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2016

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Intellectual Elites: The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Philosophy

by

Maura Margaret Priest

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Sven Bernecker, Co-Chair
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2016

DEDICATION

To

Those who Disagree with Me

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am so grateful to so many people. I can start with Gary Hartenburg whose business ethics class inspired my decision to become a philosophy major. Next let me give a resounding shout out to the outstanding philosophy department at California State University, Fullerton. Somehow these fantastic folks managed to prepare a life-long academic slacker for a PhD in just over a year. It truly is an outstanding undergraduate department. I am especially thankful to Heather Battally, whose ongoing help and encouragement has been absolutely invaluable.

I can never thank the philosophy department at UC Irvine enough (Go Anteaters)! Let me begin by thanking the amazing staff, Alice, Sara, Kirsten, and Miriam. It is hard to know who to thank next. I am so fortunate to have had the pleasure of working with so many people who consistently treated me so much better than I could ever deserve. I had an especially amazing dissertation committee, chaired by great philosophers (Sven Bernecker and Margaret Gilbert), who are even greater friends, and even more amazing persons. Casey Perin (peeps 4 life) I can never thank you enough and I so want to be like you when I grow up. Jeff Helmreich, thanks so much for all your feedback and fantastic conversations (beginning with the night I drove you to UCI for your interview). And I cannot forget Matt Zwolinski who has gone so far out of his way to help me that he has seriously helped restore my faith in humanity. There is a long list of others (like my students, awesome friends Ashly Dressel and Cailin O'Connor, the list goes on...) and I am sorry I cannot mention them all.

My favorite part of philosophy has and will always be personal conversations with other philosophers. So to everyone I have had a one-on-one conversation with thank you for making this profession worth all the other nonsense.

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"Blame After Forgiveness." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 19(3), (June 2016): 619-633.

"Paternalism, Autonomy, and Food Regulation." *Public Affairs Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (July 2015): 327- 343.

"Party Politics and Democratic Disagreement." *Philosophia* 42, no. 1 (March 2014): 137-149.

"Conversations and Collective Belief." In *Perspectives on Pragmatics and Philosophy* edited by Alessandro Capone, Franco Lo Piparo, and Marco Carapezza, 1-34. New York: Springer, 2013. (*With Margaret Gilbert)

"Social Rules." *Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, Edited by Byron Kaldis, 931-33. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013 (*With Margaret Gilbert)

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Intellectual Elites: The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy University of California, Irvine, 2016

Professors Sven Bernecker & Margaret Gilbert, Co-Chairs

My dissertation explores ethical and political issues related to “intellectual elites.” At minimum, intellectual elites are persons intellectually better off than non-elites. Elites tend to know more, have higher natural aptitudes for knowledge acquisition, and reside in epistemically favorable environments. Such elites motivate conceptual and ethical questions which my dissertation attempts to answer. Conceptually, I delineate what makes someone an elite and how to distinguish elites from non-elites. Ethical issues I discuss include the moral responsibilities of elites and the relation between morally admirable qualities and the epistemically advantageous. Other broad themes addressed throughout the work include characteristics of intellectual elites; what might constitute praiseworthy interactions between elites and non-elites, and how social institutions can and should influence intellectual norms. In discussing these issues, I draw on literature from ethics, political philosophy, and the sciences

INTRODUCTION

My dissertation is a collection of interrelated essays that explore issues related to “intellectual elites.” At minimum, intellectual elites are persons epistemically better off than non-elites. If A is epistemically better off than B, then A has some advantage when it comes to either the possession or the potential to acquire knowledge or justified beliefs. Elites tend to know more, have higher natural aptitudes for knowledge acquisition, and reside in epistemically favorable environments. Such elites motivate important conceptual and normative questions. Conceptually, we might seek to delineate what makes someone an intellectual elite and how to distinguish elites from non-elites. Normative questions have both an ethical and epistemic dimension. Epistemological concerns deal with how persons become and remain a member of the elite class. Ethical questions might examine the moral responsibilities of elites and the relationship between morally admirable qualities and the epistemically advantageous. In discussing these issues, I draw on literature from both epistemology and ethics, focusing on virtue epistemology and ethical theories of humility.

The dissertation’s five chapters (previewed below) focus on the following broad theoretical themes: characteristics of intellectual elites; how to understand appropriate interactions between elites and non-elites; how social institutions can and should influence intellectual norms; the virtues and vices of elite individuals and collectives, and the moral responsibilities of elite individuals and collectives.

My first chapter, “Risk Sensitive Credit”, characterizes the intellectual elite class via traits that advantage knowledge acquisition. I propose an account of intellectual excellence explained in terms of cost-benefit analysis and risk assessment. Since intellectual resources are limited, exerting more epistemic energy than necessary is detrimental to an intellectual life well-

lived. The best epistemic agents preserve intellectual energy whenever this does not interfere with a greater good. They are also careful not to form beliefs on little evidence, for the risk of false belief is too high a cost. I incorporate the above “risk sensitive” epistemic perspective into a more general theory of knowledge. Building off the recent literature on so-called *credit theories* of knowledge, I propose my own version of credit theory, “Risk Sensitive Credit” (RSC). Under my account, an agent deserves credit and thereby acquires knowledge just in case she believes truly on account of her reasonably accurate epistemic risk assessment.

Chapter Two, “Epistemic Greed”, is inspired by Miranda Fricker’s much discussed book, *Epistemic Injustice*. Fricker identifies two types of epistemic wrongs: (1) Taking knowers less seriously than they deserve on account of irrelevant reasons (for example, race and gender); (2) The inability of some social groups to communicate with other social groups. While I agree with the importance of such injustices, there is another wrong she admits to not discussing: the unequal distribution of epistemic goods, resources, and benefits. I argue that in this distributive scheme, there has been a societal bias that favors the epistemically rich at the expense of the epistemically underprivileged. My paper seeks to shed light on the following questions. Is the behavior of intellectual elites, (a) really much different from billionaires discussing expensive wines on a millionaire dollar yacht, and (b) do intellectual elites have the same sort of (imperfect) obligation to share in their epistemic wealth as the rich have to share their economic wealth?

Chapter Three, “Intellectual Humility: An Interpersonal Theory”, offers an original account of intellectual humility, arguing that we need to fundamentally change assumptions that have been guiding the contemporary literature. Most theories suggest that humility is primarily a virtue concerning attitudes toward our own abilities or accomplishments. I have another take.

Humility's essential features concern an agent's attitudes and acts towards *others*. The literature has mistaken humility for a personal virtue when it is better understood as an *interpersonal* virtue. The intellectually humble recognizing their own superior epistemic status, nonetheless, they lack any sense of intellectual entitlement. Those who are intellectually humble, in spite of recognizing their epistemic superiority, do not push their views upon others nor attempt to manipulate inferiors into holding the right beliefs. The intellectually humble simply do not believe that their superiority entitles them to control the intellect of the epistemically misguided.

Chapter Four, "Collective Intellectual Humility", begins with a conceptual discussion, noting that while there are many similarities between the intellectual humility of individuals and the same virtue of collectives, there are also important distinctions. For instance, there are two equally important entities that a collective might direct its humility *toward*. A collective can practice humility in respect to the collective's own members, or, on the other hand, to those external to the collective. This makes the collective virtue far more complex than the same virtue for individuals. It also means that collective humility, as well as collective pride, might have far-reaching social consequences. Along these lines, part II of this chapter explains that an intellectually humble collective, whether a nation, university, or sports team, is one that adopts politically liberal principles and policies. Two central liberal tenets are (1) respect for all persons as moral equals and (2) acceptance of reasonable pluralism. This chapter explains why and how these tenets are essential to collective epistemic humility. It also explores the differing ways collectives can utilize the virtue of intellectual humility when interacting with outside institutions.

The last chapter, "Inferior Disagreement" explores disagreements between epistemic superiors and inferiors. I was inspired to write on the topic after becoming familiar with the

literature on the epistemology of disagreement and noticing an exclusive focus on intellectual equals. It seemed that the literature would benefit from expanding the scope of discussion to disagreement between intellectual superiors and inferiors. The chapter argues that superiors must take care to distinguish *competent* inferiors from *incompetent* inferiors. Competence evaluation should be based on a probability calculus. When estimates suggest an inferior is more likely to answer correctly than incorrectly, superiors should not dismiss the inferior's opinion.

