co-authors of this chapter regularly received report cards that, in addition to tracking academic progress on topics such as spelling, arithmetic, and reading, assessed his progress in acquiring virtues deemed important by his school.¹ These included executive virtues such as patience and

¹ Co-author Mark Alfano carried out some of the research leading to this publication while he was affiliated as Visiting Research Fellow at Australian Catholic University. This research was

self-control, religious virtues such as reverence, and intellectual virtues such as creativity and thoroughness (not to mention alleged virtues for which he consistently scored *needs improvement*, such as obedience). Indeed, many parochial and public schools have given their pupils marks for the development of character traits. Starting in the late 1980s in the United States, educators bought into the self-esteem fad to such an extent that the California State Task Force to Promote Self-esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility hailed it as a panacea: “Self-esteem is the likeliest candidate for a *social vaccine* [...] that inoculates us against the lures of crime, violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, child abuse, chronic welfare dependency, and educational failure.”² The task force went on to call on every school district in California to “adopt the promotion of self-esteem [...] as a clearly stated goal” and to make course work in self-esteem mandatory for educators’ “credentials and as part of ongoing in-service training.”³ More recently, grit—construed as a kind of long-lasting perseverance⁴—has been lauded as the key to children’s success not only in school but also beyond.⁵ While there are detractors from the suggestion that schools should educate for virtues like self-esteem⁶ and grit,⁷ the contemporary educational establishment has made forays in this direction, such as the Intellectual Virtues Academy, a public charter school founded in 2013 by philosopher Jason Baehr with funding from the John Templeton Foundation.⁸

This missionary zeal for character development is understandable. Pupils would presumably be better students, better citizens, better scientists, and better

also supported by a grant from Fuller Theological Seminary and the Thrive Center. We are grateful for the critical feedback provided by Ted Slingerland, David Wong, and Adam Carter.

² State of California Department of Education. *Toward a State of Esteem: The Final Report of the California Task Force to Promote Self-esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility*. (Sacramento: Bureau of Publications, California State Department of Education, 1990), 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴ Angela L. Duckworth, Christopher Peterson, Michael D. Matthews, and Dennis R. Kelly, “Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92, 6 (2007): 1087–1101.

⁵ Paul Tough, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

⁶ Roy F. Baumeister, “Should Schools Try to Boost Self-Esteem? Beware the Dark Side,” *American Educator* 20, 2 (1996): 14–19.

⁷ Angela L. Duckworth and David Scott Yeager, “Measurement Matters: Assessing Personal Qualities Other Than Cognitive Ability for Educational Purposes,” *Educational Researcher* 44, 4 (2015): 237–251.

⁸ For more, see <http://www.ivalongbeach.org/about/about-iva>.

workers if their schooling inculcated virtues in addition to imparting domain knowledge. If we can do it, surely we should, or at least we may.⁹

Yet some virtues are more difficult to educate for than others, due to a paradox lurking in their nature. Humility, for instance, is paradoxical because typically one cannot truthfully claim to be humble. If you are humble, you don't mention it; if you claim to be humble, you're probably not.¹⁰ Likewise, if modesty is distinct from humility (a question we'll examine in section 4), then *prima facie* the same paradox applies. Wisdom, at least as Socrates presents it in the *Apology*, is paradoxical, since it requires that one know that one knows nothing. Outside of a Western context, the Chinese concept of *wu-wei* (literally "no trying")—which Slingerland defines as the "dynamic, effortless, and unselfconscious state of mind of a person who is optimally active and effective"¹¹—has long been recognized as similarly paradoxical in the Confucian, Mencian, and Daoist traditions.¹²

We are primarily concerned with the problem of how to develop these paradoxical virtues, particularly the virtue of intellectual humility. At the individual level, developing intellectual humility is fraught with contradiction. By consciously striving to become more humble, one might become less so, since humility seemingly is a virtue that one can only have by not paying attention to it. *Institutionalizing* the cultivation of intellectual humility, for instance in a school context, leads to even more bizarreness. If students receive an 'A' in intellectual humility, should they be proud of that? Giving high marks for this virtue would seem to undermine it (especially if the high marks are dwelt upon). It hardly makes sense to educate for X if we don't even know what X is—the pedagogue's variant of the *Meno* problem. This doesn't mean that we have to map out every detail of the logical space before we get started, but it does mean that we need a rather fine-grained conception that still enjoys widespread recognition (if not consensus). In this chapter, we will argue that, counter-intuitively, the institutional level is precisely where the focus should be for developing

⁹ Jason Baehr, "The Situationist Challenge to Educating for Intellectual Virtues," in *Epistemic Situationism*, eds. Abrol Fairweather and Mark Alfano (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁰ Mark Alfano and Brian Robinson, "Bragging," *Thought* 3, 4 (2014): 263-272.

¹¹ Edward Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try: The Art and Science of Spontaneity* (New York: Crown, 2014): 7.

¹² To be clear, Mencius took himself to be a Confucian, which remains a common interpretation of his work (cf., David Wong "Early Confucian Philosophy and the Development of Compassion," *Dao* 14 (2015): 157-194). Here we follow Slingerland (*Trying Not to Try*) in considering Mencius separately, as there are some important differences between his account of *wu-wei* and that the standard Confucian view.

intellectual humility. To make this claim, we will draw on Slingerland's analysis of the paradoxical concept of *wu-wei*. By finding parallels between intellectual humility and *wu-wei*, we will argue that developing intellectual humility requires an anti-individualistic aretaic framework.

2. Three Problems

The topic of educating for virtues is helpfully structured around three questions. Which virtues? How do we instill those virtues? How can we know whether we've succeeded? Call these the questions of identification, methodology, and operationalization.

2.1 Identification

Multiple millennia of philosophizing have not yet succeeded in identifying all and only the virtues worth cultivating. Nevertheless, there is more controversy about some virtues than others. For instance, honesty and fairness seem to enjoy near-universal acclaim, while the Christian revaluation of values and subsequent Capitalist revaluation have left an ambivalent palimpsest of humility, obedience, chastity, ambition, greed, and other alleged virtues (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 21).¹³ Should educators aim to inculcate obedience or, as Kant would have it,¹⁴ the spirit of *sapere aude*? Even when it comes to near-consensus virtues, though, while people may agree on the labels, there often remains a significant amount of disagreement about the rich texture of the traits in question. Does honesty demand that one never lie, even to the murderous stranger at one's door? Does fairness mean equality or equity (or something else)? The difficulty of establishing the rich contours of a virtue also applies to the ones that have undergone Nietzschean revaluation: does intellectual humility entail or presuppose ignorance or error about oneself? Is it a disposition of behavior, of cognition, of affect, or some combination of these? (For explorations of these questions, see Hazlett,¹⁵ Roberts and Wood,^{16,17} Samuelson and Church,¹⁸

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann. (New York: Vintage, 1882 / 1974): section 21.

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Enlightenment?'" (1784).

¹⁵ Allan Hazlett, "Higher-Order Epistemic Attitudes and Intellectual Humility," *Episteme* 9, 3 (2012): 205-223.

¹⁶ Robert Roberts and W. Jay Wood, "Humility and Epistemic Goods," in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, eds. Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 257-279.

Whitcomb et al.,¹⁹ and Christen et al.²⁰) In this chapter, we will work with an intuitive conception of intellectual humility that does not presuppose precise answers to these questions. We do so not because we think that the question of identification has been solved in this case (far from it), but because we think there are even more difficult questions to confront.

2.2 Methodology

Supposing we had a list of virtues to be cultivated and a way to measure the extent to which pupils embody them, we would then need to fix on some method for cultivating these virtues. It's not clear that every virtue is acquired in the same way. The predominance of neo-Aristotelianism in contemporary philosophy might lead us to believe that all virtues are acquired through habituation (and that we have a good understanding of what habituation is), but things are not so simple. For example, Alfano has argued that the habituation model may work for some virtues, such as generosity and friendship, for which there is no tension between having the virtue and wanting to be in its eliciting conditions.²¹ There's nothing problematic about generous people wanting to be in a position to benefit others. There's nothing problematic about friends wanting to be in a position to commune with one another. But there is something deeply problematic about courageous people wanting to be in threatening or dangerous conditions. Indeed, such a preference seems like a component of rashness, not courage. Likewise, there is something deeply problematic about humble people wanting to be in conditions where others are liable to praise them (especially for their humility), allowing them to manifest humility by demurring with an "Aw shucks." Indeed, such a preference seems like a component of vanity, not humility. This paradox brings to mind a passage from C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, an epistolary novel between two demons who are trying to corrupt someone:

¹⁷ Robert Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Peter L. Samuelson and Ian M. Church, "When Cognition Turns Vicious: Heuristics and Biases in Light of Virtue Epistemology," *Philosophical Psychology* 28, 8 (2015): 1095-1113.

¹⁹ Dennis Whitcomb, Heather Battaly, Jason Baehr, and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91, 1 (2015), accessed May 16, 2016, doi: 10.1111/phpr.12228.

²⁰ Markus Christen, Brian Robinson, and Mark Alfano, "The Semantic Space of Intellectual Humility," in *Proceedings of the European Conference on Social Intelligence*, eds. Andreas Herzig and Emiliano Lorini (Toulouse: IRIT-CNRS, 2014): 40-49.

²¹ Mark Alfano, *Moral Psychology: An Introduction* (London: Polity, 2016).

Your patient has become humble; have you drawn his attention to the fact? All virtues are less formidable to us once the man is aware that he has them, but this is specially true of humility. Catch him at the moment when he is really poor in spirit and smuggle into his mind the gratifying reflection, 'By jove! I'm being humble,' and almost immediately pride – pride at his own humility—will appear. If he awakes to the danger and tries to smother this new form of pride, make him proud of his attempt.²²

Developing intellectual humility through conscious habituation at the individual level does not appear promising. As already mentioned, at the institutional level, the problems appear equally vexing. Should students be proud of improving their intellectual humility score from one semester to the next? Should teachers rescind high grades for intellectual humility if they detect pride on the part of the student? Giving out bumper stickers that read, "My Child is an Honor Student and Intellectually Humble," would be counter-productive to say the least. Little attention has been paid to the paradox of cultivating paradoxical virtues in Western philosophy. Chinese philosophers, on the other hand, have grappled with this problem for centuries via the concept of *wu-wei*. The Confucian, Mencian, and Daoist traditions all opt for resolving this paradox at the institutional (or cultural) level, rather than the individual level, which we take to be suggestive of how to resolve the paradox for intellectual humility.

2.3 Operationalization

When students learn their multiplication tables, their schools typically test how well they've learned the material. If we were to educate for virtues, similar evaluations would be needed. Assessing character traits, however, is not as simple as administering a test with multiplication problems. One common way to operationalize personality and character traits is via self-report questionnaires: I yam what I say I yam, plus or minus standard error. This is how both self-esteem²³ and grit²⁴ are typically measured. Self-report can be supplemented by informant-report, i.e., asking people who know someone well to fill out a third-person version of the self-report scale.²⁵ When it comes to intellectual virtues in an educational context, neither of these methods looks very attractive. After all, if students know that they are being assessed not only for their mastery of cognitive

²² C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Touchstone, 1942 / 1961), 58.

²³ Morris Rosenberg, *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

²⁴ Duckworth et al., "Grit."

²⁵ Simine Vazire and Erika N. Carlson, "Self-Knowledge of Personality: Do People Know Themselves?," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 4 (2010) 605-620.

content and skills but also for their embodiment of character traits, then at least the ambitious ones among them are likely to provide answers to self-report questionnaires that make them look good. And while this self-serving bias might be tempered somewhat by having teachers fill out informant reports, there are reasons to worry that various biases—both explicit and implicit—of teachers would undermine their reliability as informants. These concerns are especially pertinent when it comes to intellectual humility and other paradoxical virtues in an *institutional* setting. Filling out a self-report questionnaire about one's own intellectual humility, when one knows that the stakes are high (e.g., being admitted to a more prestigious university or receiving scholarship funds), is basically an invitation to brag. But bragging is one of the things that humble people characteristically don't do.²⁶ These considerations suggest that *indirect* and *behavioral* operationalizations of intellectual virtues are to be preferred, but such operationalizations are much harder to develop and validate. To our knowledge, no valid and reliable behavioral test of intellectual humility exists. Like the question of identification, the question of the operationalization is addressed only indirectly in this chapter, via our exploration of the question of methodology.

3. *Wu-Wei* and Its Cultivation

Ian James Kidd argues that while the common Western conceptions of humility and intellectual humility suffer from serious conceptual and psychological incoherencies, Eastern philosophy has much to offer in this context.²⁷ For Kidd, intellectual humility amounts to an appropriately calibrated confidence in one's intellectual capacities. While we agree with much of Kidd's analysis of intellectual humility, we contend that he overlooks the paradoxicality of educating for intellectual humility. Because this issue deserves further attention, we follow Kidd's lead in looking beyond the Western philosophical tradition and examining conceptions of virtues in Chinese philosophy.

Slingerland's recent analysis of the state of *wu-wei* (and the related concept of *de*) provides an interesting parallel.²⁸ *Wu-wei* is a state of action that

²⁶ Alfano and Robinson, "Bragging," 271.

²⁷ Ian J. Kidd, "Educating for Intellectual Humility," in *Educating for Intellectual Virtues: Applying Virtue Epistemology to Educational Theory and Practice*, ed. Jason Baehr (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

²⁸ We recognize that Slingerland's account of *wu-wei* is not the only one in the literature. Wong (Early Confucian Philosophy) for instance offers a different account. We here opt for an examination of Slingerland's account only for the parallels then available between developing *wu-wei* and educating for intellectual humility. If one were to reject Slingerland's view, then

nevertheless feels effortless. “People in *wu-wei* feel as if they are doing nothing, while at the same time they might be creating a brilliant work of art, smoothly negotiating a complex social situation, or even bringing the entire world into harmonious order. [...] People who are in *wu-wei* have *de*, typically translated as ‘virtue,’ ‘power,’ or charismatic power.”²⁹ Not surprisingly, one cannot simply opt to be in *wu-wei*; one must paradoxically try not to try. Since we are not scholars of ancient Chinese philosophy, we will draw upon Slingerland’s analysis of *wu-wei* rather than offering a novel interpretation. Our interest in *wu-wei* instead derives from its analogy with intellectual humility:³⁰

- Having and manifesting *wu-wei* or intellectual humility tends to lead to smooth and spontaneous cooperation with others, avoiding pitfalls associated with strategic cooperation in mixed-motive games.
- It is prudentially valuable to appear *wu-wei* or intellectually humble because this appearance tends to lead to being trusted by others.
- The prudential value of appearing *wu-wei* or intellectually humble means that people may be tempted to fake these virtues and that people may be suspicious of those who seem to be faking.³¹
- Having *wu-wei* or intellectual humility entails or is at least strongly associated with being connected to a larger or higher value than oneself, and sharing that value-laden connection with others.³²
- Focusing overly much on whether one has or is in the process of acquiring *wu-wei* or intellectual humility is in serious tension—if not outright contradiction—with actually having or acquiring the trait.
- Explicitly attending in the moment to whether one is manifesting *wu-wei* or intellectual humility is in serious tension—if not outright

some of the parallels would collapse, but the more central points about methods for educating for the paradoxical virtue of intellectual humility would remain.

²⁹ Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*, 7-8.

³⁰ ‘*Wu-wei*’ can refer to a cognitive-affective state that one can slip into and out of, or to the virtue associated with the disposition to enter and remain in this state. This is consistent with the language associated with other virtues. For example, ‘curious’ can refer to a cognitive-affective state that motivates one to investigate, or the virtue associated with the disposition to enter and remain in this state. For more on the polysemy of virtue-language, see Adam Morton, “Epistemic emotions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, ed. Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 385-399.

³¹ Rolf Reber and Edward G. Slingerland, “Confucius Meets Cognition: New Answers to Old Questions,” *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 1, 2 (2011): 135-145.

³² Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*, 15.

contradiction—with both manifesting the trait and being perceived to manifest the trait.³³

These points of analogy lead us to believe that solutions to the paradox of cultivating *wu-wei* may serve as model solutions to the paradox of cultivating intellectual humility. According to Slingerland,³⁴ there are three main (partial) solutions to the paradox of *wu-wei*, which we will refer to as the early Confucian, the Mencian, and the Daoist.

3.1 Early Confucian Solutions to the Paradox of Cultivating *Wu-Wei*

As Slingerland explains, the early Confucian tradition views human nature as a shapeless block of recalcitrant material, into which form is imbued through effortful engagement in various cultural forms. People are born neither good nor bad, but become so as the block of their nature is carved and polished. This may sound to Western ears a bit like Aristotle's conception of human nature, which starts off without virtues or vices but acquires such traits through habituation. There are important differences, however. First, Aristotle thought that humans have a natural *telos* (end): rational activity. As we will see below, this allies him more with Mencius (who likewise believed in natural human teleology) than with the early Confucian tradition, which sees human nature as initially formless. In addition, Aristotle held that at least some humans are born with "natural virtues," dispositions that are behaviorally identical to full-fledged virtues but which are not underwritten by practical wisdom. For the early Confucians, becoming virtuous is difficult because it requires either eliminating "natural" dispositions or unlearning non-ideal habits of mind and action. Cultivating *wu-wei* might thus be compared to a kind of *forgetting* rather than a kind of *learning*.³⁵

Most importantly, however, the *method* of acquiring or cultivating virtue suggested by the early Confucian tradition is very different from Aristotle's model. Aristotle flat-footedly held that virtue is acquired through habituation ("the things we have to learn before we do them, we learn by doing them"³⁶). His method is

³³ For more on these last two points, see David S. Nivison, *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy* (La Salle: Open Court, 1996), 31-43 and Reber and Slingerland "Confucius Meets Cognition."

³⁴ Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*.

³⁵ For a contemporary perspective on the difficulty presented by forgetting and unlearning, see Bruno S. Frey, "'Just Forget It.' Memory Distortion as Bounded Rationality," *Mind & Society* 4 (2005): 13-25.

³⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross and L. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009): 1103b

direct. The early Confucian method, by contrast, is highly *indirect*. How is *wu-wei* cultivated? According to Reber and Slingerland, “this sort of effortless virtuous action is portrayed as the result of extended training in traditional cultural forms, including rituals and music.”³⁷ While they go on to mention more direct cultural forms such as “repeated oral and mental rehearsals of moral exemplary narratives and maxims,”³⁸ it is important to recognize just how different this is from the Aristotelian model.

But how do such indirect forms of aretaic training produce their unexpected fruit? According to Slingerland, the early Confucians were aware, if only implicitly, that repetition of rituals, music, and other cultural forms in a social setting tends to lead to affective attunement to and bonding with the other people who are also engaged in this repetition. It’s hard to chant together without such attunement. It’s hard to sing together without such attunement. Moreover, to the extent that cultural forms like singing and ritual express values, repeating them together tends to lead to a sense of shared values. And to express such values well in a ritual setting, one must have appropriate facial expressions and posture, direct one’s gaze appropriately, and engage in a wide variety of other embodied behaviors. These are precisely the kinds of behaviors that, later on, are hard to fake (e.g., the Duchenne—or genuine—smile involving both cheek and eye muscles) and are treated as reliable indicators of sincerity and trustworthiness. *De*, or moral charisma, can thus be understood naturalistically as the suite or signature of facial micro-expressions and other hard-to-fake, automatic behaviors that indicate that someone is not exercising much top-down effortful control of their behavior and demeanor.³⁹

On top of this, communal repetition directs one’s attention outward, to the complex, coordinated activity of which one is a part. Such outward-direction is characteristic of someone who is in *wu-wei* (and, as we will see below, intellectually humble). Communal repetition also tends to involve joint attention with co-celebrants and co-observants. Cognitive science is increasingly finding that direction of gaze and length of fixation are reliable indicators of preference and predictors of behavior,⁴⁰ thus providing empirical support for the early Confucian method. Finally, repetition, both alone and (even more so) in a group is

³⁷ Reber and Slingerland, “Confucius Meets Cognition,” 135.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*.

⁴⁰ Philip Pärnamets, Petter Johansson, Lars Hall, Christian Balkenius, Michael J. Spivey, and Daniel C. Richardson, “Biasing Moral Decision by Exploiting the Dynamics of Eye Gaze,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of the Sciences of the United States of America* 112, 13 (2015): 4170-4175.

tied to fluency, positive affect, and judged truth of what is repeated. The *wu-wei* person engages in smooth, fluent action, according to the early Confucians, in part because they are so practiced in these cultural forms. Positive affect makes such action intrinsically rewarding and thus more likely to be repeated; it also is associated with hard-to-fake expressions of face, posture, and tone of voice. And when the items being repeated are morally exemplary narratives and maxims, the trainee becomes more likely to endorse the values embedded in these narratives and maxims. Extensive engagement with these moral and cultural technologies leads to internalization of values and norms that “obviates rational elaboration” and “is supposed to transform moralistic attitudes derived from mere duty to religious attitudes that emphasize the joy of doing what needs to be done.”⁴¹

3.2 Mencian Solutions to the Paradox of Cultivating *Wu-Wei*

Mencius was himself a continuer of the Confucian tradition, so it might seem odd to contrast his approach to cultivating *wu-wei* with the approach of his predecessors. However, as Slingerland and others have pointed out, the Mencian model is importantly different in several respects.⁴² For one thing, Mencius held that human nature essentially tended toward the good, though not perfect, whereas the early Confucians accorded basic human nature no moral valence. The main point of difference, however, relates to the metaphor Mencius uses as a model for moral development. Whereas the early Confucians preferred the metaphor of carving and polishing a hard, shapeless block, Mencius famously employed the agricultural metaphor of *sprouts* of moral virtue that, when appropriately cultivated over time, come to fruition. There are four such sprouts: *ren* (care or benevolence), *yi* (shame or righteousness), *li* (courtesy or propriety), and *shi* (sense of right and wrong, or wisdom).⁴³ The sprouts of virtue point us in the right direction from early childhood, and if they are appropriately cultivated in a friendly socio-moral environment, they will develop into full-fledged virtues. Moreover, because the sprouts are essentially goal-directed, they can be perverted but cannot be turned completely against their nature into just anything. As Slingerland puts it, in the sprout metaphor, “natural or pre-existing structure plays

⁴¹ Reber and Slingerland, “Confucius Meets Cognition,” 139.

⁴² For more discussion of the Mencian model and various Western models (Kant, Hume, Rawls, and Haidt), see David Morrow “Moral Psychology and the ‘Mencian creature,’” *Philosophical Psychology* 22, 3 (2009): 281-304 and Owen Flanagan, *Moral Sprouts and Natural Teleologies: 21st Century Moral Psychology Meets Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2014).

⁴³ Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 2nd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000).

a crucial role in determining the final product: a face that is not already well-formed will not be made beautiful through cosmetics, and a barley sprout will never, no matter what sort of cultivation it receives, produce corn. The sprout metaphor in particular is deployed to emphasize the presence of a natural *telos*, a normal and dynamic course of development.”⁴⁴

For Mencius, then, the process of developing virtue involves the patient extension of pre-existing dispositions to new eliciting conditions. Consider, for instance, *ren*, which Mencius plausibly thinks leads almost everyone to feel compassion for cute babies and furry animals when they are clearly suffering, and to motivate action to end their suffering. Extending *ren* so that its descriptive eliciting conditions match as closely as possible its normative eliciting conditions is what he means by cultivating this moral sprout. Such extension does not proceed all at once, but rather slowly, through affect-laden analogies of cognition and perception. The person who is developing *ren* comes to see and emotionally appreciate that the suffering of a cute baby is morally indistinguishable from the suffering of someone with an ugly deformity, which leads them to respond in the same way to this new case as they would to the initial case. Universal benevolence, the ultimate *telos* of *ren*, is not arrived at in a flash but rather by slowly extending the analogy to nearby eliciting conditions. Moreover, universal benevolence is therefore not opposed, as many in the Western tradition would have it, to partial love of one’s nearest and dearest but in fact *grows out of* such emotional attachments.

How are sprouts of virtue such as *ren* cultivated and extended? Mencius identifies two main factors.⁴⁵ First, just like agricultural sprouts, moral sprouts grow best when nourished and protected. In other words, people are more inclined to extend their virtues under *material* and *political* conditions of prosperity, safety, and security. Developmentally, then, virtues depend on external features of the physical and social world. Second, just like agricultural sprouts, moral sprouts grow best in a fitting culture. Corn grows well next to beans, peas, and parsley, but not next to cabbage or celery. Likewise, moral sprouts grow best in good socio-cultural company. On the cultural side, Mencius retains an emphasis on ritual, though he puts less weight on it than the early Confucians. On the social side, Mencius emphasizes the importance of the four traditional

⁴⁴ Edward Slingerland, “Crafting Bowls, Cultivating Sprouts: Unavoidable Tensions in Early Chinese Confucianism,” *Dao* 14 (2015): 213–214.

⁴⁵ Bryan Van Norden, “Mencius,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Winter 2014 edition, ed. E. Zalta, accessed May 6, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/mencius/>.

Chinese relationships: father-son, lord-minister, husband-wife, and friend-friend. Once again, we see that, at least from a developmental point of view, virtues essentially depend on ongoing emotional feedback from a social world to which the agent is attuned and attached.⁴⁶

3.3 Daoist Solutions to the Paradox of Cultivating *Wu-Wei*

Wu-wei appears most frequently as an object of explicit philosophical reflection in the Daoist tradition associated with Laozi (through the *Daodejing*) and later Zhuangzi (through the eponymous text). In this context, *wu-wei* is often contrasted invidiously with more direct forms of practical activity that tend to backfire. For instance, in chapter 66 of the *Daodejing*, the would-be ruler is advised prudentially to humble himself before the people rather than lord it over them.⁴⁷ The Daoist approach to the good life is deeply interconnected with Daoist metaphysics, which we naturally do not have the space to delve into here. Two aspects of Daoism stand out, however.

First, the Daoist tradition eschews moralizing, favoring instead a celebration of focused and absorbed activity in the moment. This is illustrated by the famous example of Cook Ding, who manifests such remarkable skill in carving meat from bones that his knife never gets stuck or nicks a bone even when going through a joint. Ding is able to accomplish this feat by focusing intently and tuning out everything beyond his current task. Furthermore, he enjoys his work and finds it rewarding for its own sake, not thinking about the external benefits or praise he might receive for his expert performance. Such intrinsically-motivated, skilled, and immersive activity is meant to be emblematic of (or perhaps even of a piece with) virtuous activity. The person with *wu-wei* is so deeply immersed in what they are doing and accomplishing, so engrossed in the current task, that strategic considerations do not arise and therefore do not distract from or undermine

⁴⁶ For more on this idea of emotional feedback, see Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); “What Are the Bearers of Virtues?” in *Advances in Experimental Moral Psychology*, eds. Hagop Sarkissian and Jennifer Cole Wright (New York: Continuum, 2014), 73-90; *Moral Psychology*; “Friendship and the Structure of Trust,” in *From Personality to Virtue: Essays in the Psychology and Ethics of Character*, eds. Alberto Masala and Jonathan Webber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 186-206; and Mark Alfano and Joshua August Skorburg, “The Embedded and Extended Character Hypotheses,” in *Philosophy of the Social Mind*, ed. Julian Kiverstein (New York: Routledge, 2016), 465-478.

⁴⁷ David Wong, “Chinese Ethics,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Spring 2013 edition, ed. E. Zalta, accessed May 12, 2016 <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/ethics-chinese/>.

virtuous activity. Such immersion is comparable to the intense focus required to engage successfully with cultural forms like chant and dance: explicitly thinking about what you're doing while you do it is liable to interfere with skilled activity. Unlike the early Confucians, however, the Daoists seem to think that this sort of immersion in activity is best achieved not through highly constrained ritual but through laser-like focus on the here and now. What the two have in common is their indirectness. Someone who is single-mindedly intent on performing a ritual activity perfectly has little or no cognitive bandwidth available for strategic thinking; likewise, someone who is single-mindedly focused on pursuing a valued goal has little or no cognitive bandwidth available for strategic thinking. Such people can be trusted not to be looking for opportunities for side deals, strategic betrayals, and so on. This aspect of Daoist ethics thus emphasizes finely-attuned engagement with external activities, precluding unnecessary attention to the self during action.

Second, the Daoist tradition, especially in the *Daodejing*, alternates between awe or wonder at the vastness of the cosmos and derision or amusement at human's belief in their own self-importance. While the connection with humility goes without saying, the connection with *wu-wei* is also important. *Wu-wei* involves, among other things, an attunement to and appreciation of values greater than oneself. These values can be construed as *higher* in a religious sense or as *larger* in a more naturalistic sense. The point is that one feels oneself connected with and even contributing to something greater than oneself. Such an attitude naturally combines with the sense that other people are connected with and contributing to the same higher or greater value, making trust, cooperation, and fluent communication possible. Moreover, recent work in empirical moral psychology⁴⁸ suggests that the emotions of awe, wonder, and elevation do indeed lead to pro-social (especially in-group favoring) motivation and behavior.^{49 50} Thus, in the Daoist tradition, as in the early Confucian and Mencian traditions, we find that *wu-wei* is best cultivated indirectly. In the case of Daoism, two of the primary methods involving tuning out long-term strategic considerations by tuning into the here and now, and bolstering one's sense of shared, larger values with others by experiencing shared awe or wonder with them.

⁴⁸ Simone Schnall, Jean Roper, and Daniel M.T. Fessler, "Elevation Leads to Altruistic Behavior," *Psychological Science* 21, 3 (2010): 315-320, Paul K. Piff, Matthew Feinberg, Pia Dietze, Daniel M. Stancato, and Dacher Keltner, "Awe, the Small Self, and Prosocial Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 108, 6 (2015): 883-899.

⁴⁹ Schnall et al., "Elevation."

⁵⁰ Piff et al., "Awe, the Small Self."

4. Parallel Solutions to the Intellectual Humility Paradox

We can summarize the three kinds of solutions to the paradox of *wu-wei* as follows. On the Confucian model, *wu-wei* involves being deeply entrenched in a system of social rituals, joint attention on external values, and a sort of automaticity and fluency from practice. On the Mencian model, you need the right material, social, and political environment to grow the sprouts, as well as ongoing engagement in the four traditional relationships. Finally, on the Daoist model, it's all about being engaged with an external value and not prone to strategic thinking. We propose to solve the paradox of cultivating intellectual humility by borrowing elements from each of these solutions. To do that, it will be helpful to distinguish modesty from humility.

4.1 Humility and Modesty

Just as there are obvious advantages to being *wu-wei*, so too are there benefits to being humble. For instance, Van Tongeren et al. report that humility helps initiate and maintain romantic relationships.⁵¹ Owens et al. provide evidence that humility has numerous benefits for leaders and employees in organizations.⁵² Those scoring high on the honesty-humility construct of the HEXACO personality inventory⁵³ tend to be more cooperative.⁵⁴ *Wu-wei* is, according to the Confucians, hard to fake. But is the same true of humility? The term 'false modesty' is not uncommon in the parlance of our times. Yet it is not immediately clear whether it is synonymous with 'false humility.' To a rough determination, Google Ngram (which compares the frequency of two or more terms over time

⁵¹ Daryl R. Van Tongeren, Don E. Davis and Joshua N. Hook, "Social Benefits of Humility: Initiating and Maintaining Romantic Relationships," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 9, 4 (2014): 313-321.

⁵² Bradley P. Owens, Michael D. Johnson, and Terence R. Mitchell, "Expressed Humility in Organizations: Implications for Performance, Teams, and Leadership," *Organization Science* 24, 5 (2013): 1517-1538.

⁵³ Michael C. Ashton, Kibeom Lee, Marco Perugini, Piotr Szarota, Reinout E. de Vries, Lisa Di Blas, Kathleen Boies, and Boele De Raad, "A Six-Factor Structure of Personality-Descriptive Adjectives: Solutions From Psycholexical Studies in Seven Languages," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 86 (2004): 356-366.