CHAPTER 1

RISK SENSITIVE CREDIT

ABSTRACT

Credit theorists claim to explain why luck and knowledge are incompatible and also what makes knowledge valuable. If the theory works as well as they think, it accomplishes a lot. Unsurprisingly, however, some epistemologists remain unsure. Jennifer Lackey, for instance, proposes a dilemma that suggests credit theories are either too strong or too weak. Her criticism has been hard to overcome. This paper suggests a modified account of knowledge as credit for true belief that allows credit theorists to better counter Lackey's criticism. I call my version of credit theory Risk Sensitive Credit (RSC). Under my account, an agent deserves credit just in case she believes truly on account of her reasonably accurate epistemic risk assessment. This assessment need not include higher order beliefs or even enter into conscious thought. Recent work in cognitive science, for instance, suggests that our visual faculties, in the absence of our direct awareness, work in accordance with a risk sensitive framework. This research will be incorporated to help explain the dynamics of barn facade Gettier cases.

1.1 Credit & Credit Theory

As much disagreement as there is among epistemologists, there are a few points on which most can come together. We think that knowledge is valuable, that it is incompatible with certain kinds of luck, and that finding out just what it takes to know something would be pretty nice. Credit theory is one of the latest schools of epistemic thought that attempts to address all these

issues we care about. What it takes to know, credit theorists argue, is creditworthy true belief. There is disagreement over qualifications for creditworthiness, but at minimum, the true belief must be attributable to the believer.¹ This much alone gives epistemologists a lot. It explains what kind of luck is incompatible with knowledge and why lucky belief is a problem at all. Knowledge sabotaging luck interferes with, prevents, or nullifies an agent's creditworthiness; instead of attributing a true belief to the believer, we are inclined to say, "He just got lucky."

Creditworthiness is normative: if S deserves credit, S did what she epistemically ought to have done. John Greco, for instance, argues that, "a central task of epistemology is to provide an account of the normativity involved" (2010:4). Whatever the specifics, normativity seems linked to ability. To return to Greco, knowledge is "a kind of success through ability" (2010:104). Ernest Sosa puts things in terms of competence: "A performance is apt if its success manifests a competence seated in the agent" (2009:12). Although their views are not identical, both Greco and Sosa claim that knowledge acquisition demands (1) success (true belief) and (2) that the agent herself contributed to (1). The second component not only insures a belief is owing to the agent instead of luck, it explains why knowledge is valuable. Because epistemic credit is an achievement and we value achievements, we also value knowledge.

So credit theorists claim to explain why luck and knowledge are incompatible and also what makes knowledge valuable. If the theory works as well as they think, it accomplishes a lot. Unsurprisingly, however, some epistemologists remain unsure. The most compelling objection is perhaps a dilemma posed by Jennifer Lackey. She argues that credit theories are either too strong or too weak; that the framework will either grant knowledge when it should deny it or deny knowledge when it should grant it. This paper suggests a modification to Greco's account that

¹ Another term that has been used is 'creditable'. However, as Greco has noted, "'[C]reditable' is ambiguous between 'praiseworthy' and 'attributable'" (2012: 5). Credit for true belief need not imply praiseworthiness.

allows credit theorists to better counter Lackey's criticism. With this change, credit theory can rival any conceptual account on the epistemic market.

I call my version of credit theory Risk Sensitive Credit (RSC). Here is a quick and dirty definition: an agent deserves credit just in case she believes truly on account of her reasonably accurate epistemic risk assessment. This assessment need not include higher order beliefs or even enter into conscious thought. Recent work in cognitive science, for instance, suggests that our visual faculties, in the absence of our direct awareness, work in accordance with a risk sensitive framework. This research will be referenced to help explain the dynamics of barn facade Gettier cases. In preview, Henry's mistake can be understood as an instance in which his perceptual system's risk framework goes awry.

Risk Sensitive Credit has explanatory advantages over other credit theories. When credit is understood in terms of risk sensitivity, theorists can more easily respond to Lackey. Put simply, Morris deserves credit because his belief is risk sensitive while Henry's is not. An additional benefit of RSC is its compatibility with two epistemic intuitions that may seem in tension. First, it often seems that knowers deserve credit for what they know. And second, epistemic agents can do a lot right yet fail to know. Under RSC, the first intuition is explained as follows: justified beliefs must be risk sensitive; sensitivity is both a reliability constraint and makes the true belief attributable to the believer. But in line with the second intuition, an agent might have a true belief while doing a lot right yet fail to have a risk sensitive belief.

Section II disambiguates two senses of credit and argues that failure to distinguish them has created unnecessary confusion. Recognizing that credit theorists and their critics are using distinct concepts, we can understand why they disagree and why certain objections posed by credit theory critics actually bear no relevance to credit theory at all. Section III discusses Lackey's challenge

regarding barn facade Gettier cases. Section IV reviews Greco's response to Lackey's dilemma and argues that it is inadequate. Section V argues for a modification to Greco's account, drawing on ideas from Sosa, David Henderson and Terry Horgan. With reference to the previous section, Section VI resolves Lackey's dilemma and Section VII offers concluding remarks.

1.2 Confusion in Chicago

Lackey's challenge case concerns an agent who easily acquires testimonial knowledge.

Let us revisit the example from her original article:

CHICAGO VISITOR: Having just arrived at the train station in Chicago, Morris wishes to obtain directions to the Sears Tower. He looks around, approaches the first adult passer-by that he sees, and asks how to get to his desired destination. The passer-by, who happens to be a Chicago resident who knows the city extraordinarily well, provides Morris with impeccable directions to the Sears Tower by telling him that it is located two blocks east of the train station. Morris unhesitatingly forms the corresponding true belief (2007:352).

The criticism is this: It seems Morris knows the way to the Tower but is unworthy of credit. All he did was ask a random stranger, which takes little cognitive work. If anything, the testifier deserves the credit. So contra credit theory, S can know without credit for the true belief.

Credit theorists argue that despite any appearance to the contrary, Morris does deserve credit. First off, credit can be shared, and second, credit can be easy. Wayne Riggs (2009) notes that Morris might lack knowledge. But if he does know, we can assume he acted with circumspection worthy of *some* credit.² Sosa puts things in terms of partial credit.³ Greco moves in a slightly different direction, appealing to practical needs. He asks us to imagine a soccer player who scores

² "Why do we suppose that someone has to get *all* the credit? Why not just say that both the parties involved get some credit for the recipient's true belief?" (Riggs, 2009:217)(original emphasis).

³ "If we think of animal knowledge as apt belief, and of belief as apt when correct attributable to a competence, then the fullest credit often belongs to a group, even a motley group. Seated in the group collectively is a competence whose complex exercise leads through testimonial links to the correctness of one's present belief. The correctness of one's belief is still attributable in part to a competence seated in oneself individually, but the credit that one earns will then be partial at best" (Sosa, 2007).

off an excellent pass: the player deserves credit even though scoring was easy and the more difficult feat was the pass. Practical needs were served – the team needed a goal and the player’s actions furthered this end. Similarly, Morris deserves credit even if the truth came easily and the more difficult feat belonged to the testifier. Morris’s need was information to locate the Tower; the relevant testimony got him just that. Serving epistemic needs can be easy; and hence, so can credit.

The Morris dispute brings out two confusions. The first involves “shared credit” and the second the relation between credit and effort. I believe that the former has been adequately addressed. We have no reason to think that the testifier’s creditworthiness in any way suggests the recipient’s unworthiness. Credit can be shared in such a way that each party deserves significant credit for the given instance of knowledge acquisition.⁴ Hence critics who point out the testifier’s creditworthiness speak to something which is true but irrelevant. It is true that the testifier deserves a lot of credit for Morris’s true belief, but this is irrelevant to the question of Morris’s creditworthiness. Because credit can be shared, the testifier might deserve a lot of credit while Morris is still creditworthy to the extent needed for him to acquire knowledge. As Greco has argued, “[C]redit for an achievement, gained in cooperation with others, is not swamped by the able performance of others. It’s not even swamped by the outstanding performance of others. So long as one’s own efforts and abilities are appropriately involved, one deserves credit for the achievement” (2009: 228). In other words, what matters is not *quantity* but *quality*.⁵

⁴ Riggs makes this point. He notes that Morris’s knowledge acquisition, “[I]sn’t a contest” and that, “Whether someone else has done more than I have is simply irrelevant. Remember this is not about doling out praise, it is only about determining whether it is reasonable to attribute getting things right to the recipient” (2009:218). This ‘getting things right’ is the success. And as Riggs points out, it is a success that one did not arrive at through competition. Not all victories are victories over another.

⁵ “The new picture retains the idea that S’s abilities are important in the causal story regarding how S comes to have a true belief, but it makes ‘importance’ qualitative rather than quantitative. Rather than saying that S’s abilities must be ‘important enough’ in the causal story, we will say that they must be ‘important in the right way’” (Greco, 2012:13).

Creditworthiness should be measured on a scale of epistemic excellence, not relative epistemic contribution, and not, as I shall argue, epistemic effort.

As mentioned, some credit theorists have argued that credit can be “easy”. I agree, but I also think this idea can use further explication. Critics of credit theory may be skeptical of this easy credit, because these critics are using a different definition of creditworthiness than are credit theory advocates. CHIACGO VISITOR brings to light divided pre-theoretical intuitions concerning creditworthiness. On the one hand we see creditworthiness tied to admirable or even ethical characteristics. We think that the hard-working student with little ability deserves more credit than the gifted lazy student. Notwithstanding, we might give the former student B’s and the latter A’s. So in this other sense the lazy student deserves more credit. This is demonstrated in the higher grade: he earned more academic credit. We conceptualize credit in terms of both effort and excellence, which often go hand in hand, but often come apart.

When criticizing credit theory, Lackey assumes the effort conception. In her own words, “[T]he absolutely *minimal work* being done by the recipient of testimony casts serious doubt on the plausibility of him deserving credit for the truth of his belief” (2009:37) (emphasis added).⁶ Perhaps Lackey is right insofar as the recipient of testimony has a minimal epistemic workload. Note, however, that Lackey’s claim that this casts doubt on Morris’s creditworthiness holds only if we understand credit in terms of effort. If conceptualizing in terms of excellence, ‘minimal work’ counts neither for nor against creditworthiness. And this is how credit theorists seem and

⁶ At another point Lackey again puts her dilemma in terms of the ‘minimal work’ being done by the testimony recipient, “As should be clear, either horn of this dilemma undermines the Credit View of Knowledge at its core. For, on the first horn, credit may be adequately blocked in Gettier-type cases, but only at the expense of also blocking credit in countless cases where testimonial knowledge is intuitively present despite *minimal work* being done on the part of the hearer. And, on the second horn, credit is secured in cases of testimonial knowledge where such *minimal work* is done by the recipient, but only at the expense of also securing credit in Gettier-type cases. Either way, the Credit View not only fails to shed light on what is absent in Gettier-type cases.

ought to understand the concept. Credit theories are virtue theories and virtue theories are theories of excellence. As Greco has noted, "...the notion of 'virtue' in play is *personal level excellence*" (2012: 9) (original emphasis). Yes, "knowledge" is a success term. But often to our dismay, success and effort come apart. We like to root for the underdog, the disadvantaged hard worker that overcomes all odds. In an ideal world, merit might directly correlate with effort. But in this imperfect one, hard work can fall short; some try yet fail and others achieve effortless success. It would not be surprising to learn, for instance, that hard working athletes are sometimes denied MVP awards in favor of lazy yet more talented athletes. Likewise with epistemic endeavors: those who put in ample epistemic effort can fail to acquire knowledge while the epistemically lazy painlessly acquire copious stockpiles of knowledge.⁷

Theorists have spent considerable time arguing for Morris's creditworthiness, but all that was necessary was a clarification of terms. The credit Morris earned and needed was credit in terms of excellence. Whether he worked hard or had significant help is irrelevant; Morris performed as an excellent epistemic agent ought. As Riggs has put it, "There is not some stable threshold of effort...that must be superseded... (We) simply have to do enough to bring it about." (2009:218). Indeed. And sometimes very little is also just enough. CHICAGO VISITOR, for example, suggests that epistemic excellence and laziness are not mutually exclusive.

Consider a variant example:

BOOTSTRAP BUCK: Buck is a rugged epistemic individual, a "pull yourself up from your bootstraps" type of guy. He steps off the Chicago train determined to form a true belief about the Sears Tower: on his own. He wants full epistemic credit. Accordingly, he refuses to ask for directions, turns off his smart phone and will not even glance at a map. Instead, Buck uses intuition, the location of the

⁷ I am not, of course, claiming that this is the usual course of things. Generally speaking, there may be a correlation between epistemic effort and epistemic success. My point is simply that this is not always or necessarily the case; sometimes epistemic effort fails while epistemic laziness leads to success.

sun, memory, and wholesome epistemic grit. Thirteen hours later, exhausted but satisfied, Buck finds himself in front of the Sears Tower. With tired pride, he forms the justified true belief, “The Sears Tower is located at ‘233 S. Wacker Drive.’”

We see that no one other than Buck deserves credit for his true belief. But is he Morris’s epistemic superior? Probably not. Maybe Buck had non-epistemic reasons to behave as he did. Perhaps he wanted the exercise, was seeking adventure, or preparing for a survivalist TV show. But if Buck’s goals were purely epistemic, he behaved like a fool. The time and effort spent searching could have been used on other epistemic endeavors: reading Descartes Meditations, conversing with a physicist or listening to a lecture at Northwestern University. Whatever the alternative, it would surely offer greater epistemic returns than the Tower expedition.

Using more cognitive prowess than necessary may contribute to success in one instance, but resource wasters are unlikely to live fruitful epistemic lives. Insofar as extraneous effort impedes an epistemic life well lived, it is epistemically vicious. We can return again to Riggs who has noted, “It would be silly to require that someone do more than was necessary to bring about some end in order for it to be attributable to them that they did so” (2009: 218). Yes, it would be silly to require this, and as Buck shows us, even sillier to act as though it was required. But if Buck exemplified a vice rather than a virtue, must credit theorists deny that he acquires knowledge? This would be a serious problem. No matter the inefficiency, it does seem Buck knows when he finally arrives at his destination. Credit theorists can respond as follows. Credit should be understood in two senses: credit qua epistemic agent, and credit qua token belief. The former is acquired when an agent’s belief forming mechanism, (1) is attributable to the agent, and (2) contributes to an epistemic life well-lived. The latter is reserved for belief forming mechanisms which (1) are attributable to the agent, and (2) reliably lead to true belief. Each kind of credit can be had without the other. An agent might do everything right and yet believe

falsely. In these cases credit is earned qua epistemic agent, but not token belief. An agent might also, however, use a belief formation process that is inefficient yet reliable. This is what happens with Buck, and we see that he earns credit qua token belief but lacks credit qua epistemic agent. Throughout the rest of the paper, I focus on credit qua token belief. Much more will be said, but so far we have this: credit is earned when a true belief is attributable to the believer's epistemic excellence. Whether or not that excellence was easy or difficult is immaterial.

Let us briefly examine how credit for excellence relates to the testimony case under consideration. If an act of belief acquisition is to qualify as excellent and hence creditworthy, we must consider at least three things. First, was the means of belief acquisition reliable? Second, can we attribute the use of such reliable means to the believer? Third, can we identify the presence of any credit undermining defeaters? Creditworthy beliefs will have a "yes" answer to the first two questions and a "no" to the third. Regarding question one, let us just say that many have the intuition that asking a competent looking stranger for directions reliably (or reliably enough) leads to true belief. We seem to think at least, that if the passerby is not competent she will admit so, rather than just make something up at random.⁸ After all, if directional inquiries usually failed there would be no point in asking in the first place. So credit theorists can claim that part of Morris's epistemic excellence is the excellence of reliability. Think of a soccer player that kicks the ball into a hard to reach corner of the net. This is an act of athletic excellence insofar as this means of shooting reliably leads to scored goals. Likewise then, asking a stranger

⁸ In "Knowledge and Credit", Lackey seems doubtful of this reasoning. In her own words, "[W]hat does an honest, competent passerby look like that would enable Morris to reliably distinguish her from a dishonest or directionally-challenged one... on any plausible reading of CHICAGO VISITOR, Morris could have just as easily approached a competent-looking liar or a directionally challenged speaker as he did an honest, knowledgeable, Chicago resident when asking for assistance in finding the Sears Tower" (2009: 31-2). If by 'just as easily', Lackey means to imply 'just as likely', this at least needs more argument. My experience with asking for directions suggests otherwise. Our intuition that we can gain knowledge by asking for directions is likely linked to our experience of this being a fairly reliable way of finding a desired location. But if by 'just as easily', Lackey means something other than likelihood, I will argue (in Section 5) that likelihood is what matters.

for directions is an act of epistemic excellence insofar as this means of belief formation reliably leads to true beliefs.