⁵⁴ Ingo Zettler, Benjamin E. Hilbig, and Timo Heydasch, "Two Sides of One Coin: Honesty-Humility and Situational Factors Mutually Shape Social Dilemma Decision Making," *Journal of Research in Personality* 47 (2013): 286-295.

across Google's database of millions of books published over centuries) shows that 'false modesty' is a more common expression than 'false humility.'⁵⁵



Figure 1. Google Ngram shows the frequency of the terms 'false modesty' and 'false humility' by year from 1840-2008 in the millions of books in the Google Ngram database.

This suggests that modesty and humility are not equivalent. What is missing is a conceptual means for distinguishing between them.⁵⁶

To fill this conceptual lacuna, consider the hypothetical case of Holly and Molly. Behaviorally, they are fairly indistinguishable. They both do not boast; they engage in self-deprecation when praised by others; they tend not to behave in a manner intended to draw excessive attention to themselves. If praised, both would tend to say something like, "Thank you, but I'm not that special." They both also generally lack the intention to impress others, which is why they don't brag. Consequently, both can rightly be called modest. Yet, Molly is very anxious

⁵⁵ We recognize that Google Ngram is not without faults, as recently pointed out by Eitan Adam Pechenick, Christopher M. Danforth, and Peter Sheridan Dodds, "Characterizing the Google Books Corpus: Strong Limits to Inferences of Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Evolution," *PLoS ONE* 10, 10 (2015): e0137041. Accessed May 22, 2016, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0137041. Nevertheless, we contend that at least in this case it provides a suggestive starting point.

⁵⁶ This difference in frequency of use does not establish a difference in meaning. 'Water' is more common than 'H₂O,' though they both have the same referent. In the case of 'false modesty' and 'false humility,' the difference is suggestive not only that there is a difference but perhaps even that 'false humility' fails to refer. The hypothetical case of Holly and Molly is meant as a conceptual basis for distinguishing false modesty from false humility.

for others to be impressed with her, just not directly by her.⁵⁷ If she were to brag, others may be less impressed because she drew attention to herself. She doesn't believe her self-deprecating statements are true. So Molly is very aware of aspects of herself that are praiseworthy and is desirous of praise for them, but doesn't directly draw attention to them. Holly, on the other hand, does not attend much to herself, and that is why she doesn't brag. She typically lacks occurrent beliefs about anything praiseworthy about herself. On the basis of this difference, we can assert that Holly is humble (and modest) while Molly is only modest.

Our intuition is that Molly embodies *false* modesty. Typically, when something is described as a 'false *X*,' the meaning is that it is not actually an *X*, such as false prophet. So it might seem that our notion of false modesty entails that Molly is not actually possessing modesty. Driver holds this same view, arguing that a falsely modest person knows something good or praiseworthy about herself but feigns ignorance.⁵⁸ Given our distinction between humility and modesty, we think that false modesty is something of a misnomer. Molly does in fact exhibit modesty. The reason that some may want to criticize Molly, however, is that she lacks humility, though she is attempting to deceive us about this fact by means of her modesty. Though she is modest in not bragging, she is fully aware of her bragging rights. So there may be something disingenuous about Molly's modesty, since her beliefs do not correspond with her behavior. But she is modest all the same; it's her humility that is false.

4.2 Lessons from *Wu-Wei*

If this distinction between modesty and humility is on the right track, then it points to several lessons from *wu-wei* that can be applied to the paradox of intellectual humility. The solutions to the paradox of *wu-wei* offered by the Confucian and Doaist traditions (and to a lesser extent the Mencian tradition as well) were in tension. When it comes to intellectual humility though, we will attempt to integrate these traditions. By bringing into conversation Doaist- and Confucian-inspired solutions to the paradox of intellectual humility, the product is

⁵⁷ It should come as no surprise that the social norm against bragging is stronger for women (cf., Jessi L. Smith and Meghan Huntoon, "Women's Bragging Rights: Overcoming Modesty Norms to Facilitate Women's Self-Promotion," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 38, 4 (2014): 447-459.) and that some of Molly's reluctance to brag stems from this fact. We submit, however, that bragging can often be self-defeating regardless of the speaker's gender, with the election of the braggadocios Donald Trump as President of the United States serving as more of an exception to the rule.

⁵⁸ Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 17-18.

an enriched conception of how to educate for this virtue. The Mencian tradition then supplies a final element missing from the other two through its emphasis on particular relationships.

As we noted, the Daoists emphasize that one cannot be in *wu-wei* for strategic reasons; one just is in *wu-wei* and thereby reaps the benefits as a side effect. Molly's refusal to brag is strategic: she recognizes that bragging can backfire in attempting to impress others. Holly, on the other hand, is humble without regard to the strategic advantage that her humility can provide. The first lesson, then, is that if we seek to educate for intellectual humility, we shouldn't encourage students (or people generally) to become humble instrumentally, in order to reap the rewards for humility. A growing body of empirical research is finding benefits for humility, but focusing on those benefits is liable to produce at best strategically modest individuals like Molly.

The benefits of intellectual humility specifically are so far only conceptually argued for and not yet empirically corroborated. Kidd⁵⁹ argues persuasively for intellectual humility as "a virtue for the management of confidence," whereby one has an accurate and not undue confidence in one's own intellectual abilities.⁶⁰ *At the very least* then, possessing intellectual humility entails a recognition of one's own fallibility. An intellectually humble agent is at least somewhat receptive to critical feedback from others, as well as considering others' differing viewpoints on controversial topics. More simply, intellectually humble people are open-minded.⁶¹ They will not automatically dismiss or ignore the correction of a peer or superior (such as a teacher), for such behavior is the hallmark of intellectual arrogance. Open-mindedness is a widely shared social value. As we saw already, part of the Daoist solution to the paradox of *wu-wei* was through emphasis on shared external values. In the context of intellectual humility, institutionally emphasizing the importance of receptivity to feedback plays the same role. This emphasis should take two forms. First greater class time should be devoted to providing critical feedback to students. Second, beyond providing time for this feedback, there should also be explicit discussion of the value of critical feedback with emphasis on why it is important and useful. By teaching students the value of critical feedback—both for them and for society in general—schools are indirectly

⁵⁹ Kidd, "Educating."

⁶⁰ It may be that on Kidd's account, accuracy in one's confidence of one's intellectual capacities requires one to be cognizant of that accuracy, in which case Kidd's account of intellectual humility would be subject to the paradox argued for here. We are not certain where he stands on the relevant issues.

⁶¹ James S. Spiegel, "Open-Mindedness and Intellectual Humility," *Theory and Research in Education* 10 (2010): 27-38.

educating for intellectual humility without prodding students to try to be intellectually humble.

While this adaptation of Daoism to the problem of educating for intellectual humility has considerable merit, there is more to be said. The problem still remains of how to get students to become actually intellectually humble instead of just faking it. Students, for instance, could presumably feign to listen to critical feedback or the views of others, but not take seriously their own fallibility. As Reber and Slingerland notes, “Of course, part of the concern with real virtue lies in the fact that people may fake ritual performance and virtuous behavior to attain the benefits of group membership—a central concern in early Confucianism.”⁶² The falsely humble Molly is what Confucius hatefully calls the “village poseur,” “who goes through all the motions of being good but is in the end a hollow counterfeit of virtue.”⁶³ The Confucian solution to the danger of the village poseur—who blocks the development of true virtue in herself and in others—is to use social ritual in two ways. First, in the ensuing arms race between those wanting to fake *wu-wei* and those wanting to expose the village poseurs, social rituals offer a method of detection and increase the cost of faking it. The thought is that typically only those in *wu-wei* will be able to correctly and consistently perform the rituals. Second, because these rituals require a considerable investment of time or other resources, those who might otherwise be tempted to fake it are likely to deem the cost too high.

In terms of intellectual humility, we already have some rituals in place. Merely not bragging or saying “Aw shucks,” when praised aren’t enough to conclusively demonstrate intellectual humility. There are subtle nuances in behavior that Molly may exhibit, but not Molly. Molly may pause too long before demurring, for instance. Humans are quite good at detecting such subtle behavioral nuances in other contexts. We, for instance, are often inclined to distinguish between people who genuinely feel happy and those who are merely faking it. One way we do that is noticing the subtle difference between Duchenne smiles (where one’s ocular muscles also contract) and a fake, eyeless smile. This method isn’t foolproof, but it is fairly reliable.⁶⁴ For Confucius, developing more complex and demanding social rituals was an effective means for discovering and discouraging the village poseur. To discourage Molly from faking intellectual humility, the Confucian solution would be to establish social rituals that are

⁶² Reber and Slingerland, “Confucius Meets Cognition,” 7.

⁶³ Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*, 96.

⁶⁴ Daniel S. Messinger, Alan Fogel, and K. Laurie Dickson, “All Smiles Are Positive, but Some Smiles Are More Positive Than Others,” *Developmental Psychology* 37, 5 (2001): 642–653.

sufficiently costly in time or other resources to make faking intellectual humility no longer worth it. Luckily, the relationship we already noted between intellectual humility and open-mindedness provides a basis for establishing such rituals. Our worry was that some might feign open-mindedness, but not really consider the objections, corrections, or worldviews of others. Useful social rituals would therefore include a battery of tests to establish the extent to which people actually were open-minded. The educational context is ready-made for such rituals. In a classroom setting, this would involve looking for the application of critical feedback. Thus, teachers need to create opportunities for and a social ritual of constructive feedback from the teacher and fellow students, and then encourage and test for the application of that feedback.

Furthermore, social rituals can provide a fake-it-till-you-make method of developing a virtue. As Slingerland puts it, “Confucius’s strategy seems to be an injunction to just keep plugging away.”⁶⁵ Perhaps, then, faking modesty is a viable means of cultivating humility. Perhaps Molly, by not bragging about her praiseworthy characteristics, will eventually come to not think about them often either. In so doing, she would follow the Confucian solution of practiced repetition producing automatic and effortless results: Molly’s not bragging would eventually lead to her not even realizing she has something to brag about. “People can try to fake virtue by simulating virtuous behavior, but [...] even the act of faking can become self-defeating when an actor does not intend to be virtuous, instead becoming so as a result of his or her behavior.”⁶⁶

The Daoists were skeptical of the fake-it-till-you-make-it solution of the Confucians, since they saw this approach as being “incapable of producing anything other than village poseurs. The very act of trying to be good fatally contaminates the goal.”⁶⁷ As Slingerland admits, however, it is far from clear in the *Daodejing* how one is supposed to stop trying, relax, and spontaneously slip into *wu-wei*, though meditation is a key practice. Laozi, the reputed author of the *Daodejing*, speaks of returning to the “mind of an infant” as the best way to achieve *wu-wei*.

When it comes intellectual humility, we think the matter is slightly less difficult, at least in an educational context. Students can fail to be intellectually humble when they become prideful of an intellectual skill or accomplishment. Individually, they will then have a hard time cajoling themselves into being intellectually humble. Institutionally, educators could attempt to discourage such

⁶⁵ Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*, 81.

⁶⁶ Reber and Slingerland, “Confucius Meets Cognition,” 7.

⁶⁷ Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*, 96.

pride when evidenced and encourage humility instead, though as we've seen drawing attention to intellectual humility in this manner is likely to be counterproductive. Alternatively, educators could attempt to prevent the pride in the first place by distracting the student from the fact that she has done something praiseworthy. For instance, when a student masters a challenging topic after considerable effort, the educator could introduce a new challenge before intellectual pride takes hold, i.e., the positive learning outcome is acknowledged, but not dwelt upon. Holly was not ignorant of what is praiseworthy about herself; she doesn't focus on it because she has other things to do. From this perspective, humility isn't a virtue of ignorance (*pace* Driver) but a virtue of distraction. It's the virtue of those with more important things to do. Continually re-engaging and challenging students anew can foster such intellectual humility.

Finally, building on the role of the educator in cultivating intellectual humility, we can return to the Mencian and Confucian solutions that emphasize the role of society. For Confucius, *wu-wei* is achieved through participating in *social* rituals; they can't be done alone. Mencius also stressed particular relationships. In the context of educating for intellectual humility, we can emphasize three: student-teacher, student-parent, and student-student. In the student-teacher relationship, the teacher should model intellectual humility, which would include not bragging, considering differing views of others, and freely admitting to being wrong. Such behavior makes imitation easier for the students. Additionally, seeing an authority figure such as a teacher admit to being wrong when corrected can help de-stigmatize the same behavior in students. Furthermore, rituals in a classroom can be developed for students to imitate these behaviors. One such ritual could be having students praise someone (not in the class) for being intellectually humble. Finally, the teacher has the ability also to reward intellectual achievements, and not to reward intellectual arrogance for those achievements.

5. Anti-Individualism and Educating for Paradoxical Virtues

Our objective in this paper is not to develop Confucian rituals for cultivating intellectual humility; neither is it our aim to articulate precisely what sort of Daoist-inspired techniques educators could use to distract students from their intellectual praiseworthiness. While these topics are important, our goal here is to articulate why educating for intellectual humility requires an anti-individualistic solution to the paradox of intellectual humility. To make this claim, it is necessary that we make clear what we mean by anti-individualism.

Anti-individualism is a form of externalism. Yet, as Carter et al. note, the internalist/externalist distinction takes different forms in different contexts.⁶⁸ In the philosophy of mind, active externalism is the view that the vehicle's mental states or cognitive processes extend beyond individual (human) organisms to include the external world around them. Clark and Chalmers, for instance, present the thought experiment of Otto, who has Alzheimer's but also has an extensive and well-organized notebook, in which he finds the address for MoMA on 53rd Street.⁶⁹ Clark and Chalmers argue that this notebook is functionally equivalent to the brain-embodied memory of another character, Inga, who remembers the same address in the more familiar way. Just as Inga's mind is functionally constituted by processes and states in her brain, so Otto's mind is functionally constituted by processes and states in his brain+notebook.

Recently, Alfano has adapted active externalism in philosophy of mind to virtue theory, claiming, "A virtue is not a monadic property of an agent, but a triadic relation among an agent, a social milieu, and an asocial environment."⁷⁰ This view is in opposition to the standard account of virtues as being properties of individuals (cf., Russell⁷¹ and Slote⁷²). Alfano draws extensively on the recent situationist debate in virtue theory regarding the role that non-moral situational factors (such as foul odors, dim lighting, or finding a dime) can have on the manifestation of character traits.⁷³ Doris⁷⁴ and Harman⁷⁵ contend that the fact that these situational factors exert such powerful influence on our behavior militates against confidence in robust virtues and vices. Alfano argues instead that our character traits *depend* in part on these external, situational factors. More importantly for our purposes, however, is Alfano's extension of virtues to social influences. "When an agent is functionally integrated through ongoing feedback loops with her social environment, the environment doesn't just causally

⁶⁸ J. Adam Carter, Jesper Kallestrup, S. Orestis Palermos, and Duncan Pritchard, "Varieties of Externalism," *Philosophical Issues* 24, 1 (2014): 63-109.

⁶⁹ Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers, "The Extended Mind," *Analysis* 58, 1 (1998): 7-19.

⁷⁰ Alfano, "What Are the Bearers," 73.

⁷¹ Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷² Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁷³ Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*.

⁷⁴ John Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁷⁵ Gilbert Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series 119 (1999): 316-331.

influence her but becomes part of her character.”⁷⁶ In a virtuous feedback loop, other people and shared values are partial bearers of a given individual’s virtue.⁷⁷ Alfano discusses such feedback loops in connection with virtues such as trustworthiness and trustingness, arguing that these can form an interlocking dyad and thus be mutually constitutive.⁷⁸ Our contention here is that intellectual humility is another example, in that one person’s humility could depend constitutively on the humility of another person with whom they are in ongoing and highly-attuned contact.

In borrowing from the Confucian, Mencian, and Daoist solutions to the paradox of *wu-wei*, the answer to the paradox of intellectual humility that we are propose relies heavily on these virtuous feedback loops. As Slingerland notes, “Cultivated behaviors have a small positive effect on [other people], which causes them to act in an incrementally more morally positive way, which in turn feeds back on us.”⁷⁹ Sarkissian also focusing on lessons for virtue ethics from Confucianism, notes that “the *interconnectedness* of all social behavior, how we are inextricably implicated in the actions of others, and how minor tweaks in our own behavior—such as our facial expressions, posture, tone of voice, and other seemingly minor details of comportment—can lead to major payoffs in our moral lives.”⁸⁰ As an example, Zajonc et al. report that the faces of people who live together as romantic partners for 25 years end up looking like each other because they empathically mimic each other’s micro-expressions. “Empathy is a process that relies on the motor engagement of the face and on the resulting subjective experience of a correlated feeling state. The person who empathizes with another can actually appreciate the other’s condition because of his or her own subjective experience. And for this subjective experience to take place, nothing more is required than a matching facial expression.”⁸¹

Earlier we claimed that Molly and Holly were *nearly* behaviorally indistinguishable, since they both refrain from bragging and demur when praised. But subtle differences aren’t implausible. Over time, those around Holly will mimic her micro-expressions when she manifests intellectual humility. Our anti-

⁷⁶ Alfano and Skorburg, “The Embedded and Extended,” 467.

⁷⁷ Alfano, “What Are the Bearers.”

⁷⁸ Alfano, “Friendship.”

⁷⁹ Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*, 201.

⁸⁰ Hagop Sarkissian, “Minor Tweaks, Major Payoffs: The Problems and Promise of Situationism in Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 10, 9 (2010): 2.

⁸¹ R.B. Zajonc, Pamela K. Adelman, Sheila T. Murphy, and Paula M. Niedenthal, “Convergence in the Physical Appearance of Spouses,” *Motivation and Emotion* 11, 4 (1987): 344.

individualist assertion then is that their intellectual humility *depends* upon and extends to Holly's humility, and vice versa. They mutually reinforce each other.

Alfano suggests another means for cultivating virtues through virtuous feedback loops: plausible, public, second-person attributions of virtues.⁸² Publically telling someone "You are charitable" after they have just done something generous is likely to induce future behavior in that person that is consistent with the virtue of charity. This second-person virtue attribution contributes to their self-identity. It also prompts others to expect her to be charitable in the future. Such praise then is consistent with a sort of Confucian social ritual. When such plausible, public, second-person attributions of virtues become commonplace in a social milieu, the disposition of the individuals in that milieu cannot be explained apart from this practice. Their character traits are integrated with these external social conventions and rituals, such that they cannot be understood separately; they form one system.

When it comes to intellectual humility, however, there is one small catch to Alfano's proposal. By plausibly and publically telling someone that they are honest, courageous, or cleanly, she will likely start living up to those virtuous attributions. But as we've already seen, attributions of intellectual humility are tricky. I can't attribute it to myself without contradiction. Having someone else tell me of my intellectual humility (and praise me for it, as Alfano advocates) will be counter-productive. Humility is a virtue of distraction. Such praise draws my attention to my humility thereby endangering it, just as pointing out to someone that she is in *wu-wei* can easily break her out of it. If, however, a teacher tells a student of Holly's intellectual humility (when she is not present to hear), the teacher sets up Holly as an exemplar for the first student to emulate. Such speech is a sort of positive gossip, which functions as an indirect virtuous feedback loop.⁸³ The teacher can then further strengthen this feedback loop by later lauding the first student's intellectual humility to Holly, so that my example serves to re-enforce her intellectual humility. At that point, the first student's intellectual humility is partially dependent the externalia of this social practice of positive gossip and Holly's humility as well. This peculiar kind of virtuous feedback loop reveals a final anti-individualist element. If my intellectually humility requires me to be distracted from the fact that I possesses this trait, then generally I cannot (occurently) know that I am intellectual humble. Nevertheless, my intellectually humility depends on knowing that others (in this case Holly) are intellectually humility. She likewise has to know of my humility but not her own.

⁸² Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*.

⁸³ Brian Robinson, "Character, Caricature, and Gossip," *The Monist* 99, 2 (2016): 198-211.

6. Conclusion

The paradox of intellectual humility is a vexing problem if we are to attempt to educate for this virtue. Explicitly focusing on the value of intellectual humility is likely to produce only strategically modest students. Directly testing intellectual humility is unreliable. Self-reports of intellectual humility are self-contradictory. At first glance, it might seem therefore that one cannot know one is intellectually humble and further that educating for intellectual humility is a doomed enterprise. By looking to the Confucian, Daoist, and Mencian traditions in Chinese philosophy however—each of which has long grappled with a similar paradox for *wu-wei*—we have found a promising set of solutions. Educators should seek to distract students from their own burgeoning intellectual humility and through social rituals focus their attention on the intellectual humility of others so that students may imitate them. Consequently, for one to be intellectually humble, one must be part of a social milieu that includes other intellectually humble people and rituals that encourage intellectual humility. One must know others to be intellectually humble without paying attention to one's own humility.

CARTESIAN HUMILITY AND PYRRHONIAN PASSIVITY: THE ETHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EPISTEMIC AGENCY

Modesto GÓMEZ-ALONSO

ABSTRACT: While the Academic sceptics followed the plausible as a criterion of truth and guided their practice by a doxastic norm, so thinking that agential performances are actions for which the agent assumes responsibility, the Pyrrhonists did not accept rational belief-management, dispensing with judgment in empirical matters. In this sense, the Pyrrhonian Sceptic described himself as not acting in any robust sense of the notion, or as ‘acting’ out of sub-personal and social mechanisms. The important point is that the Pyrrhonian advocacy of a minimal conception of ‘belief’ was motivated by ethical concerns: avoiding any sort of commitment, he attempted to preserve his peace of mind. In this article, I argue for a Cartesian model of rational guidance that, in line with some current versions of an agential virtue epistemology, does involve judgment and risk, and thus which is true both to our rational constitution and to our finite and fallible nature. Insofar as epistemic humility is a *virtue of rational agents* that recognise the limits of their judgments, Pyrrhonian scepticism, and *a fortiori* any variety of naturalism, is unable to accommodate this virtue. This means that, in contrast to the Cartesian model, the Pyrrhonist does not provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of *cognitive disintegration*. The Pyrrhonist thus becomes a social rebel, one that violates the norm of *serious personal assent* that enables the flourishing of a collaborative and social species which depends on agents that, however fallible, are accountable for their actions and judgments.

KEYWORDS: intellectual humility, epistemic agency, Pyrrhonism, René Descartes, virtue epistemology

In this paper I argue that, despite regarding openmindedness as the distinctive virtue of sceptical enquirers, the Pyrrhonians were unable to provide the proper epistemic framework to accommodate such a virtue. On the one hand, their investigations were guided by pragmatic motivations such that they remove both cognitive competences and openmindedness. On the other hand, they failed to ground a relation of strict entailment between a theoretical and a normative

scepticism, in such a way that knowledge and rational belief stand or fall together, and thus, they failed in the task of dispensing with judgmental beliefs and of describing activity as a natural process that does not require of a monitoring subject. Curiously, instead of preventing a radical divorce between the subject and his actions, the Pyrrhonian cure of passivity severely intensified it. This is why I argue for a Cartesian model of rational guidance where the norm of judging to the best and the virtue of intellectual humility are logically interrelated, a model that, far from applying the norm of certainty to empirical judgments, it conceives humility as the proper attitude of human agents that, in order to be true to their rational natures, have to judge to the best of their powers, but that, recognizing the limited nature of those powers, have to come to terms with the fact that the exercise of agency is compatible with failure.

In section 1, I will introduce an instrumental conception of scepticism, such that sceptical arguments are seen as means to clear the mind of preconceptions and to achieve a state of mind proper to receiving philosophical clarification, and contrast this conception with the Pyrrhonian positive and ethical description of scepticism. In section 2, I present what I take to be the strongest case for the Pyrrhonian, arguing that the Pyrrhonian distinction between two kinds of assent is *prima facie* able to answer the *apraxia challenge*, and analysing the Pyrrhonian diagnosis of epistemic regret and cognitive disintegration. In section 3, a detailed critique is mounted of some fundamental aspects of Pyrrhonism. In section 4, intellectual humility is located within a Cartesian framework. Finally, the Appendix explores some deep affinities between Descartes' conception of rational agency and Sosa's view on the same issue. The overarching theses are that no variety of naturalism is able to accommodate intellectual humility, and that epistemic remorse and cognitive disintegration can only be overcome when action is guided by rational considerations, however minimal and impaired by external circumstances such as urgency, lack of veridical information or unfriendly scenarios.

1. Freedom from Doubt

Consider the following remark, which Wittgenstein makes in *On Certainty*:

I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again "I know that that's a tree", pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: "This fellow isn't insane. We are only doing philosophy."¹

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), § 467.

This piece of savage comic humour in which philosophy becomes the brunt of Wittgenstein's sarcasm is also (as the use of 'we' makes clear) an appalling example of self-fustigation that manifests how tormented was Wittgenstein by philosophical problems.

The meaning of this remark is, however, deeper and more general. Wittgenstein is not only making fun of himself, but shifting our attention to an *attitude* or *habit of mind* which is characteristically philosophical, that of obstinately *asserting platitudes* "of such a kind that it is difficult to imagine *why* anyone should believe the contrary,"² as if by means of mere repetition the philosopher would be casting a spell to ward off possibilities which might "plunge (*them*) into chaos."³ Insofar as the philosopher is "bewitched"⁴ by those trivialities, and that his attitude is at odds with 'healthy' common sense, his practice is both analogous to the sceptical habit of doubting the indubitable and to the religious habit of believing the incredible. For all the three cases, the common target is the illness of *anxiety*, and the common goal, a way of life free from the anxieties of an *uncertainty* that reflection raises and that reflection seems unable to appease.

One could be tempted to overemphasize Wittgenstein's gloomiest moments, and so to interpret his variety of anti-philosophical philosophy as a way of cleansing the philosopher's habit of mind. On this reading, Wittgenstein's inability to stop doing philosophy⁵ was nothing else than the personal tragedy of a man that sinks beneath a burden that he can neither bear nor cast away.

This view does not answer, however, to the general impression that we receive from at least *On Certainty*. On the one hand, Wittgenstein steadfastly sticks to epistemic platitudes of a certain sort (the so-called 'hinge-propositions') whose revision "would amount to annihilation of all yardsticks,"⁶ accusing Moore, not of philosophical obsession, but of treating hinges as if they were empirical propositions⁷ that emerge "from some kind of ratiocination."⁸ On the other hand, self-doubting is a constitutive part of *transformative* and *therapeutical* processes where the subject explicitly dissociates himself from compulsions and inclinations of some kind or another, and where he has to muster all his intellectual and volitional resources to prevent relapsing into habitual opinions that keep coming

² *Ibid.*, § 93.

³ *Ibid.*, § 613.

⁴ *Ibid.*, § 31.

⁵ See Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 261–262.

⁶ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 692.

⁷ See *Ibid.*, § 136.

⁸ *Ibid.*, § 475.

back, capturing his beliefs.⁹ In this respect, it is not too difficult both to see that, in *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein struggles to resist the *natural* pull of what Duncan Pritchard aptly calls “the universality of rational evaluation,”¹⁰ namely, of understanding hinges as rationally supported and justified, and so as on the same spectrum as empirical propositions, and to appreciate the critical role played by sceptical arguments to break this pull and to clear the mind of preconceptions. Certainly, by Wittgenstein’s lights, the Sceptic makes the same mistake as Moore. But, unlike the latter, his very destructive results disclose the *arational* status of hinges. On a dialectical and parasitical reading of scepticism, the Sceptic, instead of sharing Moore’s presuppositions, draws the unwanted conclusions implicit in the latter’s assumptions.¹¹

According to the picture that emerges from the previous remarks the *source of anxiety* is some sort of attitude, normative drive, compulsion or prejudice so deeply entrenched in our ordinary nature and in our quotidian practices that its cure requires us, by means of *externalizing* this deep-seated aspect, to direct our will in the opposite direction. The Pyrrhonians identified that source as our natural tendencies to belief and commitment, inclinations that, making of the philosophically untrained a victim of unfounded dogmatism, double his troubles and make of him the subject of perturbation. Descartes saw it as a pre-philosophical state of untutored reason, rash precipitation, opinionated judgment, and compulsive passion associated for him with childhood and infirmity. Wittgenstein described the source of disquiet as the hold of unconscious pictures which, deeply ingrained in our thinking and petrified in our language, function as norms of representation and exclude alternative possibilities. Under the thrall of those imperative models, the human being of common sense is ripe for dogmatism.

⁹ See René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy,” in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume II*, eds. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 15.

¹⁰ Duncan Pritchard, *Epistemic Angst. Radical Skepticism and the Groundlessness of Our Believing* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 3.

¹¹ This means that a *theoretical scepticism*—the view that there are no rational grounds for our basic commitments—does not entail a *normative scepticism* according to which we should not assent to those commitments. One could be a theoretical sceptic without recommending suspension of assent, either because, offset by our natural inclinations, that recommendation would be idle (Hume), or because the doxastic norms governing empirical beliefs do not apply to hinges (Wittgenstein), or because, although falling short of strict knowledge, some propositions are more likely true than their negations (Academic Sceptics).

Notice that on this view philosophical dogmatism is on the spectrum of ordinary attitudes, and so that, while on the first order the philosopher of common sense (whether of a Moorean or of an Aristotelian streak) acts as the spokesman and the organizer of common nature, on the meta-order philosophical and common views share epistemological principles as generally hold as deeply mistaken. In this sense, the main goal of therapeutical philosophies such as those of Descartes and Wittgenstein is to expose and replace those meta-epistemological principles that the human being of common sense unreflectively endorses and that the philosopher of common sense prematurely reifies.

Notice too that *theoretical scepticism* is both the natural offspring of common sense's commitments and an indispensable laxative.

Insofar as the dogmatic is always concealing a secret doubt, while the anxieties that assault his mind are 'anxieties of uncertainty,' the Sceptic isolates and exacerbates that concealed doubt in order to make it explicit, so as to break the hold of downright complacency. Bringing to the open the pervasiveness of doubt, the Sceptic aggravates the disquiet. Disclosing that the very core of our epistemic practices is poisoned by sceptical paradoxes, he manages to substitute philosophical scepticism for philosophical dogmatism at the front and centre of common sense, swapping an assertive for a humble attitude. He offers a *cure of humility* that could be easily interpreted as the main way to achieve the *state of mind* proper to receive philosophical (or religious) clarification. The important point is, however, that *therapeutical philosophies*, either of a Cartesian or of a Wittgensteinian streak, are grafted on sceptical procedures and conclusions that, as in a mirror darkly, reflect the true substance of our entrenched practices. The sceptical crisis is thus the precondition of philosophical reconstruction.

The problem is that, according to this conception, scepticism is hostage to the same epistemological views distinctive of common sense, so that, even if capable of changing our epistemic attitude, it falls short. It fails to transcend embedded opinions regarding the proper sources of certainty and knowledge, failing thus to secure intellectual quietude. Instead of a cure for uncertainty, sceptical humility would merely be the correct attitude to its ubiquity, or, in the words of Sedley, "a modest sacrifice at the altar of intellectual honesty."¹² Intrinsically constrained to be a *method*, scepticism is on this view unable to be a positive means to, and much less to constitute our freedom. Sceptical humility and openmindedness would thus receive its true meaning and significance from the

¹² David Sedley, "The Motivation of Greek Skepticism," in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 10.

outside, that is to say, from the potential buildings that could be constructed on the debris left by the sceptical flood, having so a very limited intrinsic value.

The trouble is that there is a mismatch between this *instrumental* vision of scepticism and what the real life Sceptics of the Pyrrhonian tradition said about themselves. Pyrrhonian scepticism was governed by an *ethical doctrine* that underlined the *intrinsic value* of suspension of assent and that consistently identified scepticism with the liberated personality, by a sustained effort, conditional to that ethical motivation, of breaking the hold of natural inclinations and common sense assumptions, and by an unmitigated will to provide for sceptical humility (under the name of ‘openmindedness’) a place of honour. There is a truth contained in the methodological approach to scepticism: that, given its parasitical and negative nature, it is very difficult to make sense of the Pyrrhonian positive and ethical claims. However, a charitable reading of Pyrrhonism is opportune, if only because of the fact that a disclosure of the limitations of the sceptical “persuasion”¹³ could shed light on the very limits and possibilities of therapeutical reconstructions of philosophy, and with it on the proper place of humility among the intellectual virtues.

2. Pyrrhonian Therapy

On a popular picture of scepticism famously advanced by Hume, the only cure for the unmitigated Pyrrhonism that thrives in the solitary confines of meditation is the force of nature, against which sceptical arguments are powerless and idle. This means that, by Hume’s lights, the suspension of assent so energetically recommended by the Pyrrhonists cannot be *sustained*, and that *belief* is as natural as unavoidable.

As a charge to scepticism, Hume’s remarks boil down to an updated version of the *apraxia challenge*, which confronts the Sceptic with the task of explaining how his doctrine avoids inconsistency and how his principles do not reduce him to complete inactivity. In any case, the curious thing about Hume’s view of Pyrrhonism is that, as he should perfectly know, it does not fit with the Pyrrhonist’s self-description. After all, the Pyrrhonist is eager to appeal to “the guidance of nature”¹⁴ and to “everyday observances”¹⁵ in order to be *active*, as well as to insist that, insofar as his concerns are *practical* ones, his scepticism is (must be) compatible with his ability to act in the world. It seems clear that Hume

¹³ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, eds. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

missed an essential point of ancient scepticism—the Pyrrhonian distinction between *two kinds of assent or belief*—,¹⁶ a point that, while marking the strong affinities between the Humean and the Pyrrhonian varieties of *naturalism*, helps to clarify why the Pyrrhonist is able to endorse an unmitigated withholding without compromising his active life.

In a strong sense, beliefs are for the Pyrrhonist equivalent to doxastic attitudes that involve taking any given proposition as true (or false) to reality, as representing (or misrepresenting) how things *really* are in themselves. Dogmatic beliefs are *not* mechanical dispositions responsive to causal and sub-personal processes. Supported by reasons, they exhibit a normative and epistemic character, and so they are *judgments* endorsed by the agent at a reflective level for which he is responsible and accountable. Following the Stoic's model, the Pyrrhonists recognized three varieties of judgments: *opinions* (fallible judgments), *cognitions* (infallible judgments comparable with Descartes' moral certainties), and *understandings* (infallible judgments mutually and logically related within a system of science). Dogmatic beliefs being alethic affirmations that involve the endeavour to get it right on whether *p* on the part of the agent, they amount to what Sosa calls "judgmental beliefs."¹⁷ Unlike what happens with the second (and minimal) notion of belief analysed by the Pyrrhonians, judgmental beliefs are under the (indirect) control of the subject, being in our power to break their hold and to bring them to suspension. It goes without saying that judgmental beliefs are the target of the Pyrrhonian therapy, and so that they have to be eradicated in order to overcome epistemic disturbance. In this sense, there is no difference between probable opinions and *akataleptic* (apprehensive) impressions: liberation means for the Sceptic liberation from any sort of judgment and commitment, whether weak or strong. Notice, moreover, that the combined facts that judgmental beliefs are (i) (indirectly) voluntary, (ii) that they are *responsive to reasons*, and (iii) that they do not exhaust the scope of belief, help to explain how suspension of assent can be sustained, becoming so a *permanent frame of mind for the Sceptic*: again and again the Pyrrhonist appeals to counterpoising arguments in order to avoid relapsing into dogmatic attitudes, in such a way that the sceptical dialectical gymnastics is comparable with the Wittgensteinian procedure of assembling reminders.

In contrast to judgmental beliefs, *approvals* are assents "in accordance with a passive appearance,"¹⁸ beliefs in the limiting sense of *forced and undogmatic*

¹⁶ See *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷ Ernest Sosa, *Judgment and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 52.

¹⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines*, 19.

natural beliefs. Forced, because it is not in our power to suspend those psychological inclinations. Undogmatic, because, instead of dealing with how things really are, they deal with how they appear to be, released of any sort of alethic emphasis. Natural, insofar as they are non-reflective and spontaneous compulsions that make it possible for the Sceptic to go “*through the motions* of ordinary life.”¹⁹ The important points to note are that, for the Pyrrhonist, it makes no sense to get rid of those compulsive drives; that, since they are not a guide to truth, and the only role they play is a *functional* and sub-personal role in the welfare of the individual, approvals are understood on the model of *sensations*; and that, in order to avoid the charge of inconsistency, the Pyrrhonian provides a complete reconstruction of our judgments, higher-level as well as lower-level, perceptual as well as mnemonic and rational, in terms of *appearances*, in such a way that rational deliverances are construed by him as non-epistemic seemings. If correct, the latter strategy could help the Sceptic to effectively deal with the charges of self-annihilation and of being hostage to the same epistemological views of dogmatic common sense.

And this brings us to the nub of the question. Granted that the Sceptic can lead an active life without judgmental beliefs, why is he so eager to recommend such a conformist life deprived of convictions, to propose a participation in the ordinary life that falls short of a *full identification*, and that makes of the Pyrrhonist, according to the felicitous expression coined by Terence Penelhum, a man *in* the ordinary world, but not *of* it,²⁰ one that conforms to, but who does not endorse, common practice?

The stock-in-trade answer that the Pyrrhonian gives to this question is that, while the Sceptics are “disturbed by things which are forced upon them,”²¹ ordinary people are affected “by two sets of circumstances:”²² by the feelings they suffer, and by the beliefs that, attending to them, plague their minds as well as their bodies. It is interesting to note that, in a characteristic twist of the doctrines of the Stoa,²³ Sextus, instead of promising to the philosophically enlightened the

¹⁹ Katja Maria Vogt, “Scepticism and Action,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 171.

²⁰ See Terence Penelhum, “Skepticism and Fideism,” in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 292.

²¹ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines*, 29.

²² *Ibid.*, 30.

²³ As Katja Maria Vogt forcefully argues, it is a common feature of Ancient Pyrrhonists to turn fundamental aspects of the Stoic’s theory upside down, endorsing notions that would be nonsensical for the Stoic (forced assent, undogmatic belief, moderate *ataraxia*...), and so

ideal of imperturbability, talks about “tranquillity in matters of opinion and moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us.”²⁴ This means that the Pyrrhonist cannot help, say, feeling a physical pain or suffering a psychological disturbance. But that it is up to him to get rid of those beliefs that, dilating the power of the imagination and suggesting a metaphysical dimension working in the world of individual misfortune, compound our suffering.

In my opinion, what the Pyrrhonians seem to have in mind when talking about beliefs that double our troubles are phenomena related to *moral guilt*, such as interpreting misfortune and physical discomfort as the results of deeds ascribable to the free agency of the individual, and to a (possible) *psychological disintegration* due to the conflict between whatever feelings arise in the individual from demands of his body, and the judgments of value that he is inclined to make on reflection. In this regard, it is not very difficult to appreciate how, looking through the eyes of the Pyrrhonist, the Stoic sage turns from being all in one piece to illustrate an unbridgeable divorce between animal pain and the rational prescription (that he endorses) of making of all happenings his *own will*. By the lights of the Sceptic, this conflict cannot be solved, but *dissolved*: his therapy is thus a *cure of passivity* that avoids disintegration at the cost of dispensing with any sort of rational judgment and rational agency.

Notice, however, that the Pyrrhonian extends the phenomenon of psychological disintegration from paradigm cases of metaphysical dissociation to any kind of reflective dissociation whatsoever, so that the borderline between judgmental beliefs and passive approvals is not, on his view, tantamount to the frontier separating philosophical inquiry and common sense. This means that the Sceptic is not only worried about metaphysical afflictions, and that his therapy equally applies to practical judgments innocent of theorizing.

What practical judgments bring to the open is *epistemic regret*, a sort of disturbance whose source is the *disparity between our thoughts and their results*, the indeterminate character of our epistemic achievements, which, no matter how well we comply with rational norms of justification, can never be secured by reflection. Torn apart by normative commands that oblige him to be fully responsible for his beliefs (and fully creditable for their success) and by his awareness of how *epistemic luck* permeates all his performances, the agent fluctuates between an *abstention from action* that results from his inability to reach a definite conclusion, and an *epistemic remorse* that, whether his

mocking the high ideals and the unrestricted standards of knowledge and wisdom advanced by their opponents (see Vogt, “Scepticism and Action,” 174-175).

²⁴ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines*, 25.

performances are successful or not, stems from his conviction that, wanting absolute certainty, all our beliefs (and all our actions) are irresponsible, that *acting* is never *acting well* enough. Eradicating judgments and dispensing with rational imperatives, the Pyrrhonian unshackles his practice from that double jeopardy, gaining peace while catching his opponents in their own net of irresolution and inactivity. For the Pyrrhonian, *to be active* is incompatible with *performing actions regulated by rational desiderata and reflective standards*. Insofar as reflection prevents action, and that activity is a natural process that does not require of a monitoring subject, the Pyrrhonian turns the paralysis charge against his opponents. For him, action (practice within a natural and cultural form of life) takes care of itself.

However, passivity is not only the end of the Pyrrhonian's toils. It is also constitutive of the *means* he employs to reach happiness. After all, suspension of judgment is not the result of a normative use of reason and of free reflection, but a *passive experience* that is the product of the equipollence of arguments. Understood as seemings, the deliverances of reasoning are deprived of their epistemic status. The Pyrrhonian is thus able to effectively confront the charge of becoming an agent in order to get rid of agency, or, in other words, of endorsing in his methodological moment the same commitments whose abolishment gives its meaning to the method itself. It is not a surprise that, in an image that came to be part of philosophical common lore, Sextus compared sceptical arguments with a ladder that he "overturns with his foot"²⁵ once his thesis has been established, and that for the Sceptic there was no problem in engaging in philosophy to get rid of philosophy.

The problem is that, if we take the Pyrrhonist at his word, his project of externalizing belief comes to be a project of *complete externalization*, by which the Sceptic detaches himself from his animal as well as from his rational nature. At the very least, this makes it quite difficult to see how to ascribe to him any (intellectual or ethical) virtue, when there is no *ego* to which attribute it, or when that ego shrinks to the measure of a metaphysical point, or how to apply to him basic norms of assertion such as sincerity, when he does not believe what he says and when he represents 'his' actions as the actions of somebody else, acting as the spokesman of 'his' impulses, 'his' education or 'his' society, and so as always asserting as "the occupier of a role."²⁶

²⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 481.

²⁶ Ernest Sosa, *Knowing Full Well* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 47.

It seems that, after all, sceptical humility is not a genuine variety of intellectual humility, and that the Pyrrhonist offers as a *bona fide* product something that is closer to the vice of *abjection* than to the virtue of *humility*. This is a symptom that something was terribly wrong in the very principles of the Sceptic's approach to epistemology.

3. Where the Pyrrhonist Goes Wrong

The first thing that I want to observe is that the very intellectual virtue with which the Sceptic differentiates his persuasion, the *openmindedness* proper of a serious and neutral enquirer,²⁷ is empty of content, and so that it is nothing else than a political gesture to make his position attractive.

At the opening of the *Outlines of Scepticism*, Sextus distinguishes himself from positive dogmatists that "have said that they have discovered the truth"²⁸ and from Academics that "have asserted that it cannot be apprehended,"²⁹ claiming that Pyrrhonians are still searching for the truth. However, when coming to define scepticism, he describes it as a dialectical ability "to set out oppositions among things"³⁰ whose leading motivation is suspension of assent, as an argumentative expertise (or virtue) intrinsically directed, not to the truth, but to avoid belief and commitment.

This means that the sceptical inquiry is not an *open* investigation that attempts to discover the truth where the subject endeavours to get it right on whether p, but a policy with a view to *tranquility*, and so that it is a discernible exercise in *wishful thinking* where the Sceptic's *pragmatic* motivation constantly threatens to override relevant evidence. In my view, the frame of mind required to pursue the truth and the Pyrrhonian frame of mind are incompatible, in such a way that, paraphrasing Sosa, the Pyrrhonist's dominant desire removes both his epistemic competence and his openmindedness,³¹ if only because of the fact that, as Descartes perfectly saw, this pragmatic desire makes of the Sceptic's intellectual horizon something miserably close, blinding him to a more radical doubt supported by the very materials he uses, and to the possibility of, pushing sceptical arguments to their very limits, reaching certainties able to refute scepticism. Pragmatic considerations thus prevented the Pyrrhonians from taking their scepticism seriously enough. It was on Descartes to derive from this "very

²⁷ Note that 'Sceptic' and 'enquirer' are cognate words in Greek.

²⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines*, 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

³¹ See Sosa, *Knowing Full Well*, 29.

seriousness”³² those new elements that mark the border between Ancient and Modern philosophy.

All this, however, might apparently co-exist with a positive evaluation of sceptical arguments and conclusions as used *within a non-Pyrrhonian framework where the search for truth is relevant*. I will make three remarks in answer to this possibility.

In the first place, the Pyrrhonian seems guilty of equivocation on the notion of appearance, operating with two incompatible concepts: a restricted notion that, *impervious to reasons* and *under no control by the rational agent*, it is conceived on the model of *sensations*, and an extended notion that applies to rational operations and deliverances, covering as *seemings* the whole of our deliberative and personal processes. This equivocation points to a general and systematic confusion between reasons and causes, judgments and sensations, compulsions operative at a sub-personal level and rational considerations that impel assent.

We must observe firstly that, by the Pyrrhonist’s lights, approvals are akin to automatic responses to changes in the environment, that they are understood as dispositions triggered by events causally related to our sensorial equipment.³³ However, they are not mere dispositions to act (behavioural dispositions), but dispositions to act intrinsically coupled to *phenomenal inclinations*. Notice, in this sense, the difference between *how the sun appears to me* and the judgment, based on the reports of my sight, as of the small size of the sun.³⁴ The important point is that astronomical reflections are able to change our judgments about the size and the distance of the sun, but that they are incapable to vary appearances. This is what the Pyrrhonian means when saying that appearances are impervious to reasons, and what justifies his drawing such an impenetrable border between approvals (as sensations of sorts) and rational beliefs. The same claim could be paraphrased by saying that for the Pyrrhonians *error is a property of judgments*,

³² Myles Burnyeat, “Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed,” *The Philosophical Review* 91, 1 (1982): 39.

³³ This model applies to approvals responsive to the “guidance of nature,” where the *forced nature* of seemings is both salient and paradigmatic. This does not exclude, however, adaptation and learning, whether as biological organisms or as social beings responsive to cultural inputs. The important points are that, inasmuch as it is not in our power to alter hard-wired appearances, they are instrumental to the Sceptic’s purpose, and that, whether social or natural, acquired or innate, approvals are understood by the Pyrrhonians in terms of blind causality, and not in terms of justification and rational evaluation.

³⁴ See Descartes, “Meditations,” 27.

and that, sensations being non-epistemic, they are not guilty of errors commonly attributed to them.³⁵

Apart from the curious dissimilarity between natural approvals and seemings that result from argumentation, the trouble with the previous account is that the logical subjects of appearance-statements are everyday objects, and so that approvals refer to *propositions* made out of *conceptual contents* resulting from the operation of the intellectual and recognitional capabilities of the individual. That is a far cry from passive sensations, so that the Pyrrhonian seems trapped in a dilemma between abandoning his model, and so relocating approvals in the space of reasons, and sticking to it, at the cost of committing himself to opacity and of depriving his actions of any natural guidance whatsoever.³⁶ In my opinion, the most sensible option for the Sceptic would be to conceive of human sense perception as including two discrete capabilities working in tandem: sensory awareness as well as understanding, and so to incorporate judgments (whether explicit and reflective or embedded from early childhood in our cognitive dispositions) within our natural equipment. On this reading, the pressure on the Sceptic is multiplied. He not only has to explain in which sense rational deliverances are seemings, but he also has to extend that explanation to approvals.³⁷

³⁵ This is common ground for Descartes and the Pyrrhonists. Contrary to some interpretations, Descartes understood sensory misrepresentation in terms of harsh judgments or misleading conceptions that “we form without any reflection in our early childhood” [René Descartes, “Objections and Replies,” in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume II*, ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 295] and that we are able to correct.

³⁶ The point is that “It appears to me as if the sun is small” is not a faithful report of the contents of the sensation, but an *interpretation* of those contents that presupposes the operation of highly sophisticated evaluative and recognitional powers.

³⁷ The Pyrrhonian could easily reply to the above objection by pointing out that he accepts that our recognitional powers subserve the formation of beliefs about, for instance, the colours things look, but that both our intellectual sensitivities and the *presentations* resulting from their operations are non-doxastic. In this sense, he would be able to segregate judgments from approvals, the latter being forced and undogmatic assents where the agent, instead of committing himself to the belief that, say, he is holding a dagger, simply claims that he is having an experience *as if* a dagger were in his hands, acting accordingly. The point is that the Pyrrhonian can easily incorporate intellectual powers to his model without thus incorporating judgments, so that he can coherently propose a general suspension of judgment without suspending action. Seemings are prior to and independent of judgments. They are enough to guide common practice.

I do not dispute that presentations [or, borrowing from Sosa, “propositional experience” (Sosa, *Knowing Full Well*, 74-78)] are independent of judgments. What I dispute to the Sceptic is that

The only way for the Pyrrhonian to do it is, in my view, by appealing to the *operative norms* of our cognitive form of life, and by consequently exploiting and *iterating* the gap between those norms and our first-order judgments, in such a way that our practices, as well as the norms regulating them, fall short of their own normative dimension.

The point of that strategy would be to secure that a *higher-order endorsement* of our beliefs could never be obtained. In this sense, what the Sceptic would be putting in question is that we could integrate the contents of our claims and the rules governing them into the very rational perspective that those norms and claims reclaim. On this reading, when saying that all our judgments are seemings, the Sceptic, while also trying to recapture something of the original flavour of forced and passive sensations (after all, rational seemings are imposed on us by the *compelling* character of arguments), confines himself to describe his own reflective lack of position, qualifying (on reflection) his expressions of approval. His sceptical attitude would thus be located on the meta-reflective order, as expressing the mismatch between the results of *pure* reflection and the rational principles guiding action.

There is much to say about this interpretation of Ancient scepticism, if only because it is helpful to explain how Descartes could make a better use of some of the aspects of the ‘reheated cabbage’ of Pyrrhonism to create a brand-new variety

presentations are non-doxastic, and so that there is a distinction between approvals and judgments. This point can be substantiated by, at least, two considerations: (i) The Pyrrhonian confuses *approvals to seemings* with *approvals understood as seemings*, modelling the difference between approvals and judgments on the distinction between appearance and reality. This error blinds him to the fact that *any kind of approval, whether weak or strong, is responsive to reasons*, and so that the hold of a presentation can be broken (or minimized) and that, since one acts according to his experience as of a dagger only as far as one thinks that such an experience is *veridical*, approvals that guide action are always dogmatic (approvals to the likely truth of *p*). The point is that, instead of postulating two kinds of assent, one should say that there is only *one kind*, but that there are *several degrees* of assent according to probability. It is true that some ‘beliefs’ are so embedded that it is psychologically impossible to suspend assent on them, but this means neither that we are forced to endorsing them fully nor that their attraction is a non-rational one. (ii) Making compulsive dispositions of approvals, the Sceptic seems forced to describe the ordinary person’s endorsements of first-order claims as *not involving meta-epistemic commitments to a strong conception of truth*, namely, as closely related to the sceptical approval to appearances. Apart from being highly controversial (compare, for instance, with the relativist’s claim that common sense assertions are epistemically neutral), this claim obliges the Pyrrhonian to reject his own picture of common sense *as plagued by dogmatism*, and so to offer his therapy only to philosophers. On this view, it is far from clear where the roots of judgmental attitudes lie, and also, if those attitudes are unnatural or artificial, how this latter claim could be supported.

of scepticism. However, this should not blind us to the fact that it is far from convincing.

On the one hand, let us observe that, however much it fits with some particular trends within Pyrrhonism, this reading is deeply uncongenial to its main tenets. The Pyrrhonian does not distinguish between higher-order judgments and judgments *tout court*, a point that suggests that, when saying that rational judgments are seemings, he is not meaning that they are seemings in a *derivative* sense, as the result of the philosophical discovery that, reason being incapable of self-validation, our first-order judgments lack an objective status. This point is further substantiated by the Pyrrhonian insistence on locating epistemic disturbance *on the first order*, and consequently by the kind of therapy that he offers, one that, instead of ridding us of epistemological concerns, attempts to eradicate our natural judgments.

On the other hand, consider the *discontinuity* between *theoretical* and *normative* scepticism, between the *norm of certainty* that prevents us from having a secured knowledge and the variety of the *Principle of Underdetermination*³⁸ to which the Pyrrhonian appeals in all his procedures.

As the example of the late Academics makes clear,³⁹ one could consistently claim that high-order knowledge is unattainable, and yet make rational judgments according to probabilities and guide practice by a doxastic norm, so rejecting suspension of assent as the rational attitude to take for many empirical propositions. This is why the normative scepticism endorsed by the Pyrrhonians needs a *perfect equivalence* between judgments in order to suspend commitment. The trouble is that the Pyrrhonist is torn between a theoretical scepticism that could easily make sense of why rational deliverances are seemings, but which is compatible with rational belief, and a normative scepticism that abolishes the rational *attraction* of seemings (as it were, its very force) at the cost of inactivity. As a conclusion, one could say that, since the attraction of seemings is at least in part intellectual, an unmitigated scepticism seriously compromises active life. In any case, there is no entailment from the rejection of knowledge to a general suspension of assent such that all our beliefs would be equally unjustified.

But, in the second place, it is quite important to notice that, even if it is true that knowledge and rational belief stand or fall together, this is a claim that the very materials with which the Pyrrhonist deals prevent him from making.

³⁸ According to the formulation provided by Duncan Pritchard, this principle states that if S knows that p and q describes an incompatible scenario, and yet S lacks a rational basis for preferring p over q, then S lacks knowledge that p (see Pritchard, *Epistemic Angst*, 30).

³⁹ See Vogt, "Scepticism and Action," 167-171.

Pyrrhonism is by its own nature a species of *empirical scepticism*, one that, according to the apt expression coined by Robert Fogelin, attempts to raise radical and unlimited doubts by the only means of “checkable but unchecked defeaters.”⁴⁰ On the one hand, this procedural limitation blinds the Pyrrhonian to the hierarchical structure of our beliefs, preventing him from appreciating the normative role played by hinges “of the form of empirical propositions,”⁴¹ and raising justified concerns about the prospects of supporting by those means a sort of scepticism at least as radical as the Cartesian one. On the other hand, it seems that, deprived of *global scenarios*, the Pyrrhonist is unable to argue for the reduction of any probability, however high, to nothing.⁴² My point is that, inasmuch as they put in question our *basic background assumptions*, only global scenarios are *candidates* to suspend degrees of probability and to debase any judgment to the same level of equality—as equally unjustified—and so that only Cartesian scepticism could *in principle* be able to bridge the gap between theoretical and normative scepticism.

This does not mean, however, that the aforementioned gap is, under closer scrutiny, bridgeable. As Descartes perfectly saw, global scenarios being governed by the same laws of probability ruling all our rational judgments, they are far-fetched, hyperbolic and “metaphysical”⁴³ possibilities, possibilities whose very implausibility is not up to cancel the fact that many empirical claims are “highly probable opinions.”⁴⁴ Contrary to Hume, Descartes did not think that iteration and epistemic ascent to the second order could diminish the probability of our first-order judgments, if only because global scenarios act as regress stoppers and are used by Descartes, not as empirical defeaters that decrease the probability of any item whatsoever *within* the system, but as metaphysical narratives that,

⁴⁰ Robert Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 192.

⁴¹ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 401.

⁴² Compare with the fiasco made by Hume when, in the *Treatise*, he attempted to reduce *by empirical considerations* all knowledge to probabilities, and all probabilities to nothing at all.

⁴³ Descartes, “Meditations,” 25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 15. This explains why Descartes has to ‘feign’ that all his beliefs are false, deceiving himself about their epistemic weight. Given the context and the objectives of Descartes’ project of acquiring *scientia* and of erecting the building of science on sound grounds, it is perfectly understandable his demanding policy of “pretending for a time that these former opinions are utterly false and imaginary.” (*Ibid.*, 15)

For an illuminating analysis of Descartes’ epistemological policy, see Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 237–239.

undermining the metaphysical certainty of all our beliefs, leave moral and psychological certainty unscathed.

Descartes' point is very subtle. By ingeniously using a strategy analogous to the Pyrrhonian ladder, he manages to show how global scenarios are *not* on the same spectrum as defeaters that, when making a cognitive claim, one did not consider, and so how, contrary to the appearances, they carry (in a sense of 'probability' that is *internal to the system*) *no probabilistic weight at all*, not even one only enough to make of a maximally probable belief a highly (but not maximally) probable belief.

Take, for example, a paradigmatic perceptual belief, one that could not be doubted by appealing to doppelgängers. It is reasonable to think that, insofar as a global scenario H incompatible with the truth of a paradigmatic belief that *p* is conceivable, this very fact diminishes, however slightly, the degree of probability of *p*. The problem is that, the belief that *p* being paradigmatic, it has to stand fast for our rational system not to collapse. This means that, reason being non-optional, and *p* being constitutively attached to our rational system, *p*'s moral certainty is unassailable. One could say that, however possible, global scenarios are unable to shake, even slightly, our first-order *rational conviction*, or, in other words, that the operations of our rational system are insulated from global hypotheses.

Following the preceding view, for Descartes the function played by global scenarios is not that of reducing our conviction, but of helping us to acquire a transcendental and higher-order position from which we could see *as possible* how the power of reason is so external and compulsive as the power of natural compulsions, so stripping moral certainties, not of their rational conviction, but of a normative dimension that gives them an authority higher than intra-rational authority. Descartes' point is that metaphysical uncertainty is compatible with moral or intra-rational certainty, and that, scepticism being metaphysical or transcendental, global scenarios are rational only in the marginal sense of being possible interpretations of the ultimate character of our world *as a whole*, but not in the sense of being relevant alternatives *within* that world.

In short, Descartes considers sceptical scenarios like a ladder that leads to a whole reinterpretation of their own meaning and significance. They leave things as they were before, while overturning our higher-order way of looking at them. The point is that, whether our reason can ultimately be validated or not, rational judgments are not comparable with blind impulses. This is why Descartes is creditable for isolating the norm of metaphysical certainty from the norms that govern rational performances, the quest for invulnerable knowledge from the

investigation of rational action. Descartes improved on the procedures of traditional scepticism. He also relocated scepticism on the second order. It is this latter aspect that makes it possible to combine empirical fallibilism with a project of rationally integrating hinges, to wit, principles of judgment.

And observe, lastly, that the Pyrrhonian cannot even secure a complete *detachment* from all his commitments, that, inasmuch as sooner or later he is doomed to reach a point where his policy of rejection cannot be obeyed,⁴⁵ or where the *falsification thesis*, namely, the possibility of a radical discrepancy between how things really are and what they seem to be, no longer make sense, or where there is such a tight alignment between the understanding and the will that there is no cue to move the will to the opposite direction, he is not going to attain the complete *externalization* that, foreshadowing the libertarian conception of freedom, he conceives as the only means to preserve his free and uncommitted attitude.

The interesting thing is that such points where the hold of unmitigated scepticism is broken are always operations of *intuitive reason*, of an intellectual power that sceptical meditations help us to recognize, to purify, and to develop, and that, unexternalizable, it presents itself, not as an external and coercive force acting on the passive subject, but as a power whose deliverances are imposed upon the agent by himself. When yielding to intuitive reason the subject is yielding to his own power, in such a way that a perfect certainty is the same as a perfect liberty. This means that absent a rational integration of the *principles of judgment*, the latter are, in a certain sense, external. This is why arational approaches to hinges are, in my view, unable to get rid of the bewitchment of scepticism, and so why they are plagued by the same anxieties that, against his best intentions, assail the Sceptic. To be sure, these are *philosophical anxieties*, disquietudes of the meta-reflective mind that are (usually) unable to divorce the ordinary person from his life. Nonetheless, they provoke a feeling of rational irresponsibility that, pointing to a possible discrepancy between Mind and World and between intuitive reason and truth, deprives the mind of its own fulfilment.

The curious thing about the Pyrrhonians is that they made possible *against their will* the discovery of the rational agent, of a rational animal that, however limited in his understanding, is lord of his inner world and stands above the impulses of mere feeling. The very fact that they failed to withdraw themselves fully from the human and rational atmosphere about them, and that their uneasiness was so clearly betrayed by their desperate clinging to a mechanical

⁴⁵ For an interpretation of Descartes' certainties in terms of a failure to act in accordance with his policy of global rejection of beliefs, see Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 244.

dialectic, smoothed the path to a model of rational guidance where the norm of *judging to the best* and the virtue of *intellectual humility* are logically interrelated: the Cartesian model.

4. The Position of Intellectual Humility in Descartes' Virtue Epistemology

For a start, let us observe that the 'state of prejudice' that is the target of the Cartesian therapy⁴⁶ is described by Descartes as involving an *implicit epistemology* rooted in several vices, at once intellectual and ethical: (i) a corrupted use of reason that confuses the deliverances of the imagination with the correct functioning of our rational power; (ii) the habit of thinking of deep-rooted opinions as if they were invulnerable principles; (iii) a general blindness to attitudes and beliefs that are subject to control by our wills, and, consequently, a common inclination to take our senses as well as our passions at face value, as evaluations that conform either to the object's true nature or to its true worth, so thinking that one cannot help to believe or to act as one feels impelled to do, and that intellectual and ethical self-restraint are either worthless or accessory to our impulses; and (iv) the conviction that *certainly lies in the senses*, a conviction that for Descartes is salient in explaining the disputes involving irreconcilable differences between the Pyrrhonians and their adversaries,⁴⁷ and that, inasmuch as it leads to intellectual paralysis, Descartes is eager to expunge.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ That the *Meditations* are therapeutical exercises that require of the reader to reproduce *in foro interno* the same processes and experiences 'lived' by the Meditator, in such a way that his mind is completely engaged by the subject matter he considers and that he "make(s) the thing his own and understand(s) it just as perfectly as if he had discovered it by himself" (Descartes, "Objections and Replies," 110), and whose objective is, by means of changing habits as well as opinions, to gain enlightenment, is a point substantiated by Descartes' favouring of the analytical method of exposition, and by his continual appeals, not only to the understanding, but also to the will of his readers. If involved in this process, the readers pass through a maieutical and transformative discipline whose result is a new birth, at once a free and active choice and a passive experience. For an analysis of the Cartesian therapy, see Mike Marlies, "Doubt, Reason, and Cartesian Therapy," in *Descartes. Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. Michael K. Hooker (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 87-113. See also David Cunniff, *Argument and Persuasion in Descartes' Meditations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14-43.

⁴⁷ See René Descartes, "Principles of Philosophy," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume I*, ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 182.