Next we must consider Morris's attribution. Interpreting the example in the most straightforward way, the use of a reliable means is indeed attributable to Morris. Assuming Morris is an ordinary fellow, he has some past experience with directional inquiries, or has observed others, or has conversed about the practice. Such features of his past explain, in part, why Morris behaved as he did. We can assume Morris did not ask on a whim, completely oblivious to the social practice of requesting directional help.⁹ Rather, if we interpret the case in an everyday way, we can assume Morris was aware of both the social practice of asking for directions and also its fairly high success rate. What is attributable to Morris is the non-accidental undertaking of requesting directions alongside a personal history of either success with this practice or acquaintance with the success of others. This attributably explains another source of excellence and thereby Morris's creditworthiness.

The last step in assessing Morris's creditworthiness is a typical search for epistemic defeaters. We are stipulating that the person Morris asked was not a drunk, a child, or a squirrel. Let us also presume no one nudged Morris on the train, whispering, "Whatever you do, don't ask for directions in Chicago!" It is also crucial that Morris did not have a lie-detecting smart-phone app that was set off when the passerby began to speak. If all this is the case and there is no other disqualifying defeaters, then we have no reason to strip Morris of credit. Morris, and many others who gain knowledge via testimony, act with epistemic excellence insofar as they use a reliable

⁹ Some might argue that Morris could acquire knowledge even if he was unaware of the practice of requesting directions and did ask on a whim. A case like this would be harder, although perhaps not impossible, for credit theorists to explain. I do not think, however, that credit theorists would need to account for this unusual interpretation. The force of Lackey's point is grounded in the ordinary intuition that Morris can attain knowledge by asking a stranger. The ordinary background story of such an occurrence is one in which Morris is familiar with the practice of asking for directions. The intuitive pull of her counterexample then, is linked to an ordinary construal of the case.

means of true belief acquisition and such use is attributable to them. This is enough for now. In Section 5 we will return to testimony, and I will go into further detail about the excellences of testimonial recipients.

1.3 Lackey's Dilemma: Part 2

Suppose we grant that credit theorists understand credit in terms of excellence and that Morris thereby acquires credit and knowledge. This responds to the first horn of Lackey's dilemma; it explains why Morris is creditworthy. What about the second horn, does understanding credit in terms of excellence make the theory too weak? Let us revisit the example Lackey uses to support her weakness accusation.

FAKE BARN: Henry is driving through the country, looks out the window, and forms the belief, "That's a barn." His belief is true. However, Henry is in Fake Barn Country, and the barn he saw was surrounded by fakes.¹⁰

We do not want to attribute knowledge to Henry. But Lackey argues that credit theories must do just this to avoid inconsistencies. Henry has a true justified belief that we can attribute to his vision and hence to his agency. Compare Henry to Morris: He also had a true, justified belief attributable to his agency. Lackey concludes that either both Morris and Henry deserve credit or neither does. If both do, then against intuitions, Henry knows that he is looking at a barn. If neither, then against intuitions, Morris fails to know the Tower's location. Explaining Morris's creditworthiness solves one problem at the expense of another: credit theorists must now explain why Henry *lacks credit*.

Prima facie, conceptualizing credit in terms of excellence is little help with dilemma part II. If Morris can be credited with epistemic excellence, it seems so can Henry. Morris earns

¹⁰ This example is based off of one credited to Carl Ginet and cited by Alvin Goldman (1976).

credit because he utilized his abilities in the right sort of way, a way that reliably leads to true belief. And credit theory critics will argue that we can say the same of Henry. Henry's true belief is at least partly attributable to his reliable vision. Then both Henry and Morris, it seems, can be credited with epistemic excellence because both utilized their own abilities in a way that reliably led to the acquisition of a true belief. The belief forming process was pretty easy for both Morris and Henry, but we have already established that credit has little to do with the arduousness of epistemic labor.

In Section V, I argue that contrary to first appearance, credit theorists can show that Morris is creditworthy but Henry is not. Because Morris's acquired his belief in a way that exemplified epistemic excellence, he earns credit and acquires knowledge. Henry lacks this excellence and so acquires neither credit nor knowledge. First, however, we should explain why current credit theories fail to give a satisfying account. I focus on Greco's theory, because with modification, it can explain Morris's creditworthiness and Henry's lack of it.

1.4 Greco's Solution

1.4.1 The Argument

Greco argues that credit theorists can counter Lackey's second criticism by noting that ability, and therefore creditworthiness, is relative to environment. According to Greco, "an agent might have an ability relative to one environment but not another" (2012:42). In this fashion, his argument continues, we might distinguish CHICAGO VISITOR and FAKE BARN. Morris's disposition to receive testimony was reliable in his environment; we cannot make the equivalent claim about Henry. In other words, within the environment of Fake Barn Country, Henry lacks a reliable disposition to identify barns. In Greco's words, "Henry believes from a disposition that is reliable relative to normal environments, but not relative to the environment he is in.

Accordingly, Henry does not know that the object he sees is a barn” (2012:25). Formally, Greco argues as follows:

1. Henry’s perceptual disposition regarding barns is not reliable relative to Fake Barn Country (and therefore does not count as an ability).
2. Credit and knowledge are only acquired if belief is produced by a disposition that is reliable relative to the environment.
3. Therefore Henry acquires neither credit nor knowledge.

In contrast to Henry, Morris’s relevant disposition was reliable on that busy Chicago sidewalk and so rendered him creditworthy. Greco’s strategy of linking ability to environment may seem innocent enough, but its true plausibility depends on how we circumscribe environments. To this end, Greco offers an analogy to illustrate which environments *exclude* creditworthiness: “(Derek) Jeter has the ability to hit baseballs in typical baseball environments, but presumably not in an active war zone, where he would be too distracted” (2012:42). Just as Jeter’s baseball abilities are relative to a peaceful environment, Henry’s abilities are relative to a traditional farm environment. And this, Greco suggests, solves the second horn of Lackey’s dilemma. Because the environment in Fake Barn Country is unusual, and in a way that makes Henry unreliable, he lacks the relevant ability and so acquires neither credit nor knowledge. Morris’s environment allows him to form his belief reliably, and so he can come to know the Tower’s location.

1.4.2 Risk v. Reliability

A potential difficulty with Greco’s response is the apparent conflation of risk and reliability. An example from Duncan Pritchard (2012) helps illustrate. I paraphrase:

PIANO: A pianist is performing in a threatening environment: he is surrounded by walls which could collapse and flood the room with water. But as long as the walls remain intact, he performs excellently.

Pritchard's point is that despite of the risky environment, the pianist properly exercises his abilities. Similarly, Henry's vision works just fine in Fake Barn Country. Although he is in a risky situation, he has a clear view of a large dry-good from a modest distance. His vision is perfect for this. We can modify one of Greco's examples and make a similar point.

HOMERUN: Jeter is playing baseball in a war zone for a "support the troops" charity game. Unexpectedly, chaos erupts. However, Jeter's love of the game compels him to continue. He receives the perfect pitch and the ball flies past enemy fire and clear over the makeshift stadium wall.

Does Jeter deserves credit for his homerun? It seems that despite the risky environment, the hit is still attributable to him. In a regular game Jeter is creditworthy insofar as his coordination, strength, and determination contribute to his successful hit. And these are the same features that lead to success in HOMERUN. If he had been too distracted and struck out, this need not count against his abilities as it would in Yankee Stadium. As Greco says, "[I]t does not count against Derek Jeter's ability to hit baseballs that he would fail in poor lighting conditions." (2012:42). Fair enough. But when Jeter does succeed in poor lighting conditions, or in a war zone, we might still attribute the success to ability. There is a sense in which HOMERUN Jeter gets lucky. But it is neither luck that renders his success accidental nor luck that disqualifies him from athletic credit. Disqualifying luck contributes to success and thereby weakens or eliminates an agent's own contribution. But Jeter used his abilities in the same way as he would in a professional baseball stadium. He was lucky nothing interfered with his hit. But since he was lucky, he avoided the dangers and his abilities secured success.