⁴⁸ Descartes describes himself as "the first philosopher ever to overturn the doubts of the sceptics." (Descartes, "Objections and Replies," 376) He grounds this claim in his contribution to making explicit the above category mistake, and thus to expose the overrated epistemological

That certainty lies *solely* in the understanding, namely, that only clear and distinct perceptions of the intellect count as examples of a knowledge invulnerable to metaphysical doubt, it is not only *the positive principle* that permits Descartes to stop radical scepticism, but also a *principle of demarcation* that settles the border between the objects proper to metaphysical certainty and judgments that are by their own nature *defeasible*. As textual evidence internal to Descartes' corpus shows, the former constitute a logical framework that is the intentional object of pure understanding, a set of *contentful norms* that govern, constrain, and make it possible the understanding of particular items, and whose objects are constituted by conceptual webs of necessary and logically interrelated aspects that the mind pulls from within itself and whose validity is *independent* of what empirical facts obtain and of the amount and the quality of the information accessible to the epistemic subject.

Descartes' point is that certainty is *unattainable* beyond this framework, so that the norm of certainty that rules the project of securing and integrating the foundations of knowledge does not apply to *empirical judgments* that neither can be deduced from first principles nor can be governed by any other rule but the law of plausibility.⁴⁹ For Descartes, by the same process through which we acquire metaphysical certainty, we become aware of the *limits* of infallible knowledge. One thus acquires clear and distinct perceptions only against a background of objects whose conception is partial, confused, obscure, and corrigible.

This means that the perfect fitting between the light of the intellect and the inclination of the will which characterizes certainty, and, consequently, that Descartes' recommendation, in *Meditation Four*, for avoiding error, namely, to suspend judgment whenever one does not perceive the truth with clarity and distinctness,⁵⁰ are, respectively, mental states and epistemic rules *operative* solely within the context of a meditative reflection where the mind is conceived by itself and where practical concerns are fully suspended, and so that they do not conform

status commonly conferred to the senses, and to break the hold of the empirical tradition that is the *ground of possibility* for scepticism.

⁴⁹ "But most of our desires extend to matters which do not depend wholly on us or wholly on others, and we must therefore take care to pick out just what depends only on us, so as to limit our desire to that alone. As for the rest, although we must consider their outcome to be wholly fated and immutable, so as to prevent our desire from occupying itself with them, *yet we must not fail to consider the reasons which make them more or less predictable, so as to use these reasons in governing our actions.* [Our emphasis]" René Descartes, "The Passions of the Soul, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume I*, ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 380.

⁵⁰ See Descartes, "Meditations," 41.

with the possibilities accessible for an ego substantially united to his body that has to act in order to live, to judge in order to act, and to take decisions either at the brink of the moment or on the basis of inconclusive or unreliable information.

Notice, however, that such a limitation does not entail that similar, if less stringent, rational rules could not guide our actions, and thus that we are forcibly caught in a dilemma between (a) being true to our rational nature at the cost of inactivity (on Descartes' reading of Pyrrhonism, that is the result of the Sceptic's mistake of searching for certainty in the realm of the senses, and, consequently, of making of the norm of certainty the rule governing empirical beliefs)⁵¹, and (b) being false to our rational nature, yielding to the power of the passions and to the way they make things to appear, in order to be active. The empirical analogue of invulnerable certainty is *responsible judgment*, namely, a judgment from which, since it is supported by evidence that speaks to its likely truth, the agent takes at once *care* and *responsibility* (as his own). The empirical analogue for avoiding error is *judging to the best of our powers* in accordance with the circumstances (and the limits imposed by them), and knowing full well that, because luck permeates all our judgments, our thoughts depend on us, but their ends are not ours.

Let us observe that for Descartes the epistemic (and opposed) vices of *prevention* and *precipitation* play an important part in the diagnosis of the sources of cognitive disintegration, as this malady presents itself in practical reasoning. Contrary to the Pyrrhonians, who, bewitched by the opinion that the norm of certainty rules our empirical beliefs, thought of the agent as swinging between inactivity and epistemic remorse, and saw as the *unique* source of his fluctuating condition the natural drive to judgmental beliefs that always fall short of their supposed norm, Descartes describes *two different sources* for the opposite states of *irresolution* and *epistemic repentance*.⁵²

⁵¹ Descartes, "Principles of Philosophy," 182. Descartes's philosophical instincts are sound on this point. The Stoics' dogmatic empiricism acted as the target of Academic and Pyrrhonian arguments, embroiling the latter in the same web of implicit commitments and general assumptions of their opponents. This is an example of a first-order disagreement made possible by a meta-order agreement.

⁵² Descartes distinguishes between *remorse* and *repentance*. The former being "a kind of sadness which results from our doubting that something we are doing, or have done, is good" (Descartes, "Passions," 392), it presupposes doubt. Remorse becomes repentance once we are certain of having acted wrongly. Notice that repentance is the intellectual emotion opposite to *self-satisfaction*, a state of the mind characteristic of the *generous man* that Descartes considers the supreme good, and that he equates to peace of mind and tranquility.

Irresolution is, according to Descartes, “a kind of anxiety”⁵³ that results “from too great a desire to do well” and “from a weakness of the intellect, which contains only a lot of confused notions, and none that are clear and distinct.”⁵⁴ The interesting point about the previous diagnosis is that, although Descartes agrees with the Pyrrhonians in seeing the desire of achieving conclusive arguments and a perfect certainty as the source of irresolution, he segregates that desire, which stems from the intellectual error of thinking that certainty lies in the senses (this is why Descartes emphasizes the role played by clear and distinct perceptions to avoid irresolution: recognizing them involves recognizing at once the limits of metaphysical certainty), from our duty as reflective agents, a duty that is fulfilled “when we do what we judge to be best, even though our judgment may perhaps be a very bad one.”⁵⁵

This account makes it possible for Descartes: (i) to conceive irresolution as a tragedy of unenlightened reflection to which philosophers are especially prone, but that, inasmuch as it is not coupled to the natural impulse to judge, afflicts neither common man nor common nature; (ii) to propose as its remedy the habit “to form certain and determinate judgments regarding everything that comes before us,”⁵⁶ that is to say, a prescription that, unlike the Pyrrhonian one, is both viable and stimulating; and, finally, (iii) to shed light on epistemic remorse in terms of a *common phenomenon* that, instead of resulting from the conflict between the high standards allegedly operative in practical judgment and the imperatives of action (a conflict that could be understood only by a trained epistemologist enthralled by the ideal of indefeasible empirical knowledge), it results from the discord between how we act and how we should act, between our rational duty and our failing to comply with it.

In short, for Descartes, while irresolution is the product of *intellectual delusions*, epistemic regret is the result of qualms that are too real and ordinary for comfort, qualms produced by the clash between our epistemic natural conscience and our unreflective behaviour. Contrary to the Pyrrhonians’ view, repentance is not for Descartes a disturbance that assails the agent, but an anxiety that plagues the mind of those whose action has not been guided by proper rational considerations, however minimal and impaired by external circumstances such as

The previous distinction is not, however, relevant for our purposes. We will refer indistinctly to both emotions.

⁵³ Descartes, “Passions,” 390.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 390-391.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 391.

urgency, lack of accessible information or unfriendly scenarios.⁵⁷ By Descartes' lights, instead of appeasing anxiety, the Pyrrhonian cure of passivity would severely intensify it. Our nature being rational, the recommendation for passive action and passive belief would amount to the proposal of *being false to ourselves*.

This is why for Descartes the intellectual virtue of *generosity*—that in his technical parlance stands for *openmindedness*—is the supreme virtue to which we can aspire.

Generosity is the human capacity of restraining the power of the passions, and of acquiring a reflective and more objective stance from which to weight the different factors of a situation, and, eventually, to act, not impelled by our feelings, but out of a deliberative process. Let us observe, however, that, far from being a later-day follower of the Stoics, Descartes is fully aware that the passions are an essential ingredient for a fulfilled human life, if only because, directing the subject's attention at the morally important features of a situation and helping to strengthen one's moral belief, they are the emotional counterparts of evaluative judgments, the moorings that make the integration of mind and body possible and that allow the soul to establish unions with the world (which include unions with the agent's beliefs and actions).⁵⁸ The trouble with the passions is that, inasmuch as they tend to overestimate or to underrate the significance of things, they have to be monitored and endorsed by the understanding. Failing this rational control, *which is far from being an eradication of the passions*, we are liable to practical error and, what is most important, to epistemic regret.

⁵⁷ "I think also that there is nothing to repent of when we have done what we judged best at the time when we had to decide to act, even though later, thinking it over at our leisure, we judge that we made a mistake. There would be more ground for repentance if we had acted against our conscience, even though we realized afterwards that we had done better than we thought. For we are responsible only for our thoughts, and it does not belong to human nature to be omniscient, or always to judge as well on the spur of the moment as when there is plenty of time to deliberate." René Descartes, "The Correspondence," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume III*, ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 269.

⁵⁸ Following some cues provided by Byron Williston [see Byron Williston, "The Cartesian Sage and the Problem of Evil," in *Passion and Virtue in Descartes*, eds. Byron Williston and André Gombay (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 310-311], I would say that for Descartes passions are not spontaneous representations of value that justify evaluative beliefs. On the contrary, the very fact that they are epistemically assessable suggests that they are expressions elicited and justified either by judgments of value or by experiences of pain, discomfort, and so on. This means that for Descartes passions are highly responsive to beliefs and at least partially under the control of rational considerations. In many cases, passions are resistant to rational considerations. But this does not entail that, unlike sensations, they are invulnerable to them.

Consider this latter aspect. For Descartes, no matter how successful our unreflective and passionate actions are, and insofar as we are rationally divorced from them, they are the occasion for a disturbance that prevents our full integration with our lives and with the world. This means that, by his lights, the scruples of our rational nature are the main hindrance to the soul's union with the world and to its own self-contentment as substantially united to the body. For the passions to "become a source of joy,"⁵⁹ they have to be rationally integrated, and so they have to occupy their proper and circumscribed position within our rational life, in such a way that one could not be blamed (specially by oneself) for the failure of one's performances, and that one could only be praised by the only thing that "truly belongs to (*one*),"⁶⁰ namely, one's freedom to dispose one's volitions. Generosity is nothing else than the *experience* and the *exercise* of *freedom*, and freedom ultimately is the compliance to our rational duty and the subsequent states of virtue and self-esteem. Luck does not separate the agent from himself. Compulsive action does so.

Finally, it is important to notice that Cartesian generosity is intrinsically related to the virtues of *tolerance* and of *intellectual humility*, and that only the humble, open minded and tolerant person is capable to recognize, from his own experience of freedom, the rational and free character of other human beings, so escaping from a theoretical egoism whose sources are compulsion and practical egoism.

On the one side, the old-fashioned and judgmental virtue of tolerance is rooted in the related convictions that, however wrong the opinions of others are, our wrongs are "no less serious than those which others may do,"⁶¹ and that, however right our opinions are, they cannot be forcibly imposed on a rational agent with the capacity to judge by himself and to discover freely and by his own means where the truth lies.⁶² Tolerance is thus a virtue rooted in the experience of our *rational and fallible nature*, so that it includes humility and openmindedness. On the other side, humility is the proper attitude of an agent that, in order to be true to his rational nature, has to judge to the best of his powers, but that,

⁵⁹ Descartes, "Passions," 404.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 384.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 385.

⁶² This explains both Descartes' preference for the analytic method of teaching philosophy and his inclination for therapeutical approaches to philosophy. Dealing with rational agents, the role of the teacher is not to instruct the philosophically untrained, but to let the disciple's reason to take the part of the instructor. It is common both to Descartes' and Wittgenstein's philosophical therapies, to stress that, in order to be cured, the sick soul has to freely agree with the diagnosis (as a matter of fact, he has to make his own diagnosis).

recognizing the limited nature of those powers, has to come to terms with the fact that a judgment can be adroit and inaccurate (or accurate only by accident). The important point is that for Descartes the exercise of epistemic rationality and failure (or good luck) are compatible, and so that freedom and rational agency are not cancelled by the results (that do not belong to us) of our beliefs.

On this view, humility is a constitutive ingredient of generosity, of how it is for human beings to be rational.

Even the blows of an adverse fortune are unable to shake the foundations in which our freedom and our self-contentment are secured.⁶³

Appendix

I would like to concisely underline some deep similarities between Descartes' view and Sosa's version of a virtue epistemology:

- (i) For Descartes, as well as for Sosa, the exercise of agency is compatible with failure.
- (ii) For both of them, what makes a judgment adroit varies in accordance with the circumstances, in such a way that it is not possible to linguistically elucidate a set of criteria that could be applied in all the cases, actual as well as possible. In this regard, Descartes only points to a subjective criterion—the *internal emotion* of joy⁶⁴ that always is conjoined to a responsible belief (the subjective feeling that one cannot reproach himself for a decision in such and such circumstances)—, and to the cultivation of the virtue of prudence. Given the *invariant* character that this feeling has to Descartes and his appeal to the Aristotelian virtue of prudential evaluation, the Cartesian response might be endorsed by Sosa.

⁶³ Notice that on this model the virtues of self-contentment and humility are not first-order passions that express the value of an object external to the agent, but *internal or intellectual emotions* that represent the right state of the mind, and that can only be acquired by means of an *intellectual second-order therapy* that brings to light the prejudices of untutored common sense. The opposite vices of irresolution and dogmatism are rooted in the same false opinion that empirical judgments should be indefeasible. Descartes' procedure counts thus as a *rational therapy* of the same sort as that of the Epicureans and Spinoza.

⁶⁴ This "secret joy in (*the*) innermost soul" (Descartes, "Passions," 381) is the result of a diligent pursuit of epistemic virtue, in such a way that "conscience cannot reproach (*us*) for ever failing to do something (*one*) judges to be the best." (*Ibid.*, 382) According to Descartes, this secret joy has the power to make of the subject lord of his passions, and to prevent misfortune for shattering the self into fragments. In a sense, the agent is able to cope with the blows of fortune *insofar as there is nothing of which to reproach himself*. There is an analogue of this view in Spinoza's *acquiescentia in se ipso*, and in Harry Frankfurt's account of the integrated self.

(iii) They also agree on the role played by *responsibilist intellectual virtues* such as humility and openmindedness in our cognitive lives. They are instrumental to put ourselves “*in a position to know*,”⁶⁵ thus being integral “to a *purely epistemic intellectual ethics*.”⁶⁶ However, and contrary to the role played by *cognitive virtues* such as intuitive reason, memory and perception, they are not constitutive of knowledge, to wit, they do not manifest themselves in the *accuracy* of our judgments, helping thus to explain, not how we came to be in a position to rationally believe that *p*, but how that belief is *true*, and rationally so. In this sense, it is necessary to distinguish between the virtues of the responsible agent that manifest themselves in his will to judge, and those rational operations and capabilities that are exhibited in the judgment’s adroitness, and that, if the judgment is correct, relevantly explain why it is a piece of knowledge. Let us observe that for Descartes, while openmindedness is a requisite for human judgment—it is the virtue of being willingly responsive to the relevant objective evidence—the tasks of collecting and of evaluating the weight of that evidence are proper of perception and rationality, in such a way that the latter virtues explain, not why a judgment is a judgment, but why it is not, given our limitations, a *poor* judgment. A good will coupled to defective rational powers does not make a rational agent. Openmindedness is exhibited in an adroit judgment only in a derivative sense, as a policy of non-interference with the operations of reason. Instead of explaining how the judgment is adroit, it permits us to make adroit judgments.⁶⁷ What makes of a cook an excellent chef is not his will to cook.

(iv) Finally, it is important to note that, although for Descartes it is in a sense true that we always know “by favour of Nature,”⁶⁸ and that empirical knowledge is thus compatible with luck, there is another sense of luck that prevents knowledge. As the example of the traveller who reflectively chose, between two routes, the safer one, but that was robbed by bandits, shows,⁶⁹ Descartes not only thought that responsible agents cannot be blamed for misfortunes, but that, if, given those circumstances, the traveller were fortunate enough to escape

⁶⁵ Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 45.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶⁷ For a perfect and detached rational agent the possibility of disintegration (of being false to his rational nature) would not exist. His judgments would be adroit without an effort, however minimal, on his part. This shows that *for certain states* personal intellectual virtues are not required for rationality and knowledge, and so that in limiting cases they are not constitutive (even in a derivative sense) of them.

⁶⁸ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 505.

⁶⁹ Descartes, “Passions,” 380–381.

undetected, his success would not amount to a complete competence. This means that for Descartes an unfriendly scenario (or a bad situation) prevents adroitness to be manifested, and so that in such conditions the agents' judgment falls short of knowledge. Empirical knowledge is thus compatible with having the good fortune of being situated in such a way that the circumstances are adequate to a proper manifestation of our reflective abilities, but not with a kind of good fortune operative within unfriendly situations. Sosa's analysis of the SSS structure of competences renders analogous results.⁷⁰

In any case, the affinities between the two philosophers can be intuitively apprehended when the following text is compared with the previous remarks on Descartes' conception of the ethical significance of rational agency. Sosa writes:

Fully apt performance goes beyond the merely successful, the competent, and even the reflectively apt. And it is the human, rational animal that can most deeply and extensively guide his performances based on the risk involved, in the light of the competence at his disposal. That is why reason must lord it over the passions, both the appetitive and the emotional.⁷¹⁷²

⁷⁰ See Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 95-104.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷² Thanks to Ernest Sosa for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

KNOWLEDGE, ASSERTION AND INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

J. Adam CARTER and Emma C. GORDON

ABSTRACT: This paper has two central aims. First, we motivate a puzzle. The puzzle features four independently plausible but jointly inconsistent claims. One of the four claims is the sufficiency leg of the *knowledge norm of assertion* (KNA-S), according to which one is properly epistemically positioned to assert that *p* if one knows that *p*. Second, we propose that rejecting (KNA-S) is the best way out of the puzzle. Our argument to this end appeals to the epistemic value of intellectual humility in social-epistemic practice.

KEYWORDS: knowledge, assertion, intellectual humility, epistemic value, social-epistemic practice

1. Knowledge Norm of Assertion: Sufficiency

According to proponents of the *knowledge norm of assertion* (KNA), one must assert only what one knows.¹ Specified this way, KNA is a necessary condition on epistemically appropriate assertion.² Some philosophers, including Keith DeRose,³ John Hawthorne,⁴ and Mona Simion⁵—and debatably Williamson (2000)⁶—also

¹ See, for example, Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 243.

² KNA is sometimes defended as a *constitutive* norm of assertion (e.g., Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*.) A rule is constitutive norm, for a given type of speech act, A, when being governed by R is part of what it is to be that kind of speech act, A.

³ Keith DeRose, *The Case for Contextualism: Knowledge, Skepticism and Context (Vol. 1)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴ John Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵ Mona Simion, "Assertion: Knowledge Is Enough," *Synthese* (forthcoming).

⁶ For discussion on this point, see Matthew A. Benton, "Expert Opinion and Second-Hand Knowledge," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 92, 2 (2016): fn. 3, J. Adam Carter and Emma C. Gordon, "Norms of Assertion: The Quantity and Quality of Epistemic Support," *Philosophia* 39, 4 (2011): 615–635, and J. Adam Carter, "Assertion, Uniqueness and Epistemic Hypocrisy," *Synthese* (2015), doi:10.1007/s11229-015-0766-5, §§2–3.

embrace a *sufficiency* version of the norm which, as Jennifer Lackey⁷ formulates it, states:

(SUFFICIENCY CLAIM) KNA-S: One is properly epistemically positioned to assert that *p* if one knows that *p*⁸.

Of course, KNA-S is compatible with the concession that, often times, you *should not*, all things considered, assert what you know. You might know, for example, a secret which you promised not to tell. More mundanely: we know many trivial facts which we shouldn't go around asserting, because they lack relevance in the conversational contexts we occupy. As Lackey puts it, the core idea driving KNA-S is just that, whenever I assert something that I *know* to be the case, "my knowing that this is the case suffices for my having the *epistemic credentials* to make such an assertion." Asserting on knowledge, even if doing so is subject to various kinds of criticisms, is, *epistemically* beyond reproach.

A wide range of objections and alternatives to the necessity formulation of KNA have been proposed and discussed since Williamson's⁹ influential defense of KNA.¹⁰ By comparison, it's been relatively more recently that the sufficiency leg, KNA-S, has received critical attention, typically through the form of attempted

⁷ Jennifer Lackey, "Assertion and Isolated Second-Hand Knowledge," in *Assertion: New Philosophical Essays*, eds. Jessica Brown and Herman Cappelen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 251–276.

⁸ As Lackey ("Assertion and Isolated," 252) summarises the thrust of the idea: "[...] 'knowledge is sufficient for possessing the epistemic authority for assertion even if it is insufficient for various other kinds of propriety. For instance, while it may be imprudent, impolite, or pointless for me to assert that my colleague behaved foolishly over the weekend, *my knowing that this is the case suffices for my having the epistemic credentials to make such an assertion.*" For a helpful overview of recent defenses and challenges to the knowledge norm's necessity and sufficiency formulations, see Matthew A. Benton, "Knowledge Norms," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2015), <http://www.iep.utm.edu/kn-norms/#SH1d..>

⁹ Timothy Williamson, "Knowing and Asserting," *Philosophical Review* 105, 4 (1996): 489–523.

¹⁰ The two most notable alternative norms defended in the literature are the justification norm of assertion (Jennifer Lackey, "Norms of Assertion," *Noûs* 41, 4 (2007): 594–821; Igor Douven, "Assertion, Knowledge, and Rational Credibility," *Philosophical Review* 115, 4 (2006): 449–485; Jonathan Kvanvig, "Assertion, Knowledge and Lotteries," in *Williamson on Knowledge*, eds. Patrick Greenough and Duncan Pritchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)) and the truth norm of assertion (Matthew Weiner, "Must We Know What We Say?," *The Philosophical Review* 114, 2 (2005): 227–251). See Aidan McGlynn, *Knowledge First?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), Ch. 5, for a helpful recent overview of various challenges to the knowledge norm of assertion.

counterexamples.¹¹ Such counterexamples have attempted to establish that the following features can coincide:

- i. the impropriety of an assertion is *epistemic*, even though
- ii. one plausibly counts as *knowing* the proposition asserted.

Perhaps the most promising style of counterexample case against KNA-S, plausibly exhibiting features (i) and (ii), features *expertise and isolated second-hand knowledge*. Consider, for instances, Lackey's¹² case DOCTOR:

DOCTOR: Matilda is an oncologist at a teaching hospital who has been diagnosing and treating various kinds of cancers for the past fifteen years. One of her patients, Derek, was recently referred to her office because he has been experiencing intense abdominal pain for a couple of weeks. After requesting an ultrasound and MRI, the results of the tests arrived on Matilda's day off; consequently, all of the relevant data were reviewed by Nancy, a competent medical student in oncology training at her hospital. Being able to confer for only a very brief period of time prior to Derek's appointment today, Nancy communicated to Matilda simply that her diagnosis is pancreatic cancer, without offering any of the details of the test results or the reasons underlying her conclusion. Shortly thereafter, Matilda had her appointment with Derek, where she truly asserts to him purely on the basis of Nancy's reliable testimony, "I am very sorry to tell you this, but you have pancreatic cancer."

Lackey insists that in the above case, Matilda knows what she asserts. After all, she learned that *p* from the reliable, undefeated testimony of Nancy, whom Matilda rightly regards as a competent testifier on the topic at hand. Denying that Matilda knows that *p* opens the door to testimonial skepticism.¹³ However, Lackey suggests: "The question we must now consider is whether, under these conditions, Matilda is properly epistemically positioned to flat out assert to Derek that he has pancreatic cancer. And here the answer is clearly no."¹⁴

Lackey's rationale here can be put simply: Matilda was not epistemically situated to assert that *p* because, in virtue of Derek's recognition of Matilda as an *expert*, there are certain *epistemic expectations* at play that Matilda fails to meet,

¹¹ See Jessica Brown, "The Knowledge Norm for Assertion," *Philosophical Issues* 18, 1 (2008): 89–103, for an important early challenge to (KNA-S).

¹² Lackey, "Assertion and Isolated."

¹³ The worry here is that if an individual fails to count as acquiring testimonial knowledge in an epistemically hospitable circumstance—viz., where she is the recipient of reliable testimony from a recognized expert, and in the absence of any defeaters—then the prospects are poor for supposing that testimonial knowledge can be acquired in normal circumstances which are perhaps less hospitable than this especially friendly case.

¹⁴ Lackey, "Assertion and Isolated," 6.

even though she knows (*via* testimony) what she asserts, expectations in place in light of her recognized expertise. Derek would, for instance, plausibly be miffed to learn that Matilda had diagnosed him without ever seeing his charts or examining him. As Lackey puts it, Derek would be within his rights to expect Matilda to have a better cognitive grasp of his medical situation than she actually did. And this despite her knowing that what she said was true.

If the foregoing rationale is correct, then KNA-S is false. It's *not* the case that one is properly epistemically positioned to assert that *p* so long as one knows that *p*. Along with Lackey, several others have attempted to fashion counterexamples to KNA-S along the similar lines.¹⁵ We have ourselves in previous work¹⁶ taken such a line. In doing so, we argued that in cases like DOCTOR, the epistemic credential required for epistemically appropriate assertion was *understanding* rather than merely knowledge.¹⁷

In recent work, however, Matthew Benton¹⁸ has raised some potential problems for the purposes of appealing to DOCTOR-style expertise cases in the service of rejecting KNA-S.¹⁹ As Benton puts it, "the cases used thus far are unstable, and refinements are needed to clarify exactly what principles are being tested and exactly what our intuitive judgements are tracking in such cases." He continues:

... do we expect of experts that when speaking as experts they are giving their own expert opinion which has been formed by engaging their expertise in a first-hand manner with the relevant evidence or data? (If we do, is that expectation reasonable?) Do we expect that experts always have an obligation to explain to a non-expert what is behind the formation of their opinion? Are there any

¹⁵ E. J. Coffman, "Two Claims about Epistemic Propriety," *Synthese* 181, 3 (2010): 471–488; Rachel R. McKinnon, "What I Learned in the Lunch Room about Assertion and Practical Reasoning," *Logos & Episteme* 3, 4 (2012): 565–569; Mikkel Gerken, "Same, Same but Different: The Epistemic Norms of Assertion, Action and Practical Reasoning," *Philosophical Studies* 168, 3 (2013): 725–744; Adam Green, "Deficient Testimony Is Deficient Teamwork," *Episteme* 11, 2 (2014): 213–227.

¹⁶ Carter and Gordon, "Norms of Assertion."

¹⁷ Jennifer Lackey, "Deficient Testimonial Knowledge," in *Knowledge, Virtue and Action: Putting Epistemic Virtues to Work*, eds. Tim Henning and David P. Schweikard (London: Routledge, 2013). has indicated that she does not regard understanding as the epistemic credential lacking in cases like DOCTOR.

¹⁸ Benton, "Expert Opinion."

¹⁹ Cf., Jennifer Lackey, "Assertion and Expertise," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 92, 2 (2016): 509–517, for a reply to Benton, in which Lackey defends her original counterexamples to KNA-S. See also Simion, "Assertion," for another line of criticism against Lackey's DOCTOR case.

conditions under which experts may defer to the authority of other experts for a second-hand opinion, or a communal consensus, for the purpose of providing timely efficient testimony to non-experts? Such questions await further investigation.

We don't think Benton's questions pose an insuperable problem to defending DOCTOR-style expertise cases as genuine counterexamples to KNA-S.²⁰ Though these criticisms, we think, invite critics of KNA-S to look beyond DOCTOR-style expertise cases in forming the crux of the critical argument. In what follows, we want to suggest how considerations to do with *epistemic humility* might support a novel line against KNS-S, one that appeals in some way to expertise, but in a very different way than previous arguments in the literature, and which are immune from Benton's criticisms. Setting up the point about humility will involve putting several pieces together.

The first step will be to examine a kind of disagreement pattern that some philosophers have taken to recommend epistemic relativism. We want to suggest that closer thinking about such cases motivates a puzzle: an inconsistent set of claims, one of which is KNA-S. Once the puzzle is set up, we'll show why, with reference to intellectual humility, it's KNA-S that needs to go.

2. Deep Disagreements

Suppose that two individuals, Cat and Kim, disagree about the proposition *p*: that there is a soul that animates the human body.²¹ Call this their *first-order disagreement*. But suppose their disagreement runs deeper. Cat and Kim also disagree about what kind of evidence is even relevant to settling whether *p*. Kim, whose philosophical hero is Jaegwon Kim, thinks that Kim's analytic philosophy of mind is the only kind of authoritative evidence for the truth of *p*. By contrast, Cat thinks that the Catechism, and only the Catechism, is an authoritative source about *p*. Call this disagreement about what kind of evidence is relevant to settling whether *p* their *second-order disagreement*. Define a *deep disagreement* as a disagreement featuring both first- and second-order disagreement.

Steven Hales²² suggests that in the face of arguments of this form, where the disagreement runs at both the first- and second- order, there are five principal prospects for resolution:

- i. keep arguing until capitulation;

²⁰ For further discussion on this point, see Carter, "Assertion, Uniqueness."

²¹ This case is based (with some amendments) off of Hales' ("Motivations for Relativism as a Solution to Disagreements," *Philosophy* 89 (2014): 63–82) case of 'Jack and Diane.'

²² *Ibid.*

- ii. compromise;
- iii. locate an ambiguity or contextual factors;
- iv. accept Pyrrhonian skepticism;
- v. Adopt *relativism* (e.g. Cat and Kim are 'both right;' *p* is true relative to Cat's perspective, $\sim p$ is true relative to Kim's perspective, and there is no further sense in which either is right in a 'perspective-independent' way.

Hales, a relativist, opts for (v) (i.e., relativism), though his reasoning for reaching the relativist conclusion won't concern us here.²³ What will be relevant for our purposes is that Hales thinks that when disagreements are deep in the sense described, they are rationally *irresolvable* in the following sense: they constitute dialectical positions from which there simply *is* no appropriately neutral common ground from which either side could rationally persuade the other.

Regardless of whether *all* deep disagreements (understood as a function of first- and second- order disagreement) are rationally irresolvable in Hales' sense, let's grant Hales that at least *some* deep disagreements are rationally irresolvable. (Of course, it's a further question whether relativism would be the best conclusion to draw from such situations, once the point about rational irresolvability is granted²⁴).

But often times, deep disagreements, which cut at the first- and second-order, are not *irresolvable*. They are simply *not resolved* and for reasons that can be avoided. To appreciate this point, it will be helpful to consider the conversational dynamics of deep disagreements.

²³ For an extended discussion of this kind of argument for relativism, see J. Adam Carter, *Metaepistemology and Relativism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), Ch. 4. See also Harvey Siegel, "Epistemological Relativism: Arguments Pro and Con," in *A Companion to Relativism*, ed. Steven Hales (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 199–218. for a summary of arguments for relativism which take on this dialectical structure; Siegel calls such arguments 'no neutrality, therefore relativism' arguments.

²⁴ The most well-known such argument, which appeals to a dialectically entrenched position and moves from this position to epistemic relativism, is put forward in Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, where Rorty discusses the famous collision between the opposing 'epistemic grids' of Galileo and Cardinal Bellarmine. Rorty's diagnosis of the case is that the matter of who is correct with respect to Copernican heliocentrism doesn't have an absolute answer, but only a relative answer. Rorty's rationale on this point has been a critical focus of anti-relativists, such as Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006). See also Carter, *Metaepistemology and Relativism*, Ch. 4..

3. A Puzzle for KNA-S (and a Solution)

Consider now three dialogues, each which features a deep disagreement in the sense articulated in §2.

Dialogue 1: Cat vs. Kim

Cat: We've both established that we believe different things on this topic. But, perhaps we can find a common ground from which rational persuasion is possible.

Kim: Okay, let's try.

Cat: Contemporary analytic philosophy of mind, as well as Catholicism have both been sources which humans have a history of following on the matter of whether there is a soul, do you agree?

(!) **Kim:** *Yes, but since there is no soul, many of these folks are just wrong.*

Cat: ...

Dialogue 2: Feldman vs. Goldman²⁵

Feldman We've both established that we believe different things on the matter of reliabilism versus evidentialism about epistemic justification. But, perhaps we can find a common ground from which rational persuasion is possible.

Goldman Okay, let's try.

Feldman Well, to begin with, reliabilism and evidentialism both seem to capture something right about the nature of epistemic justification, do you agree?

(!) **Goldman:** *Yes, but unlike evidentialism, reliabilism is actually true, and so any intuitiveness about evidentialism must be compatible with the truth of reliabilism.*

Dialogue 3: Doctor vs. Demon Mystic

Demon Mystic: We've both established that we believe different things on the matter of whether small pox is the result of a demon. But, perhaps we can find a common ground from which rational persuasion is possible.

Doctor: Okay, let's try.

²⁵ For Goldman's and Feldman's representative views on reliabilism and evidentialism, respectively, see for example Alvin Goldman, "What Is Justified Belief?," in *Justification and Knowledge*, ed. George S. Pappas (Dordrecht: Springer, 1979), 1–23; *Knowledge in a Social World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)..

Demon Mystic: Well, to begin with, western science and witchcraft have both have long histories and have had thousands of practitioners, do you agree?

(!) **Doctor:** *Yes, but small pox is not the result of a demon.*

Demon Mystic: ...

Now, for some observations about these three dialogues. Firstly, notice that there is at least some kind of *impropriety* (in Dialogue 1-3) to all three of the (!)-assertions, by Kim, Goldman and the Doctor, respectively. We needn't take a stand on what kind of impropriety just yet. It should be plain enough that in none of the asserters, in asserting (!)-style assertions, is being a cooperative speaker in the conversational context²⁶. Secondly, *some* of the (!)-style assertions are *known*. This is obviously the case with the doctor's (!)-style assertion, in Dialogue 3—viz., the doctor's assertion that small pox is not the result of a demon. Now, according to KNA-S, any impropriety of the (!)-assertions simply *cannot be epistemic when these assertions are known*.

In light of these observations, we want to motivate a puzzle. The puzzle is a quadrilemma. Four claims which are independently plausible, but jointly inconsistent.

Quadrilemma

- 1) There is an impropriety to the doctor's (!)-assertion in Dialogue 3
- 2) The doctor's (!)-assertion in Dialogue 3 is known.
- 3) The impropriety of the doctor's (!)-assertion in Dialogue 3 is *epistemic*.
- 4) (KNA-S): One is properly epistemically positioned to assert that *p* if one knows that *p*.

We take it that a proponent of KNA-S is going to accept both (1) and (2), as we do, but then reject (3) while maintaining (4). Our strategy is different. Our way out of the puzzle will be to reject (4), viz., to show that it is KNA-S, rather than the claim that the impropriety of the doctor's (!)-assertion in Dialogue 3 is *epistemic*, that must go. So, it is incumbent upon us to provide a good reason to think that (3) is *true*.

So why should the impropriety of the doctor's assertion in Dialogue 3 be regarded as *epistemic* rather than merely something else? After all, the agent

²⁶ Compare here with Mikkel Gerken, "Discursive Justification and Skepticism," *Synthese* 189, 2 (2012): 373–394, that in some conversational contexts, *dogmatic* assertions—viz., assertions which the asserter refuses to back up with reasons—are inappropriate in virtue of not being, in the conversational context, appropriately cooperative.

clearly *knows* what she asserts, even if the assertion seems to beg the question. An answer to this question—and thus to our way out of the puzzle—involves some set up. Let's begin with an analogy.

Consider that in some dialectical contexts, it can be both practically as well as epistemically rational to *assume* things we *don't* actually know. Take first practical rationality: relative to the practical goal of distributing justice in a fairest possible way, it's best to begin by assuming the accused party is innocent. Correspondingly, if the practical aim is fair distribution of justice, the policy of assuming at the outset that the accused is *guilty*, and must prove her innocence, is practically criticizable.

But assuming things we don't know can be rational in a way that's not merely practical, as it is in the case of distributive justice. It can also be *epistemically* rational to *assume* things we don't know. Here is a standard example, familiar from recent discussions of the factivity of understanding in epistemology. As Elgin²⁷ has argued, often times, assuming or taking for granted a literally false scientific idealization can be instrumental in the facilitation of scientific understanding.²⁸ The case she offers to this effect is the ideal gas law, which it is advantageous to take for granted despite its falsity in order to understand the physical behavior of gas. Note that, relative to our epistemic aims (e.g. facilitating understanding), a policy of *refraining* from utilising idealisations in this way is epistemically criticizable. This is so even though what the ideal gas law claims is not true.

Think of *bracketing what you do know* as the inverse counterpoint to assuming what you don't know. We want to now suggest a parallel. We've just outlined how that it can be both practically as well as epistemically rational to *assume things we don't know* (and, correspondingly, it can in such circumstances be either practically and/or epistemically criticisable to *not* assume things we *don't* know). Likewise, as the parallel goes, it can be both practically as well as *epistemically* rational to *bracket*—i.e., literally, to *not* assert²⁹—things we *do*

²⁷ Catherine Z. Elgin, "Is Understanding Factive?," in *Epistemic Value*, eds. Adrian Haddock, Alan Millar, and Duncan Pritchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁸ For a similar recent argument to this effect, see Benjamin T. Rancourt, "Better Understanding Through Falsehood," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* (2015), DOI: 10.1111/papq.12134.

²⁹ Bracketing a claim, *p*, in a context, *C*, involves at least not asserting *p* in *C*. Note that we are not maintaining the stronger claim that it is epistemically criticisable in the context of deep disagreements to fail to bracket in a stronger sense, where a failure to bracket a claim *p* is unpacked as a failure to *suspend judgment* about *p*. For a recent discussion on the relationship between suspending judgment and inquiry, see Jane Friedman, "Why Suspend Judging?," *Noûs* (forthcoming).

know (and, correspondingly, it can in such circumstances be epistemically criticisable to *not* bracket (e.g. *literally, to assert*) things we *do know*).

A practical case to illustrate this point will easy to generate. Relative to the practical goal of not offending someone, it's best to not assert your knowledge that that person is mentally slow. (Correspondingly: relative to the practical goal of not offending someone, the policy of asserting your knowledge that the person is mentally slow is practically criticisable).

We want to suggest that we need to look no further than Dialogue 3 for a case where it's *epistemically* criticisable to not bracket (literally, to *assert*) what one *does* know, precisely because it's epistemically appropriate to bracket what you know.

Consider that, in Elgin's case of the ideal gas law, assuming what we don't know can, in certain contexts, help facilitate an *overarching* epistemic good: understanding. This is why the *practice* of assuming false idealizations in science is an epistemically advantageous practice; this practice helps facilitate our overarching epistemic goals, which is why *refraining* from utilizing idealizations in this way is epistemically criticisable.

Consider now the following question: can the practice of *bracketing* (e.g., literally *not asserting knowledge*) in a given circumstance, *C*, be a not merely practically, but also an *epistemically* rational practice, one which is required to facilitate overarching epistemic goals? If so, then by parity of reasoning, *refraining from not asserting knowledge* (e.g. *literally asserting knowledge*) in such circumstances is epistemically criticisable. We shall now sketch an affirmative answer to this question.

To this end, recall the remark at the end of §2—thus far not yet defended—that often times, deep disagreements (in the sense intimated by Hales, are not *irresolvable*, despite neither party making any headway. Rather, we suggested, many such disagreements are simply *not resolved* and for reasons that can be avoided. We're now in a position to put together some pieces to show how this is so, and in a way that we think reveals why asserting knowledge in certain circumstances can be *epistemically* criticisable.

Specifically, what we want to suggest is that at least some deep disagreements can avoid being such that they are never resolved by the parties involved *precisely by both parties embracing a kind of epistemic humility*, where each agrees to *attempt* to locate appropriately neutral (and discriminatory) common ground (i.e. the kind common ground by appeal to which rational

persuasion is possible).³⁰ Intellectual humility, like humility more generally, involves, as Kallestrup and Pritchard³¹ put it, a kind of “[...] act or posture of lowering oneself in relation to others.” One way to do this is to set aside what one regards as one’s epistemic entitlement to assert what one knows in the attempt to find common ground. Such an attempt requires, specifically, that we must bracket (i.e. literally, not assert) certain things we know, when doing so undermines mutually beneficial efforts to establish appropriately neutral common ground.

To bring this idea into sharp relief, compare now two practices which we can call, for convenience sake, *anti-epistemic humility* and *epistemic humility*, each of which is a possible strategy we might employ when making speech-act moves within a deep disagreement.

PRACTICE 1: ANTI-EPISTEMIC HUMILITY: In circumstances where deep disagreement persists, don’t refrain from asserting what you know just because doing so would contravene the possibility of locating appropriately neutral common ground.

PRACTICE 2: EPISTEMIC HUMILITY In circumstances where deep disagreement persists, *refrain* from asserting what you know to the extent that asserting what you know contravenes the possibility of locating appropriately neutral common ground.

Let’s return to the setting of Dialogue 3—featuring the doctor and the mystic, and compare the efficacy of Practices 1 and 3, respectively, beginning with Practice 1. A first observation is that Practice 1 already seems to be in full effect; the doctor simply asserted that small pox is not caused by a demon, while fully aware that this is not something that the mystic interlocutor in light of her commitments is in a position to rationally accept. As the doctor is well aware, from the mystic interlocutor’s perspective, the natural next move will be to simply deny what the doctor has just asserted, and each side will be no closer to any possibility of resolution than before. Let’s consider some further things the doctor, employing Practice 1 might *knowledgably* assert. “Demons cause no diseases; the small pox demon you believe in does not exist and so therefore lacks causal powers; the wider epistemic practice you subscribe to, one which adverts to demonic explanations, is epistemically inferior to—and much worse at tracking

³⁰ For some helpful recent discussions on epistemic humility, see Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Allan Hazlett, "Higher-Order Epistemic Attitudes and Intellectual Humility," *Episteme* 9, 3 (2012): 205–223. and Jesper Kallestrup and Duncan Pritchard, "From Epistemic Anti-Individualism to Intellectual Humility," eds. John Greco and Eleanore Stump, *Res Publica*, Philosophy and Theology of Intellectual Humility (forthcoming).

³¹ Kallestrup and Pritchard, "From Epistemic Anti-Individualism."

the truth than—Western science.” Each of these knowledgeable assertions contravenes the possibility of finding common ground, and thus contravenes the possibility of rational persuasion, by simply inviting the interlocutor to deny, from her epistemic perspective, each statement in turn.

The result of employing Practice 1 is thus that cases like Dialogues 1-3 in §3 really are in practice *irresolvable* in that the conversational dynamics of disagreements which embrace Practice 1 take patterns that move away from a potential scenario wherein both parties walk away believing truly.

By contrast, Practice 2, unlike Practice 1, offers a different possibility. Suppose the doctor (fully cognizant that demons cannot cause small pox), appreciates that asserting this knowledge is utterly hopeless *vis-à-vis* the aim of bringing the mystic interlocutor around to a true belief. The doctor, embracing Practice 2, accordingly *brackets* this knowledge, and further, refrains from asserting other items of information the doctor knows but which the doctor also has reason to believe the mystic interlocutor will, from within her own perspective simply deny. Instead, the doctor investigates what points of agreement can be found, including simple laws of logic, such as non-contradiction, modus ponens, and basic epistemic principles such as what Boghossian³² calls ‘observation,’ viz., that one is *prima facie* epistemically justified in believing the appearances of perception.

We don’t purport to embrace unrealistic optimism here. Again, we grant Hales’ point that in some, and perhaps even many, circumstances where individuals begin by embracing epistemically antipodal positions, an attempt to find some Archimedean epistemic norm from which rational persuasion is possible will simply not transpire. This can be for a number of reasons: cognitive biases, lack of endurance, or—perhaps—there is no appropriately neutral epistemic norm available to each which appropriately *discriminates* between the two rival positions. For example, it might be that in Dialogue 3, both the doctor and the mystic discover that they can both non-question-beggingly appeal to the proposition that the tautological inference rule (A, therefore, A) is truth-preserving. Though it might also be that in virtue of the utter neutrality of such a rule, it cannot be used in the service of rationally advancing either position over the other.³³

It is with all of these concessions in mind that we want to maintain that Practice 2 is nonetheless epistemically advantageous in light of (unlike Practice 1) not *foreclosing* the possibility of rational resolution, whereby both sides end up

³² Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*.

³³ See Carter, *Metaepistemology and Relativism*, Ch. 4, for a sustained discussion of this issue.

believing truly. The problem with Practice 1, as we've seen, is that *if* rational were possible—and so if it were possible that the doctor could employ a practice which would facilitate the mystic's eventually forming a true belief about the origins of small pox—Practice 1 would prevent this from transpiring.

Putting all of this together, a simple rationale materialises for why the impropriety of the doctor's (!)-assertion in Dialogue 3 is *epistemic*.³⁴ Its impropriety is epistemic because, as we hope to have now shown, in short: following the assertive practice characteristic of Practice 1, rather than Practice 2, is *epistemically* criticisable. Deep disagreements *pursued via the anti-epistemic humility policy* are genuinely irresolvable. The strategy *guarantees* deadlocks which foreclose the possibility of rational truth acquisition with respect to the target proposition. Deep disagreements *pursued via the epistemic humility policy*, one which encourages bracketing rather than asserting one's knowledge in certain circumstances, needn't be irresolvable. They might be result in both sides ultimately believing what's true.

To the extent that this foregoing is on the right track, we are in a position now to agree with the proponent of KNA-S that claims (1) and (2) of the quadrilemma are true. However, we have good reason now to embrace (3). And

³⁴ We wish to here raise and address a potential line of objection, which proceeds as follows: our quadrilemma (and in particular, our suggestion that (2) and (4) conflict with (3)), depends on a contested conflation of two kinds of epistemic impropriety which should be kept separate. On the one hand, there are epistemic assessments which hinge on consequentialist considerations about what epistemic goods one will attain by asserting, and on the other hand, there are epistemic evaluations we want to make based on whether one is well-positioned enough, given one's current epistemic state, to assert. As this line of objection goes, (2) and (4) conflict with (3) only if the kind of cases we've offered have established epistemic impropriety in the latter sense. But, we've only established epistemic impropriety in the former sense. Therefore, (2) and (4) are not incompatible with (3). In response, we submit that while the doctor's assertion in Case 3 is criticisable on consequentialist grounds, it is not criticisable only on consequentialist grounds. We have also suggested the doctor is not well-positioned enough, given the doctor's current epistemic standing *and* the epistemic standing of her interlocutors, to assert what she does. If epistemic impropriety of an assertion should be sensitive only the two-place relation between an individual and her current epistemic position, then the doctor's assertion would not be epistemically improper, or criticisable (and thus (3) would not be in tension with (2) and (4) of the quadrilemma. However, if the epistemic impropriety of an assertion should be a matter of a three-place relation between an individual and her current epistemic position and the epistemic position of her interlocutors, then she is. We have attempted to motivate the latter picture as at least a viable way of thinking about epistemic impropriety of assertion as the more traditional two-place relation picture. And so we are submitting a rationale on which (2) and (4) are genuinely in tension with (3). Thanks to Aidan McGlynn for pressing us on this point.

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(1-3) entail that we must give up (4), the claim that one is properly epistemically positioned to assert that *p* if one knows that *p* (KNA-S).

Quadrilemma (resolved)

- (1). There is an impropriety to the doctor's (!)-assertion in Dialogue 3
- (2). The doctor's (!)-assertion in Dialogue 3 is known.
- (3). The impropriety of the doctor's (!)-assertion in Dialogue 3 is *epistemic*.
- (4). ~~KNA-S: One is properly epistemically positioned to assert that *p* if one knows that *p*.~~

4. Concluding Remarks

Our previous³⁵ argument against (KNA-S) submitted that the epistemic credential that's *missing* in cases of expert testimony on the basis of isolated second-hand knowledge (i.e., such as DOCTOR) is *understanding*, and that understanding of the sort that's needed to assert in such a circumstances is not entailed by the possession of any particular items of propositional knowledge. Though we are still optimistic that the previous argument succeeds, or could succeed with some further modification in light of recent challenges from Benton³⁶ our aim here has been to pursue a different strategy altogether, one which challenges (KNA-S) by drawing from considerations to do with the social-epistemic value of *humility* as opposed to expertise. We've suggested that (KNA-S) is false precisely because certain conversational contexts featuring deep disagreements are ones where asserting one's knowledge is criticisable in a distinctly epistemic way. Our argument to this effect reveals how it is that engaging in the best kind (e.g. most truth-conducive kind) of social epistemic practices requires that we embrace, in certain circumstances, a kind of epistemic humility whereby we deliberately refrain from asserting what we know.³⁷

³⁵ Carter and Gordon, "Norms of Assertion."

³⁶ Benton, "Expert Opinion."

³⁷ Thanks to Jesper Kallestrup, Duncan Pritchard and Aidan McGlynn for helpful comments on a previous draft. This paper has benefitted from two grants awarded by the Templeton Foundation—the 'Intellectual Humility MOOC' (Gordon) and 'Philosophy, Science and Religion Online' project (Carter) hosted at the University of Edinburgh's Eidyn research centre.

TEACHING VIRTUE: CHANGING ATTITUDES

Alessandra TANESINI

ABSTRACT: In this paper I offer an original account of intellectual modesty and some of its surrounding vices: intellectual haughtiness, arrogance, servility and self-abasement. I argue that these vices are attitudes as social psychologists understand the notion. I also draw some of the educational implications of the account. In particular, I urge caution about the efficacy of direct instruction about virtue and of stimulating emulation through exposure to positive exemplars.

KEYWORDS: virtue epistemology, vice epistemology, intellectual arrogance, education, attitude, self-affirmation

Philosophers and educationalists alike often claim that formal education and exposure to exemplars are effective strategies for educating students to acquire some intellectually virtuous traits such as open-mindedness, curiosity and intellectual humility.¹ This paper voices a note of caution about the efficacy of this approach.² I base my reservation on the view, which I also defend in this paper, that intellectual modesty and the vices that oppose it are strong attitudes toward one's cognitive make-up as a whole and its components.³ My pedagogical recommendations are not wholly negative. I conclude the paper with a suggestion that self-affirmation techniques help to predispose students to become more receptive to teachers' efforts to promote virtue in the classroom.

The paper has two main aims. The first is to offer an original account of modesty and some of its surrounding vices. The second is to draw some of the educational implications of the account. The paper consists of six sections. In the

¹ See e.g., Jason Baehr, "Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 47, 2 (2013): 248-262; Heather Battaly, "Responsibilist Virtues in Reliabilist Classrooms," In *Intellectual Virtues and Education: Essays in Applied Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Jason S. Baehr (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 163-183; Ron Ritchhart, *Intellectual Character: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How to Get It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

² Both Baehr, "Educating for Intellectual Virtues" and Battaly, "Responsibilist Virtues" suggest that practice of virtuous actions is also important. I shall not address the issue of habituation here.

³ This paper is only concerned with the intellectual versions of these virtues and vices. However, for brevity sake, I often drop the qualifier 'intellectual' when talking about these character traits.

first I argue that intellectual modesty is one component of intellectual humility and that modesty does not require underestimation of one's epistemic abilities nor indifference toward one's intellectual successes. In the section two I explain the notion of an attitude as social psychologists understand this construct. In the third section I defend the view that modesty is a strong attitude directed at one's epistemic successes which serves knowledge and value-expressive functions. In the fourth and fifth sections I argue that the vices that oppose modesty are arrogance and self-abasement. I explain what attitudes these are and contrast them with their interpersonal varieties: haughtiness (*superbia*) and servility or obsequiousness. In the final section I consider some pedagogical implications based on the literature on attitude formation and on attitude change.

1. Intellectual Modesty

Modesty about one's successes and achievements is an essential component of intellectual humility. The two notions are so close that Julia Driver's account of modesty has generally been taken as providing a theory of humility.⁴ However, modesty about one's good qualities is only one aspect of humility since the ability to accept or own one's limitations is equally important if a person is to be truly humble.⁵ Although in my view humility comprises both modesty about successes and self-acceptance of limitations, this paper is exclusively concerned with providing an account of the relationships between modesty and some of the vices that oppose it.⁶

Following Driver modesty is often characterised as a virtue of ignorance or underestimation.⁷ In Driver's view the modest person is either ignorant of her good features or underestimates their significance. There is, as others have pointed out,⁸ something fishy about thinking of ignorance as a pre-requisite of virtue; the

⁴ See Julia Driver, "The Virtues of Ignorance," *The Journal of Philosophy* 86, 7 (1989): 373-384.

⁵ Several accounts of humility have focused exclusively on the limitation owning or knowing aspect of the virtue. See for instance, Nancy E. Snow, "Humility," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 29, 2 (1995): 203-216 and Dennis Whitcomb, Heather Battaly, Jason Baehr, and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, doi: 10.1111/phpr.12228 (2015): 1-31.

⁶ I have presented my account of intellectual humility in Alessandra Tanesini, "Intellectual Humility as Attitude," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, DOI: 10.1111/phpr.12326 (2016):1-22.

⁷ Driver, "The Virtues of Ignorance;" Julia Driver, "Modesty and Ignorance," *Ethics* 109, 4 (1999): 827-834; Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁸ See J. L. A. Garcia, "Being Unimpressed with Ourselves: Reconceiving Humility," *Philosophia* 34, 4 (2006): 417-435 at n 6, p. 419.

view is especially counter-intuitive when applied to intellectual virtue since the failure to have true beliefs about one's qualities could not possibly be a defining feature of any intellectual excellence.⁹ In addition one can offer counter-examples that show that ignorance or underestimation is neither necessary nor sufficient for intellectual modesty. An individual who is fully aware of her successes may nevertheless be genuinely modest about them by refraining from boasting, acknowledging the contributions others made to help her succeed, and avoiding seeking the limelight. Thus, ignorance or underestimation is not necessary.¹⁰ It is also not sufficient since a person may underestimate the real importance of his achievements, which becomes clear only with hindsight, and yet be arrogant in the way he treats his co-workers.¹¹

More plausibly modesty concerns one's stance toward one's good qualities, rather than the failure to possess an accurate estimation of them. The individual who is modest cares about her good features, since the person who is indifferent to them will lack the motivation to improve or at least maintain her current strengths and achievements. However, the modest individual cares about her good qualities in a way which is incompatible with self-aggrandizement. This thought guides those accounts of modesty that take it to be a matter of adopting a stance toward oneself and one's good qualities of being unimpressed by them, of avoiding dwelling or delighting in them.¹² Despite some plausibility these accounts are ultimately incorrect since modesty cannot consist in the absence of a hot motivational or emotional state about one's good qualities.¹³ At least in so far as modesty is compatible with proper pride about one's own achievements, it seems possible that a person is modest and yet feels elation and pride because of a success which is the outcome of much work and sacrifice. The same person may even gain in self-confidence because of this success and she may develop a habit of

⁹ Driver is, of course, aware of the fact. In her view what makes modesty interesting is precisely its incompatibility with self-knowledge.

¹⁰ For this kind of counterexample see Owen Flanagan, "Virtue and Ignorance," *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990): 420–428; G.F. Schueler, "Why Modesty is a Virtue," *Ethics* 107 (1997): 467–485; Garcia, "Being Unimpressed" and Alan T. Wilson, "Modesty as Kindness," *Ratio* 29, 1 (2016): 73–88.

¹¹ This point is also noted by Garcia, "Being Unimpressed" and by Wilson, "Modesty as Kindness."

¹² Examples of accounts of this sort are: Garcia, "Being Unimpressed" and Nicolas Bommarito, "Modesty as a Virtue of Attention," *The Philosophical Review* 122, 1 (2013): 93–117.

¹³ Hot cognitive states are states that essentially involve arousal. For an account see Paul Thagard, in collaboration with, Fred Kroon, Josef Nerb, Baljinder Sahdra, Cameron Shelley, and Brandon Wagar, *Hot Thought: Mechanisms and Applications of Emotional Cognition* (Cambridge and London: MIT, 2006).

reminding herself of it so as to stave off self-doubt.¹⁴ Modesty thus is not incompatible even with dwelling on one's own successes and reminding oneself of their impressiveness.

I have argued so far that accounts of modesty as absence of true beliefs about one's good qualities or absence of positive emotional states directed at the same features fail. They fail because they both explain modesty as a disposition to ignore one's good qualities. In Driver's account one ignores these features because one does not know about them, in Garcia's one is aware of their existence but directs the focus of one's concern elsewhere. In my view modesty is not characterised by the absence of a belief or of a hot psychological state such as an emotion or a desire but by the presence of a certain kind of care or concern for one's good features. Modesty is in this sense self-centred.¹⁵

In order to see that modesty is best thought as a way of being concerned rather than a manner of being unconcerned, imagine a person who does not care whether or not she has good qualities. This person has no desire to improve. She does not think of herself as either smart or stupid.¹⁶ She does not dwell or delight in her good qualities and does not wish to draw attention to them. She may even not be aware of any qualities she may have. In sum, she simply does not care. Undoubtedly such a person would exemplify several defects and vices. It is also true that we would not think of her of immodest. Similarly, however, we would not think that she is modest either. Indifference to one's good qualities or epistemic success is not what makes one modest about them; what modesty requires is that one is concerned about these features of the self. The difference between modesty and immodesty lies with the character of that concern.

¹⁴ The person who needs to boost her confidence in this manner may be modest but is likely to suffer from intellectual timidity. Such an individual has a negative estimate of her abilities and thus tends to keep quiet so as to go unnoticed. Reminding oneself that one has good qualities helps the timid to find the courage of her convictions.

¹⁵ I thus disagree with Wilson "Modesty as Kindness" who thinks that modesty is driven by a concern with the well-being of others. At least with regard to intellectual modesty his account is incorrect. It is plausible that a person who is not concerned with other people or their feelings may nonetheless be modest about her epistemic successes. One can imagine a very nerdy software engineer who is fully focused on producing a new kind of coding. She relishes the challenge and the technology is all she cares about. She is rather indifferent to other human beings. Yet for all I have said when thinking about her achievements she may be modest in her assessment.

¹⁶ I do not mean these remarks to imply that the person who is modest must display a high degree of self-reflective awareness. It is possible to think of oneself as smart and manifest this conviction in one's behaviour without having formed conscious judgements about one's intellectual prowess.

The individual who is not modest because he is arrogant is concerned with his good features and epistemic successes because of how they reflect on his sense of self-esteem. Whilst self-confidence is not the same thing as arrogance, the arrogant always display self-confidence in the manner of a defence shield.¹⁷ The arrogant person uses his own positive estimation of his own abilities and successes as a way of protecting and boosting his self-esteem. If this is right, given that modesty is incompatible with arrogance, it seems plausible to think of modesty as exhibiting a different kind of self-confidence. The person who is modest also has a positive attitude toward at least some of her qualities and features which she views as successes. However, her positive stance which grounds her self-confidence does not serve the need to defend the ego. Instead, the person who is intellectually modest cares for her successes because of their epistemic worth and because they are a manifestation of the values to which she subscribes. Hence, a modest scientist may display confidence in her own abilities because she has a positive evaluation of these. However, her stance toward her own successes is a concern that they promote the acquisition of epistemic goods and express support for epistemic values such as truth and knowledge.

Before offering a defence of this account of modesty as a positive stance toward one's own good features which is a way of caring for them for their worth rather than because of their ability to protect one's self-esteem, I need to take a detour in section two to explain the social psychological notion of an attitude. I return to modesty in section three in order to supply the details of my account and to begin its defence.

2. Attitudes

The notion of an attitude is the core construct of social psychology. It was introduced by Allport and has been adopted ever since.¹⁸ There are different definitions and accounts of attitudes in the psychological literature. Nevertheless, there is a consensus that attitudes are summary evaluations directed at an object.¹⁹

¹⁷ In this the arrogant and the haughty are not alone. Timid individuals also use self-confidence as a defence mechanism.

¹⁸ See G. W. Allport, "Attitudes," In *Handbook of social psychology*, ed. C. Murchison (Worcester: Clark University Press, 1935), 798–844.

¹⁹ See Mahzarin R. Banaji, and Larisa Heiphetz, "Attitudes," In *Handbook of Social Psychology*, eds. Susan T. Fiske, Daniel T. Gilbert and Gardner Lindzey (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 353–93 and Russell H. Fazio and Michael A. Olson, "Attitudes: Foundations, Functions and Consequences," In *The Sage Handbook of Social Psychology*, eds. Michael A. Hogg and Joel Cooper (London: SAGE, 2007), 141. Anything whatsoever at any level of generality can be the object of an attitude since these include items such as my umbrella or ideals such as freedom.

More specifically, they are associations of a valence (positive or negative) with an object. One can think of attitudes as preferences and dislikes. They can cause the agent to interact with, or approach, the object when one likes it, or to avoid an object that is disliked. They also comprise positive or negative emotions directed at the target object. Attitudes so conceived should therefore not be confused with propositional attitudes since the latter concern psychological relations to propositions. Attitudes as social psychology understands them do not have propositional contents.

Attitudes are learnt. They are formed on the basis of experience, past behaviour, other attitudes, background beliefs, needs, desires and emotions. One may think of the attitude itself as a cognitive shortcut. Over time individuals evaluate objects for their good and bad features; they carry out these evaluations based on the information supplied by their relevant beliefs, desires and emotions and by their past encounters with the objects. Individuals will tend to form an overall or summary view of an object weighing up all of these considerations, which results in the object being positively regarded (liked) or negatively considered (disliked).²⁰ It makes sense to hypothesise that individuals do not re-assess objects anew every time that they encounter them, as this processing would involve significant cognitive loads. Instead, individuals may store in memory the final outcome of their evaluations, ready to be retrieved and direct behaviour when one is confronted with the target. These stored representations are the attitudes.²¹

The psychological states which represent the information on which the attitude is based are said to be the content or basis of the attitude. According to the classic account of attitudes these contents always include evaluative beliefs, affective states, and dispositions to behave. But the attitude is not just determined by the information represented in its content, an important role in the formation, preservation and modification of attitudes is played by their functions. Attitudes record the evaluations of objects; but how objects are evaluated depends on the needs served by the evaluations as well as the information possessed about the object. For example, one evaluates objects for their contribution to one's survival.

²⁰ It is also possible that a person may end being ambivalent about an object because they feel both positively and negatively about it for different reasons. I shall not discuss ambivalent attitudes here. They have been shown not to be cross- situationally stable, see Gregory R. Maio and Geoffrey Haddock, *The Psychology of Attitudes and Attitude Change* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), 34.

²¹ There is some disagreement as to whether attitudes are stored or made on the hoof every time one encounters the object. See, Banaji and Heiphetz, "Attitudes." Either way the attitudes are the outcome of evaluations which they summarise.

hence, one forms positive attitudes toward items which are edible, and negative ones toward those which are inedible. One will, as a result, avoid those items that one dislikes and eat those one likes.

There is some agreement on several of the functions that attitudes may serve. Among these the best established are: knowledge, utilitarian, object-appraisal, ego-defensive, social-adjustive, and value-expressive.²² Attitudes that serve the knowledge function are acquired and sustained to satisfy the need for knowledge and understanding.²³ Attitudes that have the function of assessing objects for their preference-satisfying qualities have a utilitarian function. Those with ego-defensive function serve the need to defend the individual against threats while the social-adjustive function serves the need to fit in with one's affinity group. Attitudes which are value-expressive have the function of expressing a person's values.²⁴ Finally, the object-appraisal function is often singled out as playing a special role. It is sometimes thought as the sum of the utilitarian and knowledge functions. It is also said to be a function served by all attitudes irrespective of their other functions.²⁵

The causal effectiveness of attitudes (and their informational contents) is largely dependent on their strength. The term 'attitude strength' is used to refer to different features of attitudes, but it is most commonly read as a measure of the strength of the associative connection between the object and the positive or

²² See, Russell H. Fazio, "Accessible Attitudes as Tools for Object Appraisal: Their Costs and Benefits," In *Why We Evaluate: Functions of Attitudes*, eds. Gregory R. Maio and James M. Olson (Mahwah and London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000), 1-36; Gregory R. Maio, Victoria M. Esses, Karin H. Arnold, and James M. Olson, "The Function-Structure Model of Attitudes: Incorporating the Need for Affect," In *Contemporary Perspectives on the Psychology of Attitudes*, eds. Geoffrey Haddock and Gregory R. Maio (Hove: Psychology, 2004), 9-33.