HOMERUN and FAKE BARN are analogous in important respects. We need not say Jeter is an unreliable hitter because he hits poorly in war zones. Similarly, if Henry mistook a fake barn for a real barn, this need not count against his visual abilities. Abilities need not be reliable in *every* environment to qualify as a genuine ability. For instance, subject S might have ability A, even if S cannot reliably exercise that ability in environment E. But it does not follow that A is never responsible for success in E. Jeter's physical skills exemplified in HOMERUN are roughly the same as those exemplified in ordinary stadium homeruns. If Jeter deserves credit for his ordinary homeruns, it seems he also deserves credit for his war zone homerun. Likewise, Henry's sensory input that leads to a true barn belief in Fake Barn Country is roughly the same input that leads to true barn beliefs at ordinary farms. If Henry deserves epistemic credit for true barn beliefs in regular farm environments, it seems he also deserves credit in Fake Barn Country. And if credit is sufficient for knowledge, Henry (counterintuitively) knows he is looking at a barn.

1.4.3 Informational Needs

Greco might have another way out of Lackey's sticky dilemma. He argues that creditworthy beliefs must serve local and global informational needs. Local needs relate to the task at hand and global needs likely tasks. What is Henry's local task? Perhaps: "Form true beliefs about objects out the window." Henry does at least this; his barn belief is true. Now to the global criterion that requires Henry's abilities reliably lead to other true beliefs. Contrasting FAKE BARN with a case Greco calls GRIZZLY can help clarify. I provide a similar example.¹¹

¹¹ Greco (2012) credits the original example to Joe Salerno.

GRIZZLY*: Timothy walks into a cave and is face to face with a hungry Grizzly. He forms the true belief, “I am face to face with a Grizzly bear.” Immediately after aforementioned belief formation, Timothy is eaten by said Grizzly.

GRIZZLY* is problematic. According to Greco, credit demands that beliefs serve informational needs. Because Timothy has passed, this remains unsatisfied. Local needs cannot be served; Timothy is dead. And global needs run into the same problem. Put differently, the following activity will not reliably serve the informational needs of anyone at all: “Perception in the presence of a bear that is about to eat you.” Needs cannot be satisfied when dead. Because Greco ties creditworthiness to the service of informational needs, it seems he is committed to the counterintuitive conclusion that Timothy lacked knowledge about the Grizzly. Here is Greco’s reply.

Presumably, the “sort” of ability in question is visual perception, and the “way” in question involves the normal exercise of that ability in normal enough lighting conditions. But then visually perceiving a grizzly bear under normal enough lighting conditions *would* regularly serve relevant informational needs. That is so even if, as in Grizzly, a quick demise prevents using what would regularly be useful (2012:23-4).

In the above, Greco suggests construing abilities broadly. We should think of Timothy’s ability as “perception in normal enough lighting conditions,” *not* “perception in the presence of a hungry bear.” The former characterization is broad enough to service informational needs; and hence, Timothy can acquire credit and knowledge.

Let us contrast GRIZZLY* with FAKE BARN. To judge whether Henry’s abilities serve global needs, we must define his relevant abilities. One option is, “Visually perceiving a real barn amongst many fakes.” But this creates consistency problems. Greco defines the relevant ability in GRIZZLY as “visual perception in normal enough lighting conditions.” This broad construal defends against the counterintuitive result that Timothy lacks knowledge. To follow suit in FAKE BARN and avoid an ad hoc construal of abilities, we ought to say that Henry’s

ability is “visual perception in normal enough lighting conditions.” Sure there is something odd about Henry’s environment. But so is there something odd about the environment in which one is about to be eaten. Odd environments prevent neither Timothy nor Henry from forming true beliefs. To avoid inconsistencies, either both Henry and Timothy deserve credit and acquire knowledge or neither does. Either option is undesirable. For if neither does, then against intuitions Timothy lacks knowledge about the Grizzly. If both Henry and Timothy are creditworthy, then against intuitions Henry knows he is looking at a barn.

To be clear, the point I am making is not a generality problem of environments but abilities. The former occurs when there is no clear way to circumscribe environmental scope. Regarding Henry, this might be the problem of deciding whether the relevant environment is the field within his line of vision, Fake Barn Country, or the whole world. In GRIZZLY* we must decide whether to consider Timothy’s reliability in respect to the cave he is in, or the surrounding state park, or the whole world. My criticism, however, would not be addressed even if there was no controversy whatsoever regarding environmental scope. For once an environment is identified, we must then determine the *ability* in respect to that environment. Suppose we agree that Henry’s environment is Fake Barn Country. We must then determine whether the ability in question is simply “vision,” or “skill in distinguishing real barns from fakes” or “perception in a barn environment.”

The most obvious way to circumscribe Henry’s ability is simply “vision” or “perception.”¹² If, however, abilities are relative to the environment, then we might define the relevant ability as ‘vision (or perception) in Fake Barn Country.’ But Henry’s perception in Fake Barn Country *is* reliable. After all, he can acquire perceptual knowledge about clouds, street

¹² Perception can be understood to encompass a much wider range of faculties than just vision. However, for my purposes here, the two terms will be used interchangeably.

signs, lamas, etc. It seems forced to claim his perception is unreliable only regarding barns.

Again, this is a serious generality problem. Lackey has already recognized as much, and in an important footnote argued the following:

While Greco may be right that reliability is relative to an environment, it is unclear why he thinks that Henry's perception is not reliable in the example under consideration. For surely Henry would form mostly true beliefs by relying on perception in the environment in question, e.g., he would form true beliefs about farmers, horses, pigs, trees, grass and so on. The only sense in which his perception is not reliable in the relevant environment is with respect to distinguishing real barns from barn façades while driving in his car past them. But individuating cognitive faculties this narrowly leaves the door wide open to worries about the generality problem (2007: 355).

How can Greco answer the above concern? In response to generality accusations, he argues that scope must be understood in accordance with practical needs.¹³ It is unclear, however, how this solves the problem. Suppose Henry had no need to distinguish fake barns from real ones. Let us stipulate he was driving right through the country on the way to New York; identifying barns would further no practical purpose. Notice that even in this case, we would not want to say that Henry has knowledge.

1.4.4 Inescapable Impasse?

We considered two ways that Greco might overcome Lackey's dilemma: relativizing abilities to environment and linking credit to informational needs. The previous section suggests

¹³ Consider the following from Greco, "[W]e can solve this (generality) problem by making use of an idea that we invoked above: that the concept of knowledge serves the purposes of practical reasoning. Specifically, that the concept of knowledge is used to flag good information and good sources of information for use in practical reasoning. If this is right, then we have an answer to the generality problem: relevant parameters should be specified according to the interests and purposes of relevant practical reasoning" (2010:78). (For a fuller discussion, see all Chapter 5 (2010)). I am unconvinced that defining scope in terms of practical reasoning is a satisfactory way to solve the generality problem. As I mention above, there is no reason to think that Henry's barn (or fake barn) viewing serves some practical purpose. Put differently, there are many ways to describe the pragmatics of the case that would still allow Henry to acquire knowledge. And this, of course, is counterintuitive. If we have to circumscribe scope, we want a principled way to do so that would preclude Henry from knowing about the barn.

that neither gives us what we need. The former confuses unreliable environments and risky ones. But the latter forces Greco into a consistency dilemma. He can define abilities broadly or narrowly. If narrowly, the theory is too strong: it will label intuitive instances of knowledge non-creditworthy. Greco admits this in GRIZZLY: If we define abilities narrowly, then Timothy lacks knowledge. A broad construal, however, leads to the wrong result in FAKE BARN. Under a broad understanding of abilities Henry knows when we think he shouldn't. Greco can try to define abilities narrowly in FAKE BARN and broadly in GRIZZLY. But it is hard to see how to do this in a way that is not ad hoc.

The credit literature thus far lacks a satisfying response to Lackey. If theorists claim that Morris can acquire testimonial knowledge, they must be conceptualizing credit in terms of excellence, not effort. But in doing this, there seems no way out of FAKE BARN. Whatever excellence makes Morris creditworthy seems to do the same for Henry. In spite of initial appearances, I will argue that by delineating creditworthiness in greater detail, credit theorists can adequately respond to each of the two challenges posed by Lackey's dilemma. We have already established that creditworthy beliefs are beliefs whose truth can be attributed to the believer. But this is not enough. As Greco has said, to gain epistemic credit, ability must not only be an important part of the story but important "in the right way" (2012: 13). In the next section, I cash out my proposal for the sort of way that is and how it improves upon Greco's way.

1.5 Risk Sensitive Credit

1.5.1 What's Wrong with Henry?

Believing can be epistemically risky. Sometimes the risk of false belief is not worth the potential reward. Sosa has discussed ideas along these lines, arguing that if a belief forming process poorly assesses epistemic risk, then the belief is not "meta-apt." In his words, "What is

required for this fuller aptness is that the agent's first-order aptness derive sufficiently from his assessment, albeit implicit, of the chances of such success (and, correlatively, of the risk of failure)" (2009:14). This insight from Sosa, I will argue, is the key to developing credit theory into the account we need. There is more than one way to do this, but I apply Sosa's observation to Greco's credit theory.

We saw that Greco ties ability to reliability and reliability to environment. Attaching reliability to environment purports to account for Henry's lack of knowledge. Because Henry is unreliable in Fake Barn Country, Greco argues that he can acquire neither credit nor knowledge. Greco argues that because Henry lacks barn identifying abilities within the environment of Fake Barn Country, Henry cannot acquire credit for his true barn belief. Because credit is necessary for knowledge, Henry lacks knowledge that he is looking at a barn. But something is strange about this unreliability claim. There is an intuitive sense in which Henry's sensory data is accurate and his perceptual abilities are working great. He is not hallucinating, his vision is not blurry, there is adequate lighting, and he is an appropriate distance from the perceptual object. His eyesight is fine physiologically. What then is going wrong? Why do we have the intuition that Henry lacks knowledge? To begin, sensory data is just part of the creditworthy story. The second part, I will argue, involves using data to assess epistemic risk.¹⁴

1.5.2 Risk Sensitivity

For any proposition *p*, an agent might believe *p*, believe not-*p*, or withhold belief. S's belief is what I call *risk sensitive* only if the likelihood of false belief is low enough that belief is the best epistemic option. As Sosa argues, "[One's] meta-competence governs whether or not one

¹⁴ In what follows, "assess" is used loosely. When I say that an agent must assess *p*'s risk, this can occur via subconscious or unconscious processes of which the agent is completely unaware.

should form a belief at all on the question at issue, or should rather withhold belief altogether” (2009:14). Along these lines, risk sensitive belief demands that the chance of p is high enough that believing p is epistemically better than believing not-p or withholding belief altogether. Let us turn again to Sosa and meta-aptness, “A performance can thus easily fail to be ‘meta- apt’, because the agent handles risk poorly, either by taking too much or by taking too little. The agent may fail to perceive the risk, when he should be more perceptive; or he may respond to the perceived risk with either foolhardiness or cowardice...” (2009:12). What I call risk sensitivity is similar to meta-aptness. S’s belief lacks risk sensitivity if she takes too much risk or too little. When S takes too much risk, she believes p despite of the high chance of falsity.¹⁵ Her poor risk assessment prevents her from earning epistemic credit, and because she deserves no credit she acquires no knowledge. Taking too little risk is withholding belief in p despite of the low chance of p’s falsity. When S takes too little risk, she fails to know because she does not believe. This lack of belief is a failure of epistemic excellence and explains why she deserves no credit.

Although epistemic credit demands risk assessment, this need not include any higher order beliefs or even the possibility thereof. (If “assessment” sounds too reflective, you may prefer to think of risk “accommodation.”) It might first appear, however, that risk assessment without the possibility of higher order belief would not concur with Sosa’s understanding of meta-aptness which does require higher order belief.¹⁶ At this point we can turn to David Henderson and Terry Horgan. Henderson and Horgan question Sosa’s theory:

¹⁵ Alternatively, she might believe p when there is a low risk of falsity, but she will still lack credit if her own abilities do not assess this risk. In other words, she will lack credit if her epistemic success is not due to her risk assessment abilities.

¹⁶ In Sosa’s own words, “We can now see that knowing something full well requires that one have animal and reflective knowledge of it, but also that one know it with full aptness. It requires, that is to say, that the correctness of one’s first- order belief manifest not only the animal, first-order competences that reliably enough yield the correctness of the beliefs that they produce. One’s first-order belief falls short if it is not appropriately *guided* by one’s relevant meta-competence.”(Sosa, 2009:16)(original emphasis).

We ourselves find very plausible the idea that competent risk assessment, as an aspect of the process of forming a belief, is required in order for that belief to constitute fully human knowledge. But we doubt whether such competence needs to take the form of a higher-order belief; and we also doubt whether a first-order belief can qualify as any kind of knowledge if it is formed in a way that *utterly lacks* the aspect of competent risk assessment (2013:601) (original emphasis).

The risk sensitivity I advocate aligns with Henderson and Horgan on both counts: S cannot know p unless S (or S's abilities or S's cognitive system) assessed (or accommodated) p's risk, but this can take place without higher order belief. Moreover, risk assessment is necessary for knowledge of any kind. We may have been too quick, however, in concluding that Sosa's account rules out this type of minimally reflective risk assessment. In a reply to Henderson and Horgan's criticism, Sosa argues that what appears to be a disagreement between himself and H&H may only be a misunderstanding. Because Sosa understands "belief" broadly, his notion of belief might include cognitive states which H&H were not including. This liberal understanding of belief leads to less stringent demands for risk assessment (given that Sosa's risk assessment demands higher order "belief"). The clarification brings Sosa closer to H&H's view, as well as closer to my own. All of us seem to agree that risk assessment can occur in the absence of highly reflective higher-order cognitive processing. Yet a few points of dispute might remain. Later in his reply to H&H, Sosa argues that at least some instances of knowledge might arise sans risk assessment. He says, "...there can be pure animal knowledge with no admixture of risk-assessing reflection, no matter how implicit. A very basic sort of knowledge can be found *even below the level of animal knowledge*...since it is constituted by mere guesses rather than beliefs" (2013:631) (original emphasis).

Let us consider Sosa's "guess constituted very basic sort of knowledge." Sosa argues that when we receive an eye exam, there comes a point at which our vision isn't sharp enough for confident assertion. We can, however, still see enough to guess. If sufficiently reliable, Sosa

thinks that such guesses might constitute very basic knowledge, even though such knowledge includes neither belief nor risk assessment. I am unsure if I would want to call such guesses “very basic knowledge.” But I would say two things. First, if the guesses can qualify as knowledge, such guesses *must* involve risk assessment. And second, even if the case Sosa describes is not knowledge, there still might be some risk assessment involved. True, at a point in the eye exam, we might call our answers “guesses.” But they are not *complete* guesses; they are not the sort of guesses we would give if blindfolded. When taking the eye exam, we make the kind of guesses that Sosa refers to on the basis of our less than perspicuous visual stimuli. Guesses based on such stimuli might involve risk assessment, or at least this seems possible to me.

Let us turn to Sosa’s comments concerning a “super-blindsighter.” He says, “... a super-blindsighter can just find a belief within, despite having been guided to form it by no risk assessment... Can’t this be knowledge that is purely animal and *entirely* unreflective, based on no risk assessment whatsoever” (2013:629)(original emphasis). We see Sosa emphasize that super-blindsighter knowledge can be “entirely unreflective.” Let me note that the way I am using the term, a complete lack of reflection does not eliminate the possibility of risk assessment. It is unclear to me, then, why a super-blindsighter could not engage in below the surface risk assessment. Similarly, with the regular blindsighter. For instance, Sosa claims that “[B]lindsighter beliefs derive... from subpersonal processes systematically reliable enough to yield a kind of knowledge” (2013:629). As will be explained in 5.3, I agree that anything we might call blindsighter knowledge would derive from systematically reliable subpersonal processes. I would argue, however, that such subpersonal processes are reliable in virtue of their ability to assess epistemic risk. I suspect that Sosa and I simply have differing understandings of

“risk assessment.” According to my account, *all* instances of knowledge involve “risk assessment,” where “assessment” is understood loosely enough that it might occur without any beliefs, implicit or explicit, and without any conscious awareness or reflective processing whatsoever. The next section discusses visual studies that should further shed light on this possibility.