²³ See, Daniel Katz, "The Functional Approach to the Study of Attitudes," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 24, 2 (1960): 163-204.

²⁴ Maio et al., "The Function-Structure Model." One may have an attitude serving this function toward an object which is not itself a value but which symbolises, or is in other ways associated with, values or deeply significant features of the self. Hence, a supporter's attitude toward her football team is likely to be value-expressive. Conversely, one may have ego-defensive or social-adjustive attitudes toward values when one is positive about them because feeling that way makes one feel good about oneself or helps one to fit in with one's crowd.

²⁵ Fazio, "Accessible Attitudes." In my opinion the psychological literature on this issue often displays confusions since it risks a vacuous identification of object-appraisal with the evaluation that serves the function of evaluating. In addition, there is a tendency to presume that one may seek to acquire knowledge only as a means to utilitarian ends. In order to avoid these pitfalls, I treat the knowledge and utilitarian functions as distinct, and interpret talk of object-appraisal function as being ambiguously about either or both of these functions.

negative valence that make-up the attitude.²⁶ Thus, the strength of the attitude does not mark how much one likes or dislikes the object. Instead it measures the strength of the association between the object and the positive or negative valence. For example, a moderate preference for ice-cream could be a strong attitude if mere exposure to ice-cream always activates the attitude and thus triggers a positive (although not intense) feeling. An intense dislike for spinach could be a weak attitude if the extreme reaction to it is only occasionally present when one encounters, or thinks about, this vegetable. Strong attitudes are highly accessible or easily activated because they are attitudes in which the valence is strongly associated with the object so that when one is present, the other is triggered.²⁷

In section three I argue that virtues and vices are clusters of strong attitudes together with their informational bases serving given functions. For now, I wish to alert the reader to some features of strong attitudes that make them suitable as candidates for the states that would show virtues and vices to have psychological reality. Virtues and vices are often said to be effective in guiding behaviour; to be capable of directing visual attention; perhaps to have characteristic motivations; to be closely related to characteristic emotions; to express deep features of the person's character, and to be stable across situations. Strong attitudes possess all of these features. They guide behaviour; they direct visual attention;²⁸ they have affective, cognitive and behavioural bases;²⁹ they can be expressive of the values with which an agent identifies³⁰ and they are cross-situationally stable.³¹ These are empirically robust results. They have been obtained independently of any thought about virtues and vices, since in the social psychological literature no connections are drawn between attitudes and the philosophical notions of virtues or vices.

²⁶ Greg Maio and Geoffrey Haddock, "Attitude Change," In *Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles*, eds. Arie W. Kruglanski and E. Tory Higgins (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 565-586.

²⁷ Fazio, "Accessible Attitudes."

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Fazio and Olson, "Attitudes."

³⁰ Gregory R. Maio and James M. Olson, "Emergent Themes and Potential Approaches to Attitude Function: The Function-Structure Model of Attitudes," In *Why We Evaluate: Functions of Attitudes*, eds. Gregory R. Maio and James M. Olson (Mahwah and London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000), 417-442.

³¹ Fazio, "Accessible Attitudes."

3. Modest Attitudes

Modesty is best understood as a cluster of strong positive attitudes, together with their informational bases, directed toward features of one's own cognitive make-up which serve knowledge and value expressive functions. The aims of this section are: first, to flesh out and explain this claim; second, to argue for its plausibility.

I use the notion of cognitive make-up broadly to include an agent's cognitive habits, skills, abilities, and their products such as beliefs, theories and perceptions as well as the agent's character traits.³² Hence, capacities such as memory, traits like open-mindedness, and psychological states such as a belief that whales are mammals are all components of the agent's cognitive make-up. Most adult human beings have a "feel" for their intellectual strengths and weaknesses. They do not necessarily have explicitly formulated opinions, based on well-developed reasons, about which features of their cognitive make-up count as their strengths or weaknesses. Instead these are evaluations to which they may have arrived unthinkingly and which they may adopt unreflectingly. None the less, individuals' problem-solving strategies, levels of self-confidence, and general approach to daily life are in part guided by their summary evaluation of their intellectual abilities, of their character, and of their views. It is, therefore, extremely likely that most adults have attitudes towards their own cognitive make-up as a whole and many of its components. These attitudes may serve several functions.

Consider a person who treats doing maths as one of her intellectual strengths. This person may consciously believe that she is good at math, but she may also simply behave like someone confident in her mathematical abilities without having ever reflected on her skill. Nevertheless, if she were asked to think about it, she may say that mathematics is indeed one of her strengths. In sum, this person has a positive attitude toward her facility with numbers. She will have acquired this attitude over time on the basis of her past experiences and her background beliefs. This attitude serves a knowledge function if it has been formed, and is maintained, to serve the need for knowledge and understanding.

The person who has a positive attitude toward her mathematical ability likes this aspect of her cognitive make-up. If the attitude serves a knowledge function, this person has acquired this preference because in the past her reliance

³² One may wish to include books, papers, machinery and artefacts among the products of an agent's cognitive abilities. I shall bracket here the question as to whether these are to be included in an agent's cognitive make-up. I am, however, inclined to believe that attitudes toward these objects would figure as components of modesty. Thanks to the editors of this issue for raising this point.

on her mathematical skills has promoted her acquisition of knowledge and understanding. She has thus learnt that using her numerical abilities is a good strategy for her when she wants to acquire epistemic goods. As a result, this person likes this aspect of herself but she does so as a result of its role in facilitating her acquisition of knowledge and understanding. In a word, their promotion of epistemic goods is what causes this person to care for her numerical skills.

If the attitude also serves a value-expressive function, the individual likes this aspect of her cognitive make-up because expressing a preference for it is a way of endorsing her values.³³ In this instance, the values in question must be epistemic values since this person likes those aspects of herself which, serving a knowledge function, promote those values. Hence, this individual's positive attitude toward her mathematical ability is an expression of her valuing of truth and knowledge. If this attitude is strong, it is easily accessible and thus effective to guide behaviour and attention in numerous contexts.

It is my contention that the person who is intellectually modest possesses strong attitudes toward those aspects of her cognitive make-up which she regards as positive that play exclusively knowledge and value-expressive functions. This is a person who has over time formed evaluations of her cognitive make-up; she has formed these evaluations on the basis of her past experience of which of her traits and features have served her well. Since her past reliance on aspects of her cognitive make-up was driven by the need for knowledge and understanding, she has, as a result, developed a preference for those traits that seemed to assist the achievement of these goals. In addition, she takes these preferences to express her values, which must be epistemic values since it is those traits that promote these values that she takes to express her commitments.

I have argued in the first section of this paper that modesty is a concern with one's own good intellectual features. This concern is manifested as a positive stance toward one's intellectual qualities rather than an attitude of indifference or a lack of knowledge about what they are. However, this positive evaluation must not be motivated by the desire for self-esteem or the need to fit in with one's affinity group. The person who possesses these attitudes may make mistakes and underestimate or overestimate the actual value of some of her intellectual traits. However, these will be honest mistakes since her attitudes are based on her past experience of pursuing knowledge and understanding. In addition, this person is

³³ This notion of expression bears not connection to expressivism as a position in meta-ethics. In this context the expression of a value is any activity that allows one to re-enforce or make manifest a value one endorses.

not prone to self-aggrandizement since she cares for her qualities because they are good and not because they make her feel good about herself or accepted by her peers. Further, the person whose attitudes serve the knowledge function must be focused on improvement since she will tend to dislike those of her traits that prevent her from satisfying this need. As a result, she possesses a motivation to change them, rather than to ignore her limitations.

I have given so far several reasons to believe that intellectual modesty is a positive stance toward some aspects of one's cognitive make-up but not others. These patterns of evaluations are partly based on information acquired by past experiences of relying on components of one's cognitive make-up to satisfy the need for knowledge and understanding. These evaluations are not beliefs about the epistemic qualities of these components, although they may be based on such beliefs. The evaluations themselves are attitudes which consist in associations of the object evaluated with a negative or positive affective state. It is these attitudes and their informational bases that explain the behaviours that are characteristic of modesty such as being a willing team player, not boasting or bragging, being sensible about which risks are worth taking, showing a concern for the correctness of one's views over caring that one's discoveries show one to be intellectually talented.

One of the clearest arguments, however, in favour of identifying modesty with this cluster of attitudes is based on the relation of modesty to its surrounding vices. The framework of attitudes sheds new light on the nature of vices such as arrogance, haughtiness, self-abasement and servility and their relation to the virtues to which they are opposed. In what follows I provide an account of these four vices and of their relations. This account supplies further evidence in support of the view of modesty I have articulated in this section.

4. Arrogance and Haughtiness (Superbia)

Arrogance is a cluster of strong attitudes directed toward features of one's cognitive agency which serve an ego-defensive function (and, possibly, other functions as well). Haughtiness (*superbia*) is the interpersonal version of arrogance consisting of attitudes toward aspects of one's cognitive make-up, serving the same ego-defensive function, which are informed by evaluative beliefs consisting in judgements comparing one's abilities to those possessed by selected others.

Arrogant behaviour is both widespread and heterogeneous. We think of the bankers who lost other people's savings as arrogant, and we would think that a person, who thinks of himself as invulnerable, and thus takes excessive risks with his and others' lives as being equally arrogant as well as irresponsible. Intellectual

arrogance often takes the form of a sort of hyper-autonomy. It is characterised by a sense that one has no intellectual debts to anybody else so that one's achievements are wholly creditable to oneself. It is also manifested in an excessive form of epistemic self-reliance understood as an unwillingness to take any other epistemic agent to be trustworthy. The wholly arrogant individual gives no evidential weight to the beliefs held by others, whilst putting a lot of trust in his own views.³⁴

Arrogance can also be manifested in conversation by those who think they have all the answers, who are 'full of themselves', who boast about their abilities, who respond angrily to proper criticism, who are condescending and often use 'put-downs', who speak over other people without respecting their conversational turn. In addition, there are arrogant bodily postures or habits which include so called 'manspreading' in shared public spaces. Some of these behaviours exemplify arrogance proper, understood as epistemic hyper-autonomy, whilst others exhibit the sense of superiority and disdain for others which is characteristic of a vice that I label 'haughtiness' although the term may not be fully adequate to the concept I wish to describe.³⁵ What I have in mind is what Dante refers to as *superbia* in his *Comedy* where he describes this trait as a desire to see others' worth diminished so that one can excel.^{36,37}

The person who wishes to do others down so that he can feel superior is trying to claim for himself some kind of epistemic achievement or entitlement while attempting to deny it to others. For example, such a person may talk up their contribution to a collective success and he may also intimate that the contributions made by others are not as significant as one may have previously thought. He may even dismiss the views put forward by others. For this reason,

³⁴ Tiberius and Walker note that arrogance is an obstacle to acquiring information from other people. See, Valerie Tiberius and John D. C. Walker, "Arrogance," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35, 4 (1998): 382. On the idea of excessive epistemic self-reliance see Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially ch. 3.

³⁵ See also, Alessandra Tanesini, "I - 'Calm Down, Dear': Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing and Ignorance," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 90, 1 (2016): 71-92.

³⁶ Purg., XVII vv 91-100 and 115-17. Dante Alighieri, *La Commedia Secondo L'antica Vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi. 2a ristampa riv. ed. (Firenze: Casa editrice Le lettere, 1994).

³⁷ '*Superbia*' is generally translated into English as 'pride'. However, this translation is in my view misleading since pride as is commonly understood in the contemporary English speaking world is closer to what the medieval thought of as self-love. Self-love finds expression in the desire to excel and to improve. It is not generally thought to be vicious. *Superbia* is a distortion of self-love which is in part characterised by behaviours aimed at thwarting other people's aspirations to excel.

haughtiness is best thought as a vice opposed to proper pride. The latter concerns claiming authority and entitlements that are commensurate to one's intellectual successes and achievements; whilst the former is an attempt to secure some kind of special status for oneself.

I have argued above that modesty is neither a matter of being ignorant of one's good features nor of underestimating their extent. In a similar vein, overestimating one's qualities is neither necessary nor sufficient for arrogance or haughtiness. It is not sufficient because a person may overestimate the import of her good features due to an honest mistake. It is also not necessary because it is in principle possible for a person, who is in fact very talented, to have the measure of his talents but be arrogant about them.

Earlier I also showed that modesty is compatible with proper pride in one's achievements. It follows that being happy about one's good features is not necessarily a manifestation of arrogance. Consider a scientist who, after years of toil, makes a significant discovery and responds to the hard-won result with delight and even a sense of pride. This scientist may be either modest or haughty and arrogant. She is modest if she feels relief that the discovery has now been made; and her delight is directed toward the significance of the result. However, she is haughty or arrogant if she feels relief that it was her who made the discovery (rather than say another scientist); and her delight is directed toward the fact that this great achievement is hers.³⁸ In short, the modest scientist cares that a significant discovery was made; what matters most to the arrogant one is that it was made by her.³⁹ So individuals who are arrogant or haughty value their good qualities, not primarily because of their worth, but because of how they reflect on their self-esteem. It is for this reason that arrogance, but also haughtiness, is associated with an inflated sense of self-worth.

What these examples show is that neither arrogance nor haughtiness are best explained by the presence of some beliefs about one's intellectual abilities. They are also not to be characterised in terms of the emotional state of being delighted about these. Both belief and emotion are compatible with modesty and thus cannot be sufficient for arrogance. The difference between arrogance,

³⁸ The arrogant person need not be aware that she possesses this psychological structure. See Tanesini, "Calm Down, Dear."

³⁹ Hence, arrogance is often accompanied by stinginess or lack of intellectual generosity. The arrogant frequently fails to give others the credit that they are due and, when haughty, may also seek to deprive others of important information so as to put obstacles in the way of their epistemic achievements. See Robert Campbell Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 293-298. Thanks to J. Adam Carter for highlighting this connection.

haughtiness and modesty lies with the needs satisfied by the positive stance one takes toward some aspects of one's cognitive agency or make-up.

Arrogance as haughtiness is also often accompanied by a sense of one's own intellectual superiority. The person who cares for her achievements because of how they reflect on the self is also likely to think of herself as intellectually superior to others and consequently deserving of special treatment. Nevertheless, thinking this way is not sufficient for arrogance, nor- arguably- is it necessary. It is not sufficient because it is perfectly possible for someone who is actually intellectually superior to those around him to be aware of this fact without being immodest. For instance, a brilliant doctor who is also accomplished in other areas may rightly believe that her knowledge, skills and abilities are better than those around her. This belief will influence her actions but need not lead to treating others in disrespectful ways or to dismiss their contributions.⁴⁰ Equally it seems possible to be innocently mistaken about one's own intellectual superiority without thereby being immodest. A person, who believes that she is superior to her colleagues because she justifiably thinks that she has made a momentous discovery, is not rendered arrogant if it turns out with hindsight that she had overestimated the lasting significance of her work. So a belief in one's intellectual superiority even when that belief is actually false is not sufficient for arrogance.

This claim may sound odd, but its oddity can be attributed to a shared background belief common in liberal societies that no individual is actually superior to all others in all intellectual respects. Consequently, it would seem plausible to infer that if one thinks of himself as superior in this way, this sense of superiority must be motivated by arrogance or haughtiness rather than by taking stock of one's abilities and track record. Thus, for instance, it seems perfectly possible that without arrogance a person may judge herself as the most suited for carrying out a difficult task compared to other members of the team. What seems implausible is that somebody would think in this way about every task without being arrogant.

The belief that one is intellectually superior to everybody else is also plausibly not necessary for haughtiness or arrogance. It is possible for an individual to sustain a supreme confidence in his own abilities and to take such delight in them because of how they inflate his own sense of self-esteem by being selective in one's comparative assessments of one's intellectual successes. This individual can display haughtiness without consciously thinking of himself as superior to all others. As a matter of fact, such person may positively avoid

⁴⁰ Roberts and Wood *Intellectual Virtues* make the same point at p. 243 using the historical example of Alfred Schweitzer.

considering ways in which he may be dissimilar from very accomplished individuals in the fear that he may as a result be diminished in his own eyes. Instead, he may, without being fully aware of the fact, choose to consider only the ways in which he differs from individuals who are clearly less accomplished than he is in the domain under evaluation. In this manner, a haughty individual may sustain a sense of intellectual superiority without fully believing that one is intellectually superior to everyone else. Alternatively, the person who has acquired arrogance proper, which I have described as a kind of hyper-autonomy, may not have any beliefs about other people's comparative talents and abilities. Since he values being completely epistemically independent from all others, he has not need to assess their relative abilities in order to understand whom he could depend on.

Roberts and Wood have identified arrogance with an illicit claim to entitlements based on one's alleged intellectual superiority.⁴¹ I have just argued that thinking of oneself as intellectually superior to others, even when that belief is false, is neither sufficient nor necessary for haughtiness or arrogance. Nevertheless, Roberts and Wood are onto something here. What they are pointing to is not a feature of arrogance *per se*, but a characteristic of haughtiness which is arrogance in interpersonal relations. Haughtiness does not require belief in one's intellectual superiority but it requires that one feels and acts in superior ways, which is to say, it requires that one arrogates special epistemic entitlements for oneself.

Arrogance and haughtiness tend to go hand in hand. However, individuals may be arrogant without being haughty when they are not concerned with establishing their intellectual superiority over others. It is instead difficult to think that a haughty individual may be totally free of the hyper-autonomy which is characteristic of arrogance. It may therefore be tempting to think of haughtiness as arrogance when combined with feelings of superiority and superior behaviour. This conclusion, I believe, is mistaken. Arrogance without haughtiness can be a worse vice than ordinary haughty arrogance.⁴² The person who exhibits it manifests such excessive confidence in his own abilities that he no longer feels the need to compare himself with others. We may perhaps think of this behaviour as hubristic. In sum the haughty individual still needs to compare himself positively with some others to sustain his arrogant self-conception, the person who is purely arrogant no longer feels this need because he somehow thinks of himself as

⁴¹ See Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 243.

⁴² For an argument that arrogance is a worse obstacle to proper engagement in the epistemic practice of asserting, see Tanesini "Calm Down, Dear."

radically different from other ordinary agents. This attitude is exemplified in literature and myths by the figures of Faust and of Icarus. Both embody the idea of an individual who behaves as if he has transcended ordinary human abilities, and acquired those of a different kind of being. Thus, Faust is meant to have unlimited knowledge, whilst Icarus flies. The truly arrogant individual does not behave as if he were better than other people; he behaves as if he were unique, as if he were the only agent who is unquestionably and always intellectually trustworthy.

Thinking of these vices as clusters of strong attitudes directed toward components of one's cognitive agency or make-up helps to understand their nature and the relations between them and the virtues they oppose. I have described arrogance and haughtiness as a positive stance toward one's own intellectual abilities which is compatible with possessing an accurate assessment of them. What separates the arrogant from the modest is that the former but not the latter adopts this stance because having it contributes to securing high self-esteem.

This description can be captured using the framework of attitudes. I have argued that the person who is modest has strong positive attitudes toward some aspects of her cognitive make-up, which she therefore treats as her epistemic strengths or successes, and that these attitudes are formed to serve a knowledge function. However, a person may have a similarly positive evaluation of his abilities which is formed to serve a different function.

Imagine someone who has a positive attitude directed at his mathematical skills. The attitude is the result of past experiences that have led one to associate using one's mathematical skills to feeling good about oneself. As a result, one has acquired a positive evaluation of one's mathematical skills. Since these are skills to solve problems and acquire knowledge and understanding, to treat them as one of one's good features, as this person does, is to take oneself to be skilled at mathematics. In other words, this individual treats his mathematical skills as one of his intellectual strengths or good features. However, this evaluation serves a ego-defensive function. This person likes his mathematical skills not because he is good at mathematics, but because these skills make him feel good about himself.

This person may or may not actually be good at math, what is crucial for the acquisition of the attitude, is that past employment of the skill have resulted in situations that have enhanced one's self-concept so that one has learnt to use math to protect one's own self-esteem against threats that may diminish it.⁴³ A person

⁴³ The threats in question need not be threats to one's self-assessment of one's mathematical abilities in particular. They can be threats to any other aspect of one's self-estimation. Feeling good about one's ability to do math or any other positive attitude toward an aspect of the self can be used to neutralise the threat. See Ian McGregor, Paul R. Nail, Denise C. Marigold, and

with average ability may have a history of positive experiences with mathematics if others expect him to be good at the subject. These expectations mean that his failures will often be explained away. Teachers may say that the problem was too hard for kids of his age, or that he was having a bad day. It may also mean that he will receive praise and credit when he succeeds. Consequently, even a person who is not particularly good at it may nevertheless initially form a positive attitude about his mathematical ability serving a knowledge function.

As this individual grows up, however, he would also find himself in situations that offer him with opportunities to calibrate his attitude to his actual ability. If this person's attitude serves the need to feel good about oneself, the individual in question may seek to avoid situations that put his abilities in question by, for instance, ignoring questions, and commanding or cajoling someone else to carry out a given task. But if these situations cannot be avoided, he will seek to discount them. He may blame other people's poor efforts; he may choose to carry out some other allegedly more challenging task. He may simply forget various failures while choosing to remember and 'big up' any success. In short this individual will maintain his attitude in the light of evidence of its inappropriateness, because the function served by the attitude is not that of facilitating the acquisition of knowledge or understanding. Instead, the attitude satisfies the need to preserve one's self-esteem. Provided that opportunities to engage with mathematics continue for the large part to help one to feel good about oneself, the positive attitude is maintained. Further, because the individual in question feels good about his mathematical abilities, he is in effect treating these as among his intellectual successes or strengths since it would not be rationally consistent to feel good about them unless one were good at mathematics.

Although this attitude serves an ego-defensive function, the individual who has it is very unlikely to be fully aware of the true causes of his attitude formation. Plausibly, he does not know about this aspect of his psychology, because such knowledge would undermine the attitude. One's positive attitude toward one's own mathematical abilities bolsters one's confidence. But confidence can only be sustained if one is not aware that it is caused by the fact that confidence makes one feel good about oneself so that one has an incentive to maintain it. If one were

aware that one's confidence in one's mathematical prowess is unrelated to one's actual abilities, one would be forced to abandon one's positive attitude.⁴⁴

The arrogant person exemplifies what social psychologists have characterised as a defensive high self-esteem. Such individuals have high self-esteem as this is measured explicitly by means of self-reports, but appear to be low in self-esteem according to implicit measures such as those delivered by evaluative priming tests. There is now empirical evidence that these people tend to have strong attitudes, that their attitudes tend to serve ego-defensive functions⁴⁵ and that they exhibit arrogant behaviour.⁴⁶

Social comparison is one of the routes to arrogance. It is well-established that human beings often compare their abilities to those possessed by others. These social comparisons result in evaluative beliefs in which one represents oneself as similar to, or different from, some other person used as a kind of standard in the social comparison judgment.⁴⁷ One of the motives for engaging in this process is self-enhancement. Those who possess this motive compare themselves to others who are reputed to possess an epistemic strength to test the hypothesis that they are similar to these models, and to others who are not thought as particularly strong in some ability to test the hypothesis that they are dissimilar from them. Given the known cognitive bias in favour of evidence which confirms the hypothesis under consideration, rather than evidence that disconfirms it, these individual will retrieve information about themselves that makes them similar to capable individuals and dissimilar to those who are less able. As a result, these individuals succeed in thinking more highly of themselves, and in facilitating the future retrieval of favourable information about the self. In short the person who engages in social comparison due to a motivation of self-enhancement thinks that he is different from others whom he judges to be inferior, but similar to those who are thought to be extremely talented.

I have argued above that the arrogant individual is the person who forms strong positive attitudes towards one's own cognitive agency as a whole and a

⁴⁴ The belief that one's confidence is unwarranted would become part of the information base of the attitude and lead to change toward a more negative attitude and thus undermine self-confidence.

⁴⁵ See Geoffrey Haddock and Jochen E. Gebauer, "Defensive Self-Esteem Impacts Attention, Attitude Strength, and Self-Affirmation Processes," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 47, 6 (2011): 1276-1284.

⁴⁶ See McGregor et al. "Defensive Pride."

⁴⁷ For an overview see Katja Corcoran, Jan Crusius, and Thomas Mussweiler, "Social Comparison: Motives, Standards, and Mechanisms," In *Theories in Social Psychology*, ed. Derek Chadee (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 119-139.

great many of its components. These positive evaluations though serve an ego-defensive function so that the person has developed a preference for those aspects of one's cognitive make-up that make him feel good about himself and treats those as his intellectual strengths. We are now in a position to see that these attitudes are not formed exclusively through a process of classic conditioning (where one associates two stimuli because they tend to occur together) but they are also derived from the attitudes informational contents which include comparative judgments about one's intellectual abilities as well as information about the same. These judgements, if they are the outcome of social comparisons motivated by the desire for self-enhancement, are biased. But they inform the formation and preservation of positive attitudes serving an ego-defensive function.

I take it, therefore, that an important difference between haughtiness and arrogance proper lies in the attitude content or informational basis. The haughty individual is the person in whom evaluative comparative beliefs motivated by self-enhancement are explanatorily important to explicate the processes of attitude formation and preservation and to understand the behaviour caused by the attitudes. The person who is arrogant without being haughty is person for whom social comparison does not play a significant role.

5. Self-Abasement and Servility

I have argued that arrogance is a vice that opposes modesty by involving a positive evaluation (an approval) of one's own intellectual character or make-up and of its components which does not serve the need to find out their actual epistemic worth, but to boost one's own sense of self-worth. Correspondingly, self-abasement is a vice that flanks modesty in the opposite direction. It comprises an overall negative evaluation (dislike) of one's own cognitive agency or make-up (and some of its components) whose function is not to assess its epistemic qualities, but which instead serves the need to fit in with other people. Hence, self-abasement is a vice possessed by individuals who are thought by other members of the community to lack intellectual strengths or abilities, and who adopt that low evaluation for themselves because of the need for social acceptance.

The self-abasing person is someone who does herself down and who belittles her own abilities and achievements. She may be aware of her successes, but she is likely not to think of them as achievements (it was just luck) or as her own (by giving all the credit to others or underplaying their originality or significance). The self-abasing person, like the arrogant, evaluates her own successes primarily because of what they show about her cognitive make-up. But, whilst the haughty individual's concern for her successes is explained by their

contribution to her sense of self-worth, the evaluation of the self-abasing results from a focus on what others will make of her.⁴⁸ In addition, the self-abasing individual may feel shame because of the poverty of her achievements, and engage in self-humiliating behaviour by belittling herself and deprecating her own stupidity. W.E.B. Du Bois refers to behaviour of this sort when he discusses the educational policies for black colleges promoted by Booker T. Washington. He notes that self-abasement and obsequiousness are always a risk for those whom, in Du Bois' words, develop a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others."⁴⁹

Du Bois' observation points to two further features of self-abasement: it typically affects members of stigmatised or otherwise subordinated groups; and it is linked to intellectual servility. This is no surprise since it is individuals who belong to these groups who tend to be widely held in low esteem in society so that even absolute strangers will be prone to harbour prejudices about their abilities. It is also no surprise that a person who belittles her own abilities is likely to be intellectually servile and constantly to defer to the opinions of others whom she judges to be her intellectual superiors.

Once again the framework of attitudes sheds light on these two vices, on their mutual relations and their opposition to modesty. Self-abasement is a cluster of strong attitudes directed toward one's cognitive agency and its components which are mostly negative and that serve a social-adjustive function. Hence, whilst the arrogant comes to associate several aspects of his cognitive make-up with positivity because of how they have served him in his defence of the ego against threats, the self-abasing associates his cognitive make-up and many of its components with a negative valence because they have hindered him in his attempts to be part of the in-group. His true abilities and skills have not assisted him in the past because other members of the group are willing to accept him only in so far as he conforms to their expectations about his low status. In addition, those features of his cognitive agency that have served him well are those that have helped him to secure membership in society. Thus, he will have formed positive attitudes, and see as his intellectual strengths, traits of his intellectual character that ingratiate him to individuals who are members of the in-group, confirm his low status and promote self-humiliating behaviour. Hence, this person

⁴⁸ A person may be haughty and also concerned with being held in high esteem by other people. When this happens the individual in question is intellectually vain as well as being haughty. A full discussion of the relation between these vices is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴⁹ See W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Vintage Books/Library of America, 1990). The quotation is from p. 7.

behaves as if he has no intellectual strengths and prefers those aspects of his cognitive make up that in fact support the overall negative assessment of his intellectual abilities. He may, for example, treat his ability to defer to the views of others as one of his cognitive strengths.

Intellectual servility or obsequiousness is the interpersonal version of self-abasement. The obsequious is the person who has lost all pride in his own abilities and does not demand to be granted the epistemic credit which is due to him. The individual who is servile is quick to accept the views of others, to take them to be his superiors, and to allow others to take credit for what are in fact his contributions. Individuals who are servile are also prone to self-abasement since both are coping strategies with humiliation. The person who is told time and again that he is stupid and no good may deal with the pain inflicted by this sort of treatment by thinking that it is warranted and adopt it in his attitudes toward his own abilities. The same person may also cope by learning to parrot the views of those who insult him in the hope of being accepted, at the same time he may in words and deeds demonstrate that he takes them to be his intellectual superiors. The relation of servility to self-abasement is analogous to that of haughtiness to arrogance. Thus, although servile people tend to self-abase, self-abasement can be the worse vice when one thinks that one is so low that one is not even able of slavish imitation. Hence, the person who is servile may retain a certain amount of self-respect by thinking that there are others lower than him. He may exhibit this belief by displaying vanity in his parroting.

Also like in the case of haughtiness, judgements of social comparison play a central causal role in the formation of attitudes of the obsequious because they are included in their contents or informational bases. The individual who is servile compares himself negatively to others whom he considers as being superior. In particular, he compares himself to others who are reputed to possess an epistemic strength to test the hypothesis that he is dissimilar to these models, and to others who are not thought as particularly strong in some ability to test the hypothesis that he is similar to them. These comparisons are demoralising and lead to the formation of negative attitudes about one's intellectual capacities. These attitudes serve a social-adjustive function if they assist the person's ability to fit within the social group that attributes a low status to one.

6. Changing Attitudes

Recommendations for virtue education in the philosophical literature generally focus on four methodologies which have been characterised by Porter as the

standard approach.⁵⁰ These are: (1) direct and formal instruction about the virtues; (2) exposure to exemplars leading to emulation of positive models; (3) practice of virtuous behaviours and (4) enculturation into virtue. The arguments developed in this paper for the identification of virtue and vices with attitudes suggest that at least some of these methodologies are likely not to be very effective when students have already formed non-virtuous attitudes. For reasons of space I shall consider only the first two methodologies here. Intuitively speaking, the shortcomings of these strategies are fairly obvious. Formal instruction may work only if those who are so instructed are willing to listen. Yet those students who are the furthest away from intellectual virtue are precisely those who are less likely to pay attention. Exposure to exemplars might work only if it stimulates emulation. It is counterproductive if it leads to demoralisation or if it fans an already inflated conception of the self. Sadly, those students who have developed non virtuous habits are most likely to react to models in precisely these ways.

The effectiveness of a message on an audience does not exclusively depend on the strength of the arguments contained therein but also on the receptiveness of the audience. This much I think would be universally acknowledged. The extensive empirical literature on attitude change shows that the functions played by attitudes make a substantial difference to the effectiveness of messages encouraging one to change one's mind. The most prominent accounts of attitude change are the elaboration likelihood model (ELM)⁵¹ and the heuristic systematic model (HSM).⁵² Both predict that unless an audience has the opportunity and the motivation to process the content of the message, it will rely on cues and other proxies to determine whether to be persuaded by it. In addition, ELM predicts that messages are subject to scrutiny for their argumentative content only if they are tailored to the function served in the audience by the attitude that they are designed to change. In other words, direct and well-argued instruction will be scrutinised only by those students whose attitudes already serve a knowledge function, whilst its persuasive power on other students is more likely to be determined by other considerations which function as cues such as the length of

⁵⁰ Steven L. Porter, "A Therapeutic Approach to Intellectual Virtue Formation in the Classroom," In *Intellectual Virtues and Education: Essays in Applied Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Jason S. Baehr (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 221-239.

⁵¹ Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, "The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion," In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. Leonard Berkowitz (Orlando: Academic Press, 1986), 123-205.

⁵² Shelly Chaiken, Akiva Liberman, and Eagly Alice H, "Heuristic and Systematic Processing within and Beyond the Persuasion Context," In *Unintended Thought*, eds. James S. Uleman and John A. Bargh (New York: Guilford Press, 1989), 212-252.

the message or the attractiveness of its source. Despite its differences from ELM, HSM too predicts that a message recipient's motivations are one of the most important factors that determine how it is received. In particular, unless the audience is already motivated to form accurate attitudes, the motives of ego defence or of social impression management will bias their responses to the arguments offered. In short it seems that only those students who already possess reasonably strong attitudes serving knowledge functions are in a position to respond to persuasive messages arguing for the value of adopting virtue by paying attention to, and critically assess, the content of the message. Other students may be more influenced by cues surrounding the message; the message may persuade them to some extent so that the affective or cognitive base of some of their attitude may change. However, it is unlikely to affect the function played by them. Yet this is crucial if the account of vice offered in this paper is correct. Direct instruction only works with students who are already somewhat virtuous.

Exposure to exemplars suffers from a similar weakness since it inspires and encourages self-improvement only in those who already have fairly virtuous attitudes. There is a possibility that a student, who is exposed to a model and also told why the person in question is admirable, fails to accept the exemplar as an ideal. Instead, I assume here that the student honestly believes that the model is admirable and worthy of emulation. Nevertheless, it does not follow that the student is thereby motivated to emulate the exemplar. This point has already been noted by Zagzebski who observes that individuals might react with spiteful envy or with egoism, rather than with emulation, to the recognition that another person is admirable.⁵³ The discussion of social comparison in section four above has highlighted another possible reaction: demoralisation leading to self-abasement.

Those students who possess a defensive high self-esteem and thus are predisposed toward haughtiness and arrogance are disposed to compare themselves for dissimilarity to others whom they believe are their inferiors. In addition, if they are encouraged to compare themselves to a person presented as an ideal to emulate, they respond to the encouragement by testing the hypothesis that they already possess some of the admirable features embodied by the exemplar. As a result, instead of encouraging self-improvement, when the haughty and the arrogant are made to compare themselves with admirable individuals, they will as result become even more deluded about their own actual self-worth.

⁵³ See Linda Zagzebski, "I—Admiration and the Admirable," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 89, 1 (2015): 205–221.

The promotion of admirable exemplars is equally damaging for students who suffer from self-abasing and obsequious tendencies. The encouragement to compare themselves to exemplars is likely to result in a strengthened belief that they do not possess the required qualities and that they never will. When a student thinks of himself as stupid or as not talented confrontation with those who exhibit intellectual qualities is bound to offer further evidence in favour of their own negative self-assessment.

These considerations should not lead to pessimism about the possibility of educating students for intellectual virtue. In addition to the possible efficacy of both practice and enculturation, the considerations offered above suggest that educators should target students' ego-defensive motives or social-adjustive tendencies to share socially prevalent low evaluations of members of a social group to which one belongs. There is increasing evidence that self-affirmation techniques have some success in building individual sense of self-esteem so as to reduce both defensiveness and low self-esteem.⁵⁴ These strategies include emphasis on the fact that "intelligence is expandable" rather than fixed and the assignment of repeated self-reflective exercises where students are asked to explain what they value most and why.⁵⁵ These exercises allow the students to think about those good things that define them. In this manner, they affirm their self-worth so that it is less in need of protection against threats. This technique thus would reduce the defensiveness of the arrogant and enhance the explicit self-esteem of the self-abased.⁵⁶

By reducing the ego-defensive motive and by encouraging students to reject negative self-assessments based on societal expectations, self-affirmation changes the needs that guide students' formations of attitudes. If this is right, it is a prerequisite for removing obstacles to the cultivation of the need for knowledge. Once students' attitudes are guided by this need, it is more likely that both education and exposure to exemplars become effective in bringing about attitude

⁵⁴ See Haddock and Gebauer, "Defensive Self-Esteem" for evidence that self-affirmation techniques are effective to reduce defensiveness in individuals who have high explicit self-esteem but low implicit self-esteem and therefore tend to be very ego defensive. The efficacy of self-affirmation to boost performance in stereotype threat conditions can be seen as evidence for the effectiveness of this technique with people with low explicit and implicit self-esteem, see Claude Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi and Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2010), especially pp. 172-179.

⁵⁵ See Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi* especially ch. 9 for a presentation of the techniques and of their success in educational contexts.

⁵⁶ What I propose here is not dissimilar in spirit from Porter's intellectual therapy, although the techniques endorsed are not the same. See Porter, "A Therapeutic Approach."

change and in strengthening these attitudes so that they acquire the stability of virtue.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ I have presented some of the ideas included in this paper at an International Conference on Intellectual Humility held in Oxford in April 2015, at the Eidyn Workshop on Humility and Education (Edinburgh) in May 2015, at an international conference on the epistemic vices held in Durham in September 2015. My sincere thanks go to the organisers, co-presenters and audiences at all these events for their constructive comments and encouragement. Special thanks to J. Adam Carter for useful comments on the penultimate draft of this paper.

HUMILITY, LISTENING AND 'TEACHING IN A STRONG SENSE'¹

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ABSTRACT: My argument in this paper is that humility is implied in the concept of teaching, if teaching is construed in a strong sense. Teaching in a strong sense is a view of teaching as linked to students' embodied experiences (including cognitive and moral-social dimensions), in particular students' experiences of limitation, whereas a weak sense of teaching refers to teaching as narrowly focused on student cognitive development. In addition to detailing the relation between humility and strong sense teaching, I will also argue that humility is acquired through the practice of teaching. My discussion connects to the growing interest, especially in virtue epistemology discourse, in the idea that teachers should educate for virtues. Drawing upon John Dewey and contemporary virtue epistemology discourse, I discuss humility, paying particular attention to an overlooked aspect of humility that I refer to as the *educative* dimension of humility. I then connect this concept of humility to the notion of teaching in a strong sense. In the final section, I discuss how humility in teaching is learned in the practice of teaching by listening to students in particular ways. In addition, I make connections between my concept of teaching and the practice of cultivating students' virtues. I conclude with a critique of common practices of evaluating good teaching, which I situate within the context of international educational policy on teacher evaluation.

KEYWORDS: humility, teaching, listening, John Dewey, virtue epistemology, teacher evaluation policy

Must one have humility to teach? The answer to this question depends on what we mean by teaching. My argument in this paper is that humility is implied in the concept of teaching, if teaching is construed in a strong sense. Teaching in a strong sense is a view of teaching as linked to students' embodied experiences (including cognitive and moral-social dimensions), in particular students' experiences of limitation, whereas a weak sense of teaching refers to teaching as narrowly focused on student cognitive development. In addition to detailing the relation between humility and strong sense teaching, I will also argue that humility is acquired through the practice of teaching.

¹ Parts of this paper were presented at the Workshop on Humility and Education, at the University of Edinburgh 2015, and at the American Educational Research Association Annual conference in Washington D.C. April 2016.

Common notions of teaching circulated in popular culture and implied in much of international educational policy can interfere with an understanding of teaching in a strong sense. Perhaps the most common notion of teaching arises from our deeply ingrained image of the teacher—routinely displayed in television, film and literature, and potentially recalled in our own schooling experiences—as that person standing in front of a classroom directly delivering content to students by talking *at* them as they sit quietly in rows at desks. Another idea that pervades common thinking is that to be a teacher merely requires some specialised subject knowledge. This image is promoted by popular programmes such as Teach for America or the UK’s Teach First—which entice university graduates to go directly into a classroom to teach for a few years, often as a mere stepping stone to more lucrative business management positions. More generally, there is a common view that teaching is not a profession in its own right, which adheres to principles and methods, but rather, is something one does when one cannot enter a real profession, hence the saying “those who can’t do, teach.”

Attempts to get away from these common ideas of teaching have been made by educational theorists using more specialised notions of “good teaching.” However, talk of “good teaching” implies there is also something called “bad teaching.” But to call something “bad teaching” does not tell us what is bad about it. Is it bad because it does not lead to intended outcomes? Or is it because it does not engage learners in critical thinking in the classroom? Or is it because it involves offensive behaviours? Depending on why it is “bad” teaching, it may not actually deserve to be called teaching at all. For these reasons, I argue that we need to circumvent muddled and reified ideas of teaching, and also go beyond the qualifier “good” with reference to teaching by talking about what I will define as “teaching in a strong sense.”

Certain virtues of the teacher are implied by the way I define teaching in a strong sense. Here, I will define it in terms of its relation to the virtue of humility. My discussion connects to the growing interest, especially in virtue epistemology discourse, in the idea that teachers should educate for virtues.² Yet, the focus there has been on the question of what teachers should *do* to cultivate virtues in their

² This is not only the subject of several publications in virtue epistemology (see e.g. Heather Battaly, “Teaching intellectual Virtues: Applying Virtue Epistemology in the Classroom,” *Teaching Philosophy* 29, 3 (2006): 191-222; and, Jason Baehr, “Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 47, 2 (2013): 248-262), but also of a number of international conferences, such as this year’s “Connecting Virtues: Theoretical and Educational Insights” which names “educating to the virtues” as a special conference theme, see <http://connectingvirtuesconference.weebly.com/key-topics.html>.

students. Less considered, however, is the question of what virtues are necessary for the teachers themselves to have in order to cultivate virtues in others.

Only recently, this topic was addressed in an empirical study on "The Good Teacher: Understanding Virtues in Practice," which asked student teachers, newly qualified teachers, and experienced teachers, to identify the six character strengths they believe best describe those of the "ideal teacher."³ Of 546 teacher participants, none of them selected humility, despite this being an available option in the questionnaire.⁴ The report does not make clear why participants selected certain virtues over others. I suggest that one possible reason is that the participants differed in what concepts of teaching informed their selection of the virtues of the good teacher. The failure to include humility could suggest that they did not have a notion of teaching in the strong sense.⁵ What I seek to make clear in what follows is that the strong sense of teaching implies certain kinds of *receptivity to others* associated with humility.

My argument unfolds in three steps. In part one, I discuss the concept of humility with reference to the work of John Dewey, Richard Paul and Dennis Whitcomb et al.'s recent discussion of intellectual humility. I pay particular attention to drawing out an overlooked aspect of humility that I refer to as the *educative* dimension of humility. In part two, I connect this concept of humility to the notion of teaching in a strong sense. In part three, I discuss how humility in teaching is learned in the practice of teaching by listening to students in particular ways. To close part three, I make some connections between my concept of teaching and the practice of cultivating students' virtues. I conclude with a critique of common practices of evaluating good teaching to illuminate what I call the "hard problem" of teacher evaluation.

³ James Arthur, Kristján Kristjánsson, Sandra Cooke, Emma Brown, and David Carr, *The Good Teacher. Understanding Virtues in Practice. Research Report*. (The Jubilee Center for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham), accessed on March 1, 2016, http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/Research%20Reports/The_Good_Teacher_Understanding_Virtues_in_Practice.pdf.

⁴ Participants could choose from a list of twenty-four character strengths from the Values in Action inventory developed by well-known positive psychologists Peterson and Seligman, see Arthur et al. *The Good Teacher*, 13. Humility is one of the options in this inventory.

⁵ It is important to note that the researchers in this study do explicate their own concept of teaching as connected to *phronesis* (see e.g. Arthur et al., *The Good Teacher*, 8-10 and 26-28) and this in many ways aligns with the concept of teaching in the strong sense that I detail in this chapter. My concern is that while the researchers agree that conceptions of teaching matter (e.g. Arthur et al., *The Good Teacher*, 26) to the debate on good teaching, the methods they used in the study cannot thoroughly tell us whether practitioners interviewed shared the researchers' concept of good teaching.

Part 1: Humility and Its Educative Dimension

In order to get at an understanding of the educative dimension of humility it is first necessary to understand the relational aspects of humility, that is, that it involves a relation to self and a relation to others. The idea that humility involves a self-relation may be seen to be part of the common way we think about humility. Humility can ordinarily be understood as involving a relation to the status of one's own knowledge, ability, truth or understanding, and so in this sense it involves a relation to self. However, John Dewey's discussion of humility expresses the idea that even in this self-relation there is an implicit relation to others: humility is a "feeling of self as related to others."⁶ In this section, I first turn to contemporary virtue epistemology discourse and then back to Dewey in order to further explain how we can understand the relational aspects of humility. I will argue that the relation to self and to other implied in humility are *educative* relations that involve seeing oneself as a learner, and seeing others as those from whom one can learn. I refer to this educative, relational aspect of humility as its educative dimension.

What is the nature of the self-relation involved in humility? While we might agree that humility is not a high estimation of oneself, which could be a self-relation more associated with pride, we could take the other extreme and say that the self-relation involved in humility is one of having a low estimation of oneself, that is, what one knows, understands or can do. Whitcomb, Battaly, Baehr and Howard-Snyder⁷ argue against this more common notion of humility⁸ in their recent discussion of intellectual humility, and in doing so suggest not only a different relation to self, but also a particular relation to others, involved in humility. Their definition of intellectual humility offers initial insight to what I am calling the educative dimension of humility.

⁶ John Dewey, "Psychology (1887)," in Vol. 2 of *The Collected Works of John Dewey. The Early Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 287. The question whether humility should be called a feeling or a virtue is beyond the scope of this paper. Dewey discusses humility at times as a social or moral feeling and at times, in other ways that connect to understanding it as a virtue (as I discuss below). My point in referencing Dewey here is to draw out the idea of the self and other relations involved in the concept of and expressions of humility.

⁷ Dennis Whitcomb, Heather Battaly, Jason Baehr, and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91, 1 (2015), accessed July 19, 2016, <https://jasonbaehr.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/ih-owning.pdf>.

⁸ Whitcomb, et al., point out that not only the Oxford dictionary defines humility as "a low opinion of oneself," but that some scholars support such a view as well. See their discussion in "Intellectual Humility," 3-6, and 15.

Whitcomb et al. provide a two-part definition of intellectual humility. Intellectual humility involves on the one hand a consciousness of one's limitations, that they refer to as (i) "a proper attentiveness to one's intellectual limitations." But, it also involves what they call (ii) the "owning of one's intellectual limitations." I will look at each of these aspects in turn and then discuss how their definition helps us understand not only the self-relation, but also the other-relation that is embedded in the concept of humility.

For Whitcomb et al. "proper attentiveness" means that a person has the disposition to be aware of his or her limitation, given a situation in which this is called for.⁹ They emphasise that this does not mean that one has a constant preoccupation with one's limitations.¹⁰ This idea resonates with Richard Paul's definition of intellectual and moral humility, as "having a consciousness of the limits of one's knowledge, including a sensitivity to circumstances in which one's native egocentrism is likely to function self-deceptively; sensitivity to bias, prejudice, and limitations of one's viewpoint."¹¹ Paul would also appear to be in agreement with Whitcomb et. al. that humility does not entail a particularly low opinion of oneself, since he states that humility does not imply behaviours of "spinelessness or submissiveness" that may be characteristic of such a person with low self-regard.¹²

However, Whitcomb et al. take their definition of humility a step further by adding that proper attentiveness is not enough to qualify as having intellectual humility. They state that a person with intellectual humility must also *own* her limitations. Their notion of owning is important to my present discussion because, on my view, it points to the ways in which humility includes a particular type of orientation towards others as those from whom one can learn, which can help identify the educative dimension of humility.

Although the authors do not speak about *learning* from others as an explicit part of their concept, their differentiations between a person who is *just* aware of her limitations and a person who is *both* aware of *and* owns her limitations hinges upon the person's interest in change and improvement of his or her knowledge

⁹ Whitcomb, et al., "Intellectual Humility," 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹ Richard Paul, "Chapter 12: Ethics without Indoctrination," in *Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive in a Rapidly Changing World*, ed. A. J. A. Binker (Rohnert Park: Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique, 1990), 189.

¹² Paul, "Chapter 12," 189. See also, Richard Paul, "Chapter 13: Critical Thinking, Moral Integrity, and Citizenship: Teaching for Intellectual Virtues," in *Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive in a Rapidly Changing World*, ed. A. J. A. Binker, (Rohnert Park: Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique, 1990), 195.

and understanding, and this gets expressed in behaviours reflecting the view that others are those from whom he or she can learn. Let us look at one example they provide regarding the behavioural response of someone who “owns” his limitations. They explain that given a person who is aware “that his most cherished beliefs don’t take into account all the relevant evidence,” there are different possible responses that person could have to this awareness.¹³ A person could be aware of the limitation, but *not* own it, in which case he would “draw inferences from those beliefs as if they were knowledge [and] he doesn’t try to become more informed, and if he were to meet negative evidence, he would dismiss it without a fair hearing.”¹⁴ However, a person who was aware and owned his limitations, according to Whitcomb et al., would “tend to admit their limitations to others, avoid pretence, defer to others, draw inferences more hesitantly, seek more information, and consider counter-evidence judiciously.”¹⁵ Similarly, they refer to expected motivational responses of a person who is only aware of her limitations without owning them would be that she was “unmoved” by the awareness, whereas a person who is aware and owns her limitations could be expected to be “motivated to do something about them, cares about them, and wants to get rid of them.”¹⁶

Whitcomb et al. acknowledge that their notion of “owning limitations” involves a degree of “others focus.”¹⁷ This others focus is summarised as the increased tendency to “defer to others in situations that call upon one’s intellectual limitations; to listen to what others say and consider their ideas, even when one disagrees with them; and to seek help from others more generally in one’s intellectual endeavours.”¹⁸ What they do not explicate—but what I wish to highlight—is that this “others focus” is based in a certain relation to the other implied in the concept of humility: the other is one from whom I can learn, and this means that the other can help me identify my own blind spots, that is, wherein my limitations lie, such that I question my previously established beliefs, ideas and abilities. In this sense, the other is one who can inspire me to transform my understanding of the world and my relation to it.

Thus far, I have sought to make clear my agreement with Whitcomb et.al.’s “limitations owning” view of humility (and with Paul’s), specifically with regard

¹³ Whitcomb, et al., “Intellectual Humility,” 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17; see also 12-14.

to the relational aspects of humility implied. The self-relation consists in an acknowledgement of one's limitations, and the relation to others is one of seeing others as those from whom I can learn. But this still does not go quite far enough to capture what I am after in referring to the educative dimension of humility.

What I seek to make more explicit in considering the educative dimension of humility is that the acknowledgement of one's limitation already involves a certain kind of learning process. The moment that one acknowledges that one has a limitation, for example, that one does not know how to solve a mathematical problem, or does not understand the political message of Virginia Woolf's "A room of one's own," or more generally cannot grasp the meaning of any new, unfamiliar or different interaction with the world or others, suggests that one has encountered a blind spot. When this blind spot is "revealed" through our interactions with others—their questions, ideas, perspectives, wishes, writings—and as a humble person we acknowledge it as a blind spot, the self-relation that arises through this moment of acknowledgement is already mediated by our interaction with others who are different from ourselves in some way.

The self-relation implied in humility is always already a relation to others; it is a recognition that the other matters, and can affect me; this is precisely what I mean when I say the other is recognized as one from whom I can learn. For this reason, humility is closely tied to other virtues, such as open-mindedness and critical thinking, which presuppose a sense of one's own fallibility and include an openness to alternative viewpoints.¹⁹

Thus, humility, on my account, includes a certain kind of self-relation or orientation towards oneself that can be described as seeing oneself as "capable of learning" and it implies an orientation towards others as those from whom I can learn. This idea of the human being as a learning being is captured in several different philosophical traditions using the (roughly equivalent) terms "plasticity," "*perfectibilité*," or "*Bildsamkeit*" [educability].²⁰ The idea of plasticity, as Dewey

¹⁹ See *Ibid.*, on the connection to open-mindedness, Paul, "Chapter 13," 189-199, on the interdependence of intellectual humility and other virtues, and also William Hare, *What Makes a Good Teacher*, 2nd ed. (London, Ontario: Althouse Press, 1997), who argues both humility, open-mindedness as well as other virtues are necessary virtues of the good teacher. To discuss these other virtues in depth is beyond the scope of this paper.

²⁰ Ideas surrounding human plasticity have a long history in philosophy of education, going back e.g. to J.J. Rousseau's discussion of human perfectibility. In the German tradition, J. F. Herbart's draws on Rousseau as well as on the German tradition of *Bildung* and develops the notion of *Bildsamkeit*. Both Rousseau and Herbart connect this idea to the human capacity to make moral decisions, and therefore relate human perfectibility to what differentiates human beings from other animals. Both thinkers influenced Dewey's notion of human beings as having plasticity, or

terms it, describes the fact that human beings learn from their experiences with the world of objects and with other human beings. This capacity to learn is based in the fact that, as human beings, we encounter things that are different and new in our experience—and in that sense unexpected, e.g. an unexpected idea, object or interaction,—and this can lead us into doubt, frustration or confusion, since we may not yet fully understand what happened or what went wrong. As human beings, we can reflect on this unexpected experience and on that basis make decisions to change the way we think or act going forward; such decisions to change our ways of thinking and doing have moral meaning in so far as they can involve going against self-serving habits or self-interested inclinations.

Dewey draws out this connection between humility and learning when he writes:

Humility is more demanded at our moments of triumph than at those of failure. For humility is not caddish self-depreciation. It is the sense of our slight inability even with our best intelligence and effort to command events; a sense of our dependence upon forces that go their way without our wish and plan. Its purport is not to relax effort but to make us prize every opportunity of present growth.²¹

The passage highlights that the person with humility recognises that it is a fact of existence that we are subject to circumstances beyond our control and that we are fallible even in moments of success. A person with humility does not resign the desire to learn and grow when successful, but rather seeks out more opportunities for growth. Growth, for Dewey, is made possible by our capacity for learning from experience, and our recognition of the interdependence of human beings; it is stifled by egotistical or illusory self-reliance.²² Humility gets its “purport” as he writes, its thrust or spirit, by seeing one’s opportunities for growth, which includes learning from and with others. This again points to the educative dimension of humility that I am after, which is necessary for understanding the connection between humility and teaching in a strong sense. What might it mean for a teacher to have humility, when the “others” involved are those trying to learn something from her? Does having humility in teaching imply the teacher

the capacity to learn in all areas of life. I have discussed this in detail in Andrea R. English, *Discontinuity in Learning: Dewey, Herbart, and Education as Transformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²¹ John Dewey, “Human Nature and Conduct (1922),” in Vol. 14 of *The Collected Works of John Dewey. The Middle Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 200.

²² John Dewey, “*Democracy and Education* (1916),” in Vol. 9 of *The Collected Works of John Dewey. The Middle Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 47–50.

can learn from her students? If so, what might that learning look like? These questions are about the nature of teaching, which I address next.

Part 2: Teaching in the Strong Sense and Its Connection to Humility

There are ways that one could define teaching that would not imply humility. I will address how teaching has been viewed as “knowledge transmission,” and indicate why on that notion, teaching would not imply humility. Then, I will turn to defining teaching in a strong sense, as a notion of teaching that does imply that humility is a necessary virtue of the teacher.

Teaching is sometimes referred to as knowledge transmission. This model of teaching—also known as an input-output model, wherein the “teacher-as-transmitter” puts in the information and “learner-as-recipient” recites it back with accuracy—is part of a deeply ingrained common sense understanding of what teaching is. This notion of teaching has been criticised widely by philosophers of education from different traditions,²³ including Rousseau, Herbart, Dewey, Freire and Peters. Teaching, if understood as a process of the direct transmission of pre-packaged knowledge to the next generation, does not imply the “humility” of the teacher. Rather, since the teacher knows, and the student does not know, then there is no need for the teacher to be aware of the limits of her knowledge, or allow for the possibility of self-deception. On this model, the nature of the teacher-learner interaction also does not provide circumstances in which the teacher would come to know these limitations. On this paradigm of teaching and learning, the teacher’s knowledge is not to be questioned by students. The teacher is the authority in control of knowledge being passed on within the teacher-student relationship and so humility is not necessary. This paradigm relies on particular notions of knowledge as immutable morsels, or as Dewey calls it, “ready-made” knowledge, to be passed on from one person, the teacher, to another, the learner, a passive recipient. Dewey criticises such ideas of the learner (and in turn, the models of teaching they recommend), contending that they rest upon a false idea of the mind as purely receptive, and separated from the activities of the body.²⁴

But the notion of knowledge and the mind embedded in this idea of “teaching” are not the only problems with it; rather there is also a problematic concept of learning it relies on. Learning is viewed as the linear step-by-step

²³ And this, even as they disagree on a positive conception of teaching.

²⁴ Dewey’s criticism of this mind and body dualism is part of his criticism of dualisms in the long-standing tradition of western philosophy, which he discusses e.g. in the first several chapters of *Democracy and Education*.

acquisition of pre-packaged knowledge, which in practice means the memorisation and regurgitation of finished ideas and facts. Such a notion of learning, as I have discussed in depth elsewhere, fails to include the discontinuities that are part of all human learning processes.²⁵ Without a connection to this significant aspect of human learning, it does not provide an adequate foundation for a concept of teaching. Thus, I contend that “teaching as transmission,” even though we nominally refer to it as teaching, does not meet the criteria for even the “weak sense” of teaching (discussed below); rather it is not teaching at all.

Before I provide my positive account of teaching in the strong sense, I will briefly point out a few significant aspects of the concept of learning it is grounded in, especially those that connect to the experience of limitation. On the view I have put forward elsewhere, educative, transformative processes of learning are connected to processes of human experience.²⁶ To learn involves an encounter with something new, and in that sense, different, strange or unfamiliar, otherwise it would not be learning, it would only be reiteration of what one already knows. This encounter can be characterised as an experience of limitation, because it points us to what we do not know, do not understand, or are not yet able to do. There are certain ways of describing our experience of limitation that span at least to the time of Socrates, continuing through classical philosophers of education, e.g. Herbart and Dewey, and further through to contemporary philosophers of education talking about doubt, disillusionment, puzzlement, or even fear as part of learning processes.²⁷ Though these notions refer to different phenomena, they

²⁵ See, English, *Discontinuity in Learning*, and Andrea R. English, “John Dewey and the Role of the Teacher in a Globalized World: Imagination, Empathy, and ‘Third Voice,’” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 48, 10 (2016): 1046–1064. Accessed September 15, 2016. doi:10.1080/00131857.2016.1202806.

²⁶ English, *Discontinuity in Learning*.

²⁷ See *Ibid.*; see also e.g. John Passmore, “On Teaching to be Critical,” in *The Concept of Education*, ed. Richard S. Peters (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1967); Fritz Oser, “Negatives Wissen und Moral,” *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 49 (2005): 171–181; Nicholas C. Burbules, “Aporias, Webs, and Passages: Doubt as an Opportunity to Learn,” *Curriculum Inquiry*, 30, 2 (2000): 171–187; Dietrich Benner, “Kritik und Negativität. Ein Versuch zur Pluralisierung von Kritik in Erziehung, Pädagogik und Erziehungswissenschaft,” *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 46 (2003): 96–110; Käte Meyer-Drawe, “Lernen als Umlernen – Zur Negativität des Lernprozesses,” in *Lernen und seine Horizonte. Phänomenologische Konzeptionen Menschlichen Lernens – Didaktische Konsequenzen*, eds. Käte Meyer-Drawe and Winfried Lippitz (Frankfurt: Scriptor, 1984); Deborah Kerdeman, “Pulled Up Short: Challenging Self-Understanding as a Focus for Teaching and Learning,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (2003): 293–308; Andrea English and Barbara Stengel, “Exploring Fear: Rousseau, Dewey and Freire on Fear and Learning,” *Educational Theory* 60, 5 (2010): 521–542.

each point to the fact that our experience of the world includes what I call discontinuities—breaks in our experience, expressed in moments of doubt or frustration. Discontinuity in experience arises due to the fact that the world of objects or others have in some way defied one's expectations, pointing to a blind spot or limitation.

Discontinuity as the experience of limitation is indispensable to learning. If we take for example, Plato's Cave, we can illustrate the productive meaning of discontinuity. The prisoner experiences limitation as moments of alienation, disillusionment and fear as he exists the cave and finds himself confronting new objects and ideas. Viewed in terms of learning, these moments are indispensable in the prisoner's process of coming to understand the new objects and ideas he is encountering.²⁸ These encounters with limitation involve a break with oneself as a moment of interruption, in which we may fall into doubt because the old is no longer sufficient, but the new way of understanding the world has not yet been found.²⁹ But this experience alone is not what we would call learning as a "reflective experience," to use Dewey's term. In reflective learning experiences, the moment of discontinuity sparks thinking and inquiry; our thinking is aimed at seeking to understand the nature of the discontinuity in our experience, such that we seek to understand why we are in doubt, and in what ways what we thought to be true and valid now need to be reconsidered, modified or thrown out. In these moments, one may ask oneself, what is it that I thought before that now does not seem to fit? What ideas were guiding me that now seem in need of modification? Do my ideas, or does something in the world, or do both, need to change?

Learning processes that involve the kinds of critical questioning and inquiry described have what I call two beginnings, each of which are significant for how I

²⁸ For a more detailed analysis of this example see English, *Discontinuity in Learning*, chapter 6.

²⁹ Certainly, colloquially speaking we often use the term learning to refer to experiences that do not seem to be transformative in this way, for example, we may hear the newscaster say "it is raining today," and so we may say that we "learned" it was raining. But what is important here in the way I am talking about learning is its connection to education; learning on this view is not just a one-way street of acquiring knowledge. For Günther Buck, John Dewey and others genuine learning is connected to our experience of the world and this experience involves a back and forth interaction between self and other that is not smooth and continuous rather involves, gaps, interruptions, "bumps in the road" as we try to navigate the world and understand it. This is the kind of learning I see as important when we are talking of learning as an educational process. Mathematics education has developed the term "deep learning" to get at this educative sense of learning.

define teaching.³⁰ The first is a pre-reflective beginning to learning. It occurs when we encounter something unexpected, a new object or idea, and characteristically comes forth in our becoming perplexed or confused. The second beginning to learning is one that we consciously choose. It occurs when we start to transform the pre-reflective interruption in our experience into a question or problem into which we can inquire. On my notion of learning as a transformative process, both of these beginnings are indispensable to the process of coming to understand something new.

This concept of learning takes account of the human experience of limitation as essential to what it means to learn. The experience of limitation has the potential to lead us to call into question the knowledge and beliefs that we previously took for granted as true. Our struggle to understand this experience of limitation can only be considered *productive*, as opposed to *destructive*, if it leads to self-reflection and self-questioning of the taken-for-granted. Such acts of self-reflection, that is, of reflection on what we know and do not know and on our relation to the world, are acknowledgements that *the other* matters in our experience, that the recognition of the connection between self and other is part of what it means to be human.