1.5.3 Cognition, Perception, and Risk Assessment

H&H suggest that, “[We] might have a trained capacity that manages to accommodate [risk] without articulation, automatically and quickly...” (2013:603). While I agree with the aforementioned, credit theorists can go even further and claim that at times risk sensitivity is untrained. We might have innate cognitive capacities that evolved to accommodate risk. Perhaps H&H were thinking of “trained” loosely, and this was what they meant. In any case, visual studies confirm that automated cognitive processes can classify sensory data according to a risk sensitive framework. Consider the following commentary on a recent study,

...Bayesian concepts are transforming perception research by providing a rigorous mathematical framework for representing the physical and statistical properties of the environment... describing the tasks that perceptual systems are trying to perform, and deriving appropriate computational theories of how to perform those tasks, given the properties of the environment and the costs and benefits associate with different perceptual decisions (2002:508).

The above suggests that perception works within a cost benefit framework that balances the benefits of perceptual belief versus the risks. Further studies provide evidence that we update statistical frameworks according to perceived environment. In short, there is much more to perception than sensory data. To ensure accuracy, our perceptual system first receives sensory information, and then second and separately, accommodates this data in accordance with the

environment and other circumstantial contingencies. Environmental awareness, combined with sensory input, leads to risk assessment. This, again, is supported with research in cognitive science:

[T]he objects that are likely to occur in a scene can be predicted probabilistically from natural scene categories that are encoded in human brain activity. This suggests that humans might use a probabilistic strategy to help infer the likely objects in a scene from fragmentary information available at any point in time (2013:1031).

To expand on the above, our perceptual system matches visual sensations to familiar objects given other information about the environment and contextual circumstance. Suppose you experience a visual stimulus of a small furry animal. If prior to that sensation you believed you were in the forest, this might then indicate a high likelihood that the animal is a squirrel. If you believed you were at home, your unconscious cognitive processes could suggest that the animal is a cat. To earn epistemic credit and acquire perceptual knowledge, first, your sensory data must accurately reflect the perceptual object. In other words, your vision is not blurry, you are an appropriate distance from the object, and you are not under the influence of hallucinogens. If this holds, you have data to make a probability assessment in accordance with the environment and other relevant conditions. To return to our earlier discussion, it seems possible that a blindsighter might engage in this type of calculation. Whether we are okay then attributing the blindsighter with knowledge will depend on various other factors, including how stringent we view the requirements for belief, or if we think belief is necessary at all. But that is a bit of a digression. Back to our visual studies:

[A]n ideal observer convolves the posterior distribution with a utility function (or loss function), which specifies the costs and benefits associated with the different possible errors in the perceptual decision. The result of this operation is the expected utility (or Bayes' risk) associated with each possible interpretation of the stimulus. Finally, the ideal observer picks the interpretation that has the maximum expected utility. (2002: 508)

We can replace the ideal observer with the virtuous, or creditworthy, observer. When an epistemic agent receives visual sensory input, it prompts the following evaluation: What are the

chances that this stimulus comes from such object given the environment and circumstances?

The answer determines whether it is best to believe *p*, withhold belief, or believe not-*p*. Assume that a true belief is an epistemic benefit and a false belief a cost. Ideal agents believe *p* only if belief has the highest expected epistemic value. The creditworthy agent, which may fall short of the ideal one, believes *p* only if believing presents minimal epistemic risk. We can call this modification to existing credit theories Risk Sensitive Credit (RSC):

RSC: An agent's belief *p* is risk sensitive and hence creditworthy if (1) her own abilities assess belief risk. (2) She correctly believes *p* because (1) indicates a reasonably low chance of *p*'s falsity.

Many will object to the vagueness of "reasonably low." It is used for two reasons. First, it seems a fruitless effort to determine whether the risk of falsehood must be below 15, 10, or 5 percent. Second, philosophers who disagree about justificatory *degree* might still agree on justificatory *kind*. Agreement on the latter alone is significant. This paper presents a justificatory scheme, in particular, a modified account of knowledge as credit for true belief. Two philosophers may accept that knowledge is credit for risk sensitive belief but disagree about the degree of sensitivity that turns a mere believer into a knower. Agreement about degree seems its own project that comes after establishing more fundamental agreements. For these reasons, this paper limits itself to explaining key features of a risk sensitive framework and how it improves previous credit theories.

We should also note that while it is hard to determine a threshold of epistemic risk, so is it hard to determine whether a process or agent is reliable or whether a close world is close enough. RSC is not unique in its vagueness. Rather than liabilities, we might see all these indeterminateness as theoretical virtues. At the borders, there is strong disagreement over whether beliefs qualify as knowledge. We might then expect that any theory of knowledge which

aligns with pre-theoretical intuitions will have borderline cases in which it is unclear whether believing p qualifies as knowing p .

1.5.4 More on Risk

Risk sensitive belief is belief in accordance with reasonable risk assessment. What is risk assessment? Briefly, it is a means of analyzing and interpreting relevant data within an environment and set of conditions. Risk assessment is a means of accommodating risk. Assessment goes about as follows: an agent's cognitive system, consciously or unconsciously, assesses the chances of p given what I call her "total information." Total information consists in certain epistemic data D and epistemically relevant conditions C . That is, $P(P/D\&C)$. Risk assessment can go awry in at least three ways:

Risk Assessment Errors

1. inaccurate data
2. inaccuracy regarding the conditions
3. misinterpreting the meaning of the data given the conditions

Imagine a risk management company, SECURE. The company is hired to assess the safety of a mansion hosting a prestigious fundraiser. SECURE might blunder through inaccurate data gathering, inaccurate conditional assessment, or misinterpretation of the data given the conditions. Examples of the first could include miscounting the fire alarms or misreading the thermostat. Either error would skew total assessment. Maybe there is no data inaccuracy. Problems ensue, however, because there is failure to consider a tornado warning. (A failure of conditional assessment). A third possibility is that SECURE makes no error in data collection nor conditional assessment, yet still goes wrong in interpretation. They might judge that seven

fire alarms is appropriate when fifteen are needed. To do their job, SECURE must collect good data, carefully apprise conditions, and then use both of the aforementioned to arrive at an all things considered risk assessment. Note that a safe event is not enough to fend off criticism. SECURE'S customers can demand a refund upon discovery that the event unknowingly presented a high safety risk, even if no risk actualized. Each of us, when making an epistemic risk assessment, functions in a manner similar to SECURE.

Compare a college soccer recruiter, Scott, to SECURE. Scott is asked to watch a promising young athlete, John. Scott could receive inaccurate data via his visual percepts. He might watch the wrong player or mistake made goals for missed ones. Then again, he might have accurate sensory data: a clear view of the right player and what he accomplished.

Notwithstanding, problems unfold if Scott mistakes the competition for the best team in the league when it is really the worst (inaccuracy re: conditions). Lastly, Scott may have accurate data while accurately assessing the relevant conditions. He might still, however, fail in interpretation. New to soccer and hired thanks to nepotism, Scott may think scoring too much reflects poorly on one's soccer abilities. Any of these errors lead to risk *insensitive* belief. Scott is likely to report unreliable information to the coach. He might falsely report there is a low chance John will be a great contribution to the team when the chance is actually high.

1.6 Solving Lackey's Dilemma

1.6.1 Morris v. Henry

We saw Greco's credit theory run into trouble with the common intuition that Henry's perception explains his true belief. Because there is an intuitive sense in which Henry's perceptual abilities account for his belief, there is an intuitive sense in which Henry and Morris are responsible for their true beliefs in the same fashion, i.e. via their own reliable faculties.

Greco's strategy of tying reliability to environment is not fully satisfying. I've argued that understanding credit in terms of risk sensitivity mitigates these problems. With RSC, credit theorists can offer a more compelling response to Lackey's challenge.