So what is teaching in a strong sense? As I have sought to show above, humility is generally characterised as having to do with the attention to or recognition of one's limitations, be that in reference to knowledge, truth and understanding, or in reference to moral knowledge and moral decision-making ability. I also argued that learning involves the experience of limitation (a discontinuity in experience) and the reflective engagement with one's experience of limitation. I will now focus on how teaching in a strong sense connects to the learners' experiences of limitation, how this implies the teacher's humility, and finally what makes this idea of teaching "teaching in a strong sense."

When we grasp learning as entailing discontinuity, that is, as involving the learner's encounter with his own blind spots, as well as a reflective inquiry into what that "blind spot" or limitations may consist in, then teaching as a task that connects to learning³¹ can be best conceived of as initiating and engaging

³⁰ English, *Discontinuity in Learning*, chapter 4.

³¹ Peters discusses the important issue around how the concept of teaching is connected to student learning. He notes that teaching can be a task term pointing to a particular activity of teaching, but also an achievement term pointing to the result the teacher is trying to achieve. For Peters, both are connected to the concept of teaching, but the success of teaching is determined by its result in the learner learning something, Richard S. Peters, "What is an Educational Process?," in *The Concept of Education*, ed. Richard S. Peters (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1967). See my discussion of this in Andrea R. English, "Transformation and

discontinuities in learners' experiences.³² The teacher's task is to make the world educative for learners, and this involves helping them take it apart and explore realms that otherwise may be arbitrarily ignored or intentionally avoided out of fear or lack of interest. To do this, teachers have to learn to cultivate uncertainty and other forms of discontinuities in experience, in productive ways, so that learners begin to question their knowledge and beliefs, and those of others.³³ When construed in this way, teaching is inherently a moral practice in the sense that it aims to teacher learners to think and choose to learn from others. Through the teacher's questions and challenges, learners begin to question their own beliefs, think critically and begin to search for new knowledge.

The task of teaching as being one involving helping learners' identify what they do not know and cannot yet do, means helping them identify limitations. But, this notion of teaching implies that the teacher is willing to run up against her own limitations and engaging in self-critical reflection upon such limitations.³⁴ In order to help others find their own blind spots, the teacher has to challenge them, but she cannot entirely foresee how learners will respond and whether she is presenting them with the right kind of challenge, or whether she is over- or under-challenging them. So the very nature of the task of teaching has a certain level of risk and requires improvisation. When the teacher encounters a limitation in the context of the teacher-learner relation and becomes uncertain, the teacher's uncertainty with reference to *how to teach* is mediated by the problems and uncertainties the learner or learners have with how to learn. This "twofold discontinuity," that is the discontinuities (as doubt, frustration, uncertainty) in the teacher's experience that are mediated by the discontinuities in learners'

Education: The Voice of the Learner in Peters' Concept of Teaching. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, 1 (2009). I will not go further into these details here, rather my focus is to underscore that teaching in a strong sense conceives of the experience of teaching as linking to the learner's experience of learning in certain ways.

³² English, *Discontinuity in Learning*, 80-86.

³³ This task of the teacher relates to what Pritchard calls "epistemically unfriendly environments," which he views as necessary for strong-cognitive achievement associated with gaining understanding, in Duncan Pritchard, "Epistemic Virtue and the Epistemology of Education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 47, 2 (2013): 236-247. In my previous work, I examine more closely the types of environments that are essential for challenging learners' in productive ways that involve initiating discontinuities in their experiences in a way that would align with what Pritchard has in mind with his concept, see English *Discontinuity in Learning*, 87-96.

³⁴ Andrea R. English, "Dialogic Teaching and Moral Learning: Self-Critique, Narrativity, Community and 'Blind Spots,'" *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 50, 2 (2016): 160-176.

experience, are an indispensable part of teaching.³⁵ For this reason, teaching, as I define it, is a reflective practice—it requires teachers to become interrupted and think reflectively about the nature of that interruption for the sake of continuing to help others learn. Thus, as a reflective practice, teaching requires what Herbart calls pedagogical tact, a form of *phronesis* as it applies to decisions made in the moment about what to teach and how to teach it to particular learners.³⁶

Given this understanding of teaching, teaching implies humility. It involves being aware of one's limitations, aiming to address them and, in doing so, recognising one's relation to others as those one can learn from, and to oneself as one who can learn. For the teacher, this means seeing students as those from whom she can learn. Specifically, she can and must learn of her own limitations in order to know to what extent she is able to teach particular students a particular subject matter at a particular time. In this sense, she also must see herself as a learner, and this is connected to the fact that humility in teaching must mean *owning* one's limitations. That is to say, that humility in teaching necessarily involves carefully attending to the limitations one has found in the realm of teaching, and trying to overcome them. For example, when a teacher has become very good at teaching English literature, but then has new students in a class that do not have English as a first language, she may recognise her limitation in teaching these students. The limitation of the students—their difficulty in learning English literature—initiates the teacher's recognition of her limitation—her inability to be able to teach these students in this topic.

But mere recognition of her limitation would not be enough to say she has humility. According to the notions of humility I brought together above, to have humility as a teacher would also mean that the teacher owns the limitation, and thus seeks to address it and grow. The teacher could express that she owned the limitation by talking to the students about their specific difficulties and by changing assessment tasks so that they have other kinds of opportunities to show their knowledge and abilities. To have humility involves, as I have said above, the teacher seeing seeing herself as a learner, and seeing the students as others she can learn from. The interactions with the students help her to experience her limitation and initiate thinking around those limitations and, in taking these

³⁵ See English, *Discontinuity in Learning*; 83 and 140; and, Benner, "Kritik und Negativität."

³⁶ See Johann F. Herbart, "The Science of Education (1806)," in *The Science of Education, its General Principles Deduced from its Aim, and The Aesthetic Revelation of the World*, trans. Henry M. Felkin and Emmie Felkin (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1902); Max van Manen, *The Tact of Teaching. The Meaning of Pedagogical Thoughtfulness* (London: Althouse Press, 1991); English, *Discontinuity in Learning*; and, Arthur et al. *The Good Teacher*.

limitations seriously and owning them, she sees herself as a learner who can learn how to overcome these limitations.

Teaching, in the sense described here, is a unique reflective practice and this uniqueness as a reflective practice is what helps clarify why we can call it a strong sense of teaching. Even if pure "transmission" is not teaching at all, there is still the possibility for a weak sense of teaching. Whether the notion of teaching has a weak or strong sense is determined by the role played by the teacher's critical reflection on her own limitations arising from the students' embodied experiences of limitation. A weak sense of teaching, which associates teaching with a narrow focus on students' cognitive development (to the exclusion of other aspects of the students' experiences), may include the view that teachers reflect on their limitations arising from students' cognitive limitations—which come forth as mistakes or misconceptions—in order to find ways to get students to successfully arrive at the defined goal. But in this weak sense case, the teacher's self reflection would be superficial in that it is focused on how to get the student who erred back on the right path (with the path defined by what the teacher had preplanned for the lesson), whether or not the student is gaining understanding. Such weak sense teaching in practice is characterised by closed questions, minimal challenge, and social encounters of students relegated to a secondary role of aiding students' cognitive gains.³⁷

The strong sense of teaching views the teacher's critical reflection on her limitations that arise from the teacher-learner relation (the twofold discontinuities in her experiences) as central. This means in practice that the teacher will initiate students' experiences of limitation, engage those that arise, and create situations in which students' initiate and engage limitation together. This is the same as saying that the strong sense notion recognises teaching as a unique reflective practice, in which the students' experiences of limitations can spark the teacher's experience of limitation (as described in the example of the literature teacher, where the students' difficulty in how to learn initiated a difficulty for the teacher in how to teach). The space of critical, reflective thinking of the teacher in this sense is always aimed at increasing the learner's space of reflective thinking.³⁸ In

³⁷ This view of teaching relates to the idea of teaching being questioned in current research in education, which notes the failure of teachers to view moral and social education as part of their task, and the failure of teacher education programmes to teach pre-service teachers about the broader dimensions of their task (see e.g. Arthur et.al. *The Good Teacher*, 8-9; and Peterson et.al., *Schools with Soul*.)

³⁸ I refer to this as an in-between realm of learning, or what Dewey calls "the twilight zone of inquiry," that is found when our thinking resides between right and wrong, knowing and not

expressions of humility, teachers open up spaces for their own reflective thinking, which is intimately tied to their ability to open up spaces for students' reflective thinking.

Part 3: Humility in Teaching, Especially Its Educative Dimension, Is Learned by Listening to Students

Paulo Freire refers to humility as an “indispensable quality” of the teacher, but also as a quality “acquired gradually through the practice” of teaching.³⁹ The idea is at first puzzling, for if humility is an indispensable quality of teachers, then from the start one must have humility in order to be able to teach. However, if humility is acquired gradually through teaching practice, then this must mean that one has to be a teacher first and humility would then be acquired in the process of practising as a teacher. With the concept of teaching detailed in part two, I sought to show that humility is indispensable to being a teacher, because humility is implied in the concept of teaching (which is to say that to accept the task of teaching, one would have to be aware of one's limitations, accept new limitations when they present themselves, allow oneself to be corrected by others, locate and acknowledge bias, etc.). Therefore from my foregoing discussion, we can see the validity of Freire's idea that humility is indispensable to teaching.

In this section, I argue that it is not a contradiction to also agree with the second part of Freire's statement, namely, that humility is acquired gradually in the practice of teaching. On my reading, what Freire means is that one should have humility to become a teacher, but gradually, through the practice of teaching one will begin to understand humility in its particular relation to *being* a teacher. Specifically, I argue that what is learned gradually through the practice of teaching is the understanding and ability to express the *educative* dimension of humility. In this section, I will examine how humility is learned within the teacher-learner relationship, wherein teachers are receptive to students through listening. I close the section with a discussion of how such teacher-learner interaction connects to cultivating humility in students.

knowing. For an extended discussion of the “in-between realm of learning” see English, *Discontinuity in Learning*, chapter 4.

³⁹ Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers. Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2005), 71.

Listening and Teaching

Teaching in the strong sense, in practice, involves what I have elsewhere described as critical-educative listening.⁴⁰ Before discussing this concept as it relates to humility in teaching, it is helpful to first look at uneducative listening. A teacher who is trying to transmit pre-packaged knowledge to students can be considered to listen in uneducative ways. Their listening is evaluative, focused on mechanically filtering right and wrong answers, a mode of listening associated with what Dewey calls a traditional model of instruction, where the teacher provides the subject matter and "listens for the accuracy with which it is produced."⁴¹ For example, the teacher may didactically present the "fives" of the multiplication tables on the board and then ask the class "What is five times five?" If a student's answer is "ten," it is deemed wrong and the teacher may listen on, but only to wait for a student to arrive at the right answer. This framework for a teacher's questions is reserved for confirming the acquisition of specific knowledge, so that interruptions, such as differences of opinion or unexpected responses in the classroom, are classified as a lack of understanding, as nothing more than "wrong answers."⁴²

⁴⁰ See English, *Discontinuity in Learning*, 134-142. Research on listening in education has grown over the past several years, with philosophers of education developing various concepts of listening. In my current Spencer Foundation funded research with colleagues Drs Allison Hintz and Kersti Tyson we are developing a broad framework of listening in teaching that incorporates many recent concept of listening, including critical-educative listening. In this paper, my focus is on critical-educative listening due to its connection to the teacher's learning around limitations. For some of the recent discourse on listening, see edited volumes, Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon and Megan Laverty, eds., *Listening: An Exploration of Philosophical Traditions*. Special Issue. *Educational Theory* 61, 2 (2011); and, Leonard J. Waks, ed., *Listening to Teach: Beyond Didactic Pedagogy* (New York: SUNY, 2015).

⁴¹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 167.

⁴² Some may call into question whether teaching really still happens in this narrow way anymore and even whether we need to think about the types of practices that may follow from a notion of teaching. But empirical studies show that teachers in schools still often follow this model of what Oser and Spychiger call "A Didactic of Error Avoidance," wherein the teacher asks a question and goes from student to student until she gets the right answer and then moves on. In such a classroom structure, no one actually learns, the student who answered correctly already knew, and the students who did not, are still left with a lack of understanding at how to get to the right answer, Fritz Oser and Maria Spychiger, *Lernen ist Schmerzhaft: Zur Theorie des negativen Wissens und zur Praxis der Fehlerkultur* (Weinheim: Beltz, 2005), 163; see also Robin J. Alexander, *Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Classroom Talk*. (Cambridge: Dialogos, 2006).

Understanding the role of critical-educative listening in teaching helps to illuminate how teachers gain humility through the practice of teaching. Through listening, teachers can become open to difference and otherness that arises in the teacher–learner relation. When listening to the learner is aimed at initiating and engaging productive discontinuities in the learner’s experience, it becomes educative. This listening may in fact aide in helping learners understand misconceptions—for example, if the teacher find that her students do not understand how to find one-half of a whole number, she may formulate new questions or tasks for the students to address this lack of understanding—but the aim of critical-educative listening is different than evaluative listening. The teacher’s listening is critical and educative when the teacher is engaged in listening for signs that a productive struggle is taking place in the learners’ experiences, and simultaneously, listening for ways to support learners’ to think about the discontinuity and struggle they now find themselves in and inquire into it, so that they move towards a reflective learning process. On this account, when teachers are engaged in critical-educative listening, they are particularly attuned to interruptions in their own experience, that is, to discontinuities which point them to the fact that they may have arrived at the limit of knowledge or ability, either with respect to how to teach a particular learner or with respect to how to teach more generally. These interruptions in the teacher’s experience can indicate interruptions in the learner’s experiences, identifying to the teacher that the learner has in some way become lost or confused and may not know how to move on. When these interruptions are mediated by what the teacher hears, they can come forth as any unexpected response from a student (such as a difficult question, a challenging viewpoint, or a confusing reply) to the tasks presented in a learning situation.

The educative dimension of humility, as I have been emphasising, refers to the relation to self and other it implies, namely, it implies that the humble person recognises others as those from whom one can learn of one’s own limitations, and it implies that the humble person sees herself as a learner who can productively address the limitations. One fairly straightforward way to imagine that teachers can learn of their own limitations is with respect to the subject matter being taught. This could occur if for example a student offered a different, but equally valid perspective on a topic, or demonstrated stronger reasons for believing something other than what the teacher stated, such that the teacher could show humility by allowing herself to be corrected. This is what Leonard Waks calls “self-critical humility” in teaching, which is mediated by listening to students and

involves allowing students to correct one's views.⁴³ Similarly, William Hare discusses humility in teaching as involving the teacher recognising "the possibility of improving his or her present knowledge and understanding."⁴⁴ But as I will seek to show teachers can also learn from their students with respect to *how* to teach. This involves being attuned to students' thinking and learning within their embodied experiences, including both the cognitive realm of learning particular subject matter, and the social and moral realm of learning interactions that respect and recognise others. What it means to learn from students with respect to their social and moral learning processes is less straightforward, but can be illustrated with an example.

I provide here an example which highlights how the educative dimension of humility is acquired through practice of teaching, specifically by listening to students' discontinuities in social and moral learning processes. The example is from a segment of the documentary of a fifth grade classroom, *August to June: Bringing Life to Schools*. It is important to note that the film was chosen because the teacher in this film, who not only shows the audience inside her classroom for a year, but also discusses her views on teaching, appears to me to have views which align with teaching in a strong sense as I have defined it here. In the film, we see two students who were placed together to work on a science assignment involving building a Lego-like model of a pulley. The two students become frustrated and the camera shows the teacher has sat down to listen to their problem:

⁴³ Leonard J. Waks, "Humility in Teaching." Accessed April 5, 2016. http://www.academia.edu/11700171/Humility_in_Teaching. Waks also discusses what he calls trans-critical humility, in which the teacher offers herself as a resource to others without trying to teach something specific, and without a strict sense of thinking aimed at self-critique. My colleague Dr Waks and I work together on listening as part of the international research network 'Listening Study Group', and recently discovered that we were both working on the topic of humility and its connection to listening and teaching. I am grateful for our recent conversations on this topic.

⁴⁴ Hare, *What Makes a Good Teacher*, 39. Paul provides an example of a teacher coming to improve his knowledge and understanding of physics and in that sense demonstrating intellectual humility. Paul cites a letter from a physics teacher with 20 years of experience, who came to the realisation that he had memorised canned "textbook answers" to students' questions, and that these were insufficient for addressing the students' questions. The students made the teacher start to rethink these answers, and he acknowledged that in his own schooling he had "memorise[d] the thoughts of others" and had "never learned or been encouraged to learn to think for [him]self," see Paul, "Chapter 13," 195. Paul's reading of the example emphasises that the connection to intellectual humility is found in the fact that the teacher began to think about the nature of knowledge, since the answers the teacher was giving to students lacked justification in his own thinking.

Student A: Yeah, but she wasn't trying to understand it, she kept on trying to do it her way.

Student B: I was trying to understand it, it's just you weren't explaining right.

The teacher replies: [*To Student B*] Right now, I need you and Alani to find a way to cooperate to get this done and you need to, that's your job, that is *the* job that you have right now, to prove to each other that you can pass the test of working together, a much more important test to me than whether you do the star test right, I want to see how you learn to cooperate with each other, *that is* one of the big parts of this job.

The two girls are then shown to be fully cooperating together, sharing ideas, physically coordinating movements to hold up the pulley, and singing through the task until its completion.⁴⁵

With reference to this case, I will discuss three ways that we can understand what it means for a teacher to learn to understand and express the educative dimension of humility by listening to students. First, the example illustrates that through listening teachers learn of the particular discontinuities in students' learning processes (which, in this case, was related to them each running up against a social difficulty in working together). The teacher in the example listens in a way that appears to take seriously the discontinuities in the two students' learning processes. In doing so, the teacher gains an understanding of the students' needs with respect to their social and moral blind spots. Her decision to modify the task to become a task around working together and collaborating, rather than primarily a task to learn a scientific concept, reveals her ability to shift her practice to address an oversight in her original design of the task, and transform it to fit the needs of these particular learners at this particular time. In this self-critical shift, which reflects the teacher's pedagogical tact or *phronesis*, the teacher shows an ability to help the learners' where they were stuck, and transform what could have been a "destructive" discontinuity in their experience (which, in this case, can be characterised as a form of frustration that could have not only made them stop learning the science task, but also stop any desire to learn with and from each other) to a "productive," and reflective learning process. Learning humility through teaching then means that teachers learn through the engagement with particular learners; they learn what the limits of their knowledge and ability are in relation to those particular learners. To understand how this works it is helpful to take recourse to Nel Noddings' distinction between

⁴⁵ *August to June: Bringing Life to Schools*. DVD, directed by Tom Valens (Tamalpais Productions, 2013). 1:13-1:15.

assumed needs and expressed needs.⁴⁶ Before a specific encounter with learners, the teacher can and must reflectively try to speculate about particular learners' needs and assume certain needs based on the assumed level of knowledge and ability of the students. But their actual needs are expressed within the interaction; they *emerge through the interaction*. The teacher who is teaching in a strong sense takes this difference between assumed and expressed needs seriously and recognises the need to seek appropriate ways to shift practice in the moment.

Secondly, the example illustrates more indirectly how teachers learn of the *possible* discontinuities in learning—difficulties, doubts, fears, frustrations—that students' can have more generally, either with reference to a particular subject matter or with reference to the social and moral demands of learning. This may look differently depending on the age group of the students, but even in higher education, as groups of students' come together of different gender, race or cultural backgrounds, questions of how to help students learn together and overcome potential bias can become an explicit part of the teacher's task in reaching specific intellectual goals relating to the subject matter. Through the interactions with students, teachers gain a greater sense of how learning tasks can break down when students try to work together. Over time teachers acquire humility by continuing to encounter certain types of limitations, and expanding their understanding of what limitations are possible as they gain an increased understanding of students' needs.

Finally, there is a third way that we can understand how the educative dimension of humility is gained in teaching practice. Through the practice of teaching that is connected to the concept of strong sense teaching, teachers learn to have the *disposition* of pedagogical tact or *phronesis* in teaching. This involves recognising the inherent and necessary limitation that is part of what it means to be a teacher. This inherent limitation is found in the fact that one's own determination of whether an act of teaching is productive and educative must always be tempered by the fact that the learner co-creates the educational situation. What counts as an educational experience has to be negotiated with particular learners. As the particularities of this negotiation become more apparent within the practice of teaching, teachers learn how to better plan for learning situations, and better respond to the unexpected situations that arise in the moment. In considering this, we can understand why Freire states (somewhat cryptically) that humility is expressed as an "uncertain certainty" or an "insecure

⁴⁶ Nel Noddings, "Identifying and Responding to Needs in Education," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 35, 2 (2005): 147-159. Accessed June 1, 2016. doi:10.1080/03057640500146757.

security.”⁴⁷ Reflective, “strong sense” teaching, in practice means learning, over time, how to plan for situations that are educational. In this sense, teachers can gain confidence in their plans. However, at the same time, since educational situations always involve the learners’ contributions, teachers can never foresee entirely what the situations of learning will demand. Taken together, the confidence that builds up through understanding the relation of theory to practice, and the uncertainty that necessarily accompanies it, is part of what makes humility a virtue that is gained gradually through the practice of teaching.

Teaching in the strong sense implies seeing teaching as a task that involves being attuned to the learner as a *person*, and this means understanding students’ embodied experiences, including both cognitive and social-moral needs of students. To say that teachers gain humility over time through a reflective strong sense of teaching means that through their continual engagement with learners, they begin to gain a sense of students’ needs generally. When this understanding of students takes hold, this can lead to profound expressions of humility, like that expressed recently by Steven Strogatz, Professor of Applied Mathematics at Cornell, who confessed in his blog that his lectures were not getting students to engage deeply with the material, and how this led him to completely redesigned his approach to teaching.⁴⁸ The truly reflective teacher also is always aware that she can never be freed from the fact that new, unexpected needs can arise in the moment with new learners. Whether a teacher genuinely addresses the needs of learners, whether her teaching is educative (in that it takes account of those needs and helps learners reflectively address their own limitations), is always negotiated in the act of teaching itself. This act therefore must involve reflective engagement and dialogue with students.

A Note on Cultivating Virtues in Students: The case of Humility

In 1909, Dewey makes an important connection between teaching and its relation to students’ virtues or vices, which is still relevant today. He makes the point that forms of transmission teaching actually contribute to students’ development of egoism. He writes, if teaching is construed as mere handing off of pre-packaged facts, which involves treating human beings as if they are passive recipients of knowledge, that is, as isolated individuals, who learn by way of absorption, and recitation, and also involves the judgement of such learners solely on the basis of

⁴⁷ Freire, *Teachers as cultural workers*, 72.

⁴⁸ See the two full blog posts at <https://www.artofmathematics.org/blogs/cvonrenesse/steven-strogatz-reflection-part-1> and <https://www.artofmathematics.org/blogs/cvonrenesse/steven-strogatz-reflection-part-2>.

their individual output, then their capacity for participation and cooperation is hindered. Such modes of interaction that we call teaching, he contends, actually have the potential to detrimentally change what he calls the "social spirit" of human beings into an individualist way of thinking and behaviour.⁴⁹

This sentiment relates to a more recent point by Paul, who notes the connection between passive learning and the development of students' intellectual arrogance, that is, that they come to believe "they *know* a lot about each subject, whether or not they understand it."⁵⁰ He argues that schools and teachers do not promote intellectual and moral virtues when they focus on 'speed learning' and students gaining superficial chunks of compartmentalised knowledge. Like Dewey, he underscores that in fact, such ways of structuring learning processes lead to "intellectual arrogance" because they discourage "intellectual perseverance and confidence in reason," "provide no foundation for intellectual empathy," and instead promote students' "taking in and giving back masses of detail."⁵¹

These statements are still relevant today as educational policies around the world are pushing teachers and schools to quickly get students towards predetermined outcomes measurable on standardised tests. Even if teachers themselves have different theoretical understandings of what teaching is, in practice, such policies force teachers to comply with mechanical, unreflective modes of 'teaching,' which at its most extreme, as I have argued above, results in activities that would not deserve to be called teaching at all.

With Dewey and others helping us to understand how teaching as a mechanical, transmissive task can cultivate students' vices—such as arrogance—can we conclude that reflective, dialogic forms of teaching described above, which in theory and in practice strongly oppose mechanical transmissive teaching, contribute to cultivating students' virtues, such as humility?

Answering this question has not been the focus of this paper, however, there are certain conclusions relating to this question implied by my above discussion above. First, it would be wrong to conclude that because a teacher has humility, her students' can gain humility by simple imitation. In a strong sense of teaching, teaching virtues is always indirect; virtues cannot be directly taught, nor cultivated through the disciplined imitation of certain behaviours. Imitation of behaviours associated with humility does not imply understanding, and being

⁴⁹ John Dewey, "Moral Principles in Education (1909)," in *The Collected Works of John Dewey. The Middle Works*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 275-279; see also, Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 44.

⁵⁰ Paul, "Chapter 13," 192.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 192; see also 191-193.

virtuous, as I view it, requires certain understandings of self and other.⁵² I have sought to show that part of the teacher's task is to help the learner identify his or her own limitations, and not to see these as end points to the learning process or as signs of not learning, but rather as part of the learning process itself. In that process, the learner learns of herself as a learning being, which means that she learns that she can move past unexpected obstacles. She learns that even though she cannot overcome the fact that she is subject to circumstances beyond her control, she can create aims reflectively in order to thoughtfully and critically engage with the world and others. In doing so, the learner also learns to see others as those she can learn from, and gains a sense of her own fallibility. When learners learn to grasp the equality between human beings as beings that can and must learn from each other, they begin to understand the type of respect that, as Freire says, is part of humility.⁵³

When teaching aims to support learners in identifying and engaging discontinuities in personal and social experience, and also create opportunities for them to productively do so, then learners learn humility not only as an awareness of limitation, and not only as involving motivation and action to inquire into that limitation, but they also learn humility in its educative dimension; they learn that others are those from whom they can learn. In this sense, we can say that a strong sense of teaching contributes, rather than hinders, the growth of the social spirit in human beings—the spirit of interconnectedness, and interdependence upon others as inherent to what it means to be human.

Conclusion: The Hard Problem of *Teacher Evaluation*

It would be hard to argue against the fact that not only in primary and secondary education, but also in higher education, there needs to be systems in place for the evaluation of teaching practice. Increasingly around the world, primary and secondary teachers are being subjected to high-stakes evaluation methods, which tie the efficacy of their teaching to students' scores on standardised tests.⁵⁴ Of course, this evaluation approach has not yet come into place in higher education,

⁵² It is beyond the scope of my argument to defend this point here.

⁵³ Freire, *Teachers as cultural workers*, 71-72.

⁵⁴ "The Good Teacher" study mentioned above, reports that these strict accountability measures are contributing to hindering teachers' good practice (Arthur et al., *The Good Teacher*, 27-29). For an interesting discussion of many of the problems and complexities with current practices of teacher evaluation in schools see, Julie Cohen and Dan Goldhaber, "Building a More Complete Understanding of Teacher Evaluation using Classroom Observation," *Educational Researcher* 45, 6 (2016), DOI: 10.3102/0013189X16659442.

but even there, evaluations of teaching on the basis of general categories at the end of a course are increasing in popularity. Such evaluations ask students to rank the course, e.g. according to whether it enhanced one's skills and abilities.⁵⁵ Looking at the direction of higher education policy in the UK, which will implement the Teacher Evaluation Framework (TEF),⁵⁶ there is strong indication that these and other such evaluations of teaching will affect higher education hiring and promotion.

There are at least two problems with these common approaches to teacher evaluation. One problem is whether they in fact measure what a student has learned. But setting that aside, the more pressing issue for the present discussion is that these methods evaluate teaching on the basis of its relation to the ends or results of a student's learning process. So what is the problem? Shouldn't we say that to some extent teaching has to guarantee certain learning outcomes, if it is to be called teaching at all?

This brings us to what I call the "hard problem of teacher evaluation" (a loose analogy to Chalmers' "hard problem of consciousness"). As mentioned, a common way to evaluate teaching is to look at it from narrowly defined ends, specifically from the positive outcomes it "produced" in the learner. We could say that if we just used better measures of student learning, e.g. more complex evaluations of critical thinking, and other assessments of student thinking and understanding at the end of a lesson or course, then this would "solve" the hard problem and give an accurate evaluation of whether the teaching was in fact good. But such evaluations involve inferences and these are necessarily limited; students' lack of understanding in a subject area does not necessarily mean that it was a result of bad teaching, just as students' increased understanding does not necessarily mean that it was the result of good teaching.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ This question was put forward as part of a higher education teacher evaluation system called Evasys.

⁵⁶ On this framework see DBIS, *Teaching Excellence Framework: Technical Consultation for Year Two* (London: Department for Innovation, Business and Schools, 2016).

⁵⁷ As one math study shows in what it calls "the learning miracle", students of teachers who teach mathematics falsely can still gain mathematical understanding, see Marja van den Heuvel-Panhuizen, "The Learning Paradox and the Learning Miracle. Thoughts on Primary School Mathematics Education," *Journal für Mathematik-Didaktik* 24, 3 (2003): 96-121; see also a discussion of this case in Sönke Ahrens, "Die Unfähigkeit des Lehrmeisters und die Wirksamkeit des Lehrens," in *Philosophie des Lehrens*, eds. H.-C. Koller, Roland Reichenbach and Norbert Ricken (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2012). Hare makes a similar point in relation to the virtue of open-mindedness, stating that just because a student becomes open-minded, we cannot conclude that this was a result of his or her teacher being open-minded, see Hare, *Open-Mindedness and Education*.

As discussed, teaching in the strong sense necessarily links to learners' processes of experience and thinking, especially to their experience of limitation and their inquiry into that limitation that takes place in time through embodied interactions with subject matter, teacher and peers. What makes teaching *teaching* is the very ways a teacher links to these processes in the situations that they occur. Thus evaluating teaching from the end of a process—really a collection of processes that involve complex interactions and relations with oneself and others—is necessarily limited. This approach overlooks the process of teaching that, as I have shown, involves self-reflection on limitations, self-questioning, responsiveness, listening and associated virtues of the teacher—indispensable features that are more difficult to observe and measure. The hard problem of teaching evaluation is then the problem of evaluating the *process* of teaching, a process that is in a certain sense *invisible* while a teacher is teaching, and in a certain sense *erased* once the learner has learned. It is invisible because much of what counts in the kinds of teaching that promote transformative learning and understanding is in the teacher's own thinking processes that lead her to make certain decisions over others (whether that is in planning stages or in changing course during a lesson through the use of practical wisdom). It is *erased* because, as mentioned, the results of learning do not necessarily reveal the path of teaching that led to them. They do not reveal the teacher's humility or other essential virtues in teaching such as empathy, open-mindedness, and imagination. Certainly, I am in favour of complex measurements of student learning that can get at students' ability to think critically and creatively and demonstrate understanding. But, if we value virtues in teaching, then we have to also value the processes of teaching and how these link to processes of learning.

To approach this hard problem, we have to have an explicit philosophical concept of teaching to guide any empirical evaluation of teaching practice. This concept, the indicators used to identify its expression in teaching practice, and how these are analysed, must remain open to debate. In this sense, it is a task of philosophy of education to squarely face this hard problem.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ I want to thank the editors Adam J. Carter, Duncan Pritchard and Jesper Kallestrup, as well as Adam Linson, Leonard Waks, Megan Laverty for critical feedback on earlier versions of this paper, and also the participants at my talks on this topic for their questions, which contributed to improving this paper.

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