Earlier we claimed that if theorists can show that Morris behaves with epistemic excellence while Henry does not, they will have found a solution to Lackey's dilemma. Creditworthiness demands excellence, not effort, so there is no need to show that Morris puts in more epistemic work than Henry. As seen in BOOTSTRAP BUCK, effort can be in tension with epistemic excellence. What matters is virtuous performance in accordance with relevant epistemic demands. The previous section argued that this requires epistemic risk assessment. With that in mind, we can distinguish CHICAGO VISITOR and FAKE BARN: *Morris's belief is risk sensitive but Henry's is not*. Because Morris's belief is risk sensitive, Morris earns credit and acquires knowledge while Henry earns and acquires neither.

What might we think is going on with Morris epistemically when he asks for directions? As described in Section 2, Morris behaves with epistemic excellence insofar as he puts to use a reliable means of true belief acquisition and the use of such means is attributable to him. But now we can describe this in more detail, i.e., in accordance with RSC. The particular ability needed for credit, and that used by Morris, is the ability to assess epistemic risk. Epistemic excellence just is this accurate risk assessment. As previously mentioned, Morris's past experience with, or awareness of, the social practice of directional inquiry makes it possible for him to engage in such risk assessment activity. Assuming this is an ordinary circumstance and Morris is an ordinary fellow, his automated and conscious cognitive processes assess epistemic risk. Before even asking, Morris observes that the passerby is sane, sober, and human. He then gages that the offered advice sounds reasonable. Familiarity with the practice bolsters his

confidence; in one way or another, life has taught Morris those unqualified to answer directional inquiries usually admit as much. All things considered, Morris (using his abilities) assesses (accurately) that the passerby's directions are unlikely erroneous. Such risk assessment is an act of epistemic excellence which is attributable to Morris. In this way, Morris earns credit and acquires knowledge.

Compare Morris to Henry. Like Morris, Henry's belief is acquired via automated and conscious cognitive processes that assess epistemic risk. Henry, like Morris, receives data in need of analysis. For Morris the data was testimony and prior testimonial experience. Morris then gages the meaning of the data in light of the environment and other relevant conditions. Henry goes through a similar process. He receives data from a visual stimulus and his perceptual system gages epistemic risk. Henry, however, assumes he is in a traditional barn environment; this skews assessment. Let us view the situation from the demands of "total risk assessment." Epistemic excellence is the proper processing of epistemic information. An agent receives various information, commonly from many sources and often over long periods of time. Some of this information is consciously accessible, much is not. An agent deserves credit (and so acquires knowledge) when she first accurately processes this data, second comes to the (correct) conclusion that not-p is improbable, therefore believes p, and p is true. Henry, however, misinterprets a critical portion of epistemic information. He judges his environment as normal barn country. This is a crucial step in coming to have the belief that he does. We might be tempted to think that Henry's belief forming mechanism is nothing more than visual perception. But things are not so simple. For instance, in challenging Fred Dretske's argument against closure, Pritchard has pointed out that beliefs ostensibly formed, "just by looking," are in reality much more complex. Suppose Zula looks at a zebra and forms the true belief that what she sees

is a zebra. It may be tempting to say she forms her belief, “just by looking.” But as Pritchard explains, this isn’t quite right.

I think that while there is a sense in which it is obviously true that Zula gains her knowledge just by looking...perceptual knowledge can...involve a wide range of specialist expertise and background knowledge...such expertise and background knowledge would surely have ramifications for the total evidence that you possess in support of your belief... to know a proposition just by looking need not entail that the only evidence you possess for your belief is the evidence you gained from the bare visual scene before you (2010:256-7).

When viewed in light of fake barn Gettier cases, the above comments remind us that Henry’s “evidence” (what I prefer to call “information”) consists in much more than just the bare visual scene before him. Background knowledge plays an important role; it is only from past experience that Henry knows his percept has the appearance of an object called a “barn.” He knows that open grassy areas are the types of places where barns are commonly found. Without this and other background information he would never form the belief that he does. However, Henry is unlucky insofar as some of his background knowledge misleads. If we assume Henry an ordinary fellow, he hasn’t any reason to think that objects that appear like barns are actually barn facades. He likely has lots of information that speaks against this. As far as he knows, it would be pointless to have a town full of barn facades, he has never heard of such things, and he would be prone to suspect (quite reasonably) that those who believe in Fake Barn Country are conspiratorial loons. While these are all reasonable assumptions on his part, they do not, unfortunately, contribute to an epistemically excellent belief. Epistemically excellent beliefs are based on accurate risk assessments, but Henry’s misleading information leads to an inaccurate assessment.

Total risk assessment is derived from various sources of epistemic information which are first individually interpreted and then collectively assessed. Going too far off the mark when

interpreting information will corrupt the collective assessment. This is what happens with Henry. He misinterpreted his environment and this misinterpretation played a key role in his total risk assessment. Epistemic excellence does not allow for these types of mistakes. In line with previous credit theorists' emphasis on "credit for *success*," an understandable epistemic mistake is still a mistake. The idea is similar to the common externalist/reliabilist notion that justification goes beyond that which is internal to the believer. Even if an agent has good reason to think her method is reliable, she cannot be justified if it's unreliable. Similarly, even if we can understand why Henry made the risk assessment that he did, it was inaccurate and therefore not excellent.

Let me take a moment to make clear what RSC is not. RSC is not a variant of the so called "no false lemmas" theory. As some may recall, shortly after Gettier introduced The Gettier Problem, a view often referred to as the "no false lemmas" approach (NFL), suggested a simple solution to Gettier's puzzle. According to NFL, those troublesome beliefs which are true and justified yet still not knowledge, are illegitimate (or unjustified) because they rely on false premises: Smith's true belief that "the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket" is acquired by reasoning through the false premise that "Jones will get the job." Similarly, Smith's true belief that "Either Jones owns a ford or Brown is in Barcelona," is acquired only via reasoning through the false premise that 'Brown is in Barcelona'. NFL proponents argued that a necessary condition of knowledge was that the "belief" in "justified true belief" could not be acquired via reasoning via false premises. With this requirement, we see that the heroes of Gettier's puzzles fall short; their true beliefs depend on reasoning through false premises, and are therefore not knowledge.

Although a clever suggestion at the time, many problems with NFL soon came to light. First, with some imaginative effort, it is possible to come up with examples similar to those in

Gettier's original paper that do not rely on false premises. And second, a new breed of Gettier cases, those of the fake barn variety, were introduced to the epistemological stage. It seemed to many that simple visual beliefs (like the barn façade belief) do not rely on any premises at all, and hence, even more so, do not rely on false premises.

I want to say a few words about NFL, and clarify that RSC is entirely distinct from, and bears very little relation to NFL. I agree with others that NFL is simply insufficient for knowledge, whether or not it is necessary. Second, RSC does not suggest that NFL is necessary for knowledge. Let us return to Henry. I have suggested that his true barn belief, which might appear to arise spontaneously, is actually dependent on a vast array of background information. And in Henry's case, much of this background information is really misinformation. Such misinformation plays a critical role in tipping Henry's risk assessment scales in a misleading direction; this poor risk assessment ultimately stops Henry from earning credit and acquiring knowledge. However, we should not understand this risk assessment failure in terms of false premises. First, it is unclear whether or not background information actually consists of beliefs. Our cognitive system is able to register information that never makes its way to the forefront of our cognitive life and into the realm of explicit beliefs. It is unclear this information rises to the level of implicit belief. I think it is best to stay away from belief talk; what matters is that background information contributes to our belief formation processing, that is, this background information contributes to our assessment of epistemic risk.

We see that it is the failure to accurately assess epistemic risk, and not false background "beliefs" (such background information may not even qualify as beliefs at all) which accounts for Henry's failure to obtain knowledge. On the contrary, our beliefs which do qualify as knowledge are often based, in part, on false or misleading background information. For instance,

suppose that my belief that George Washington was the first president of the United States is, in part, based on the false background assumption that my kindergarten teacher never told a lie. This false assumption dings my risk assessment, but not enough to curtail my quest for knowledge. The relevant risk assessment in question can take the hit: I have enough non-misleading information about George Washington that my overall assessment maintains the reasonable accuracy required for knowledge. To sum things up: In many cases misleading background information (which may or may not consist of false beliefs) is not enough to prevent a reasonable assessment of epistemic risk. In such cases, one might have both a false lemma and knowledge. However, in other instances, (like with Henry) misleading information does interfere with a reasonable risk assessment, and thus does prevent one from attaining knowledge.

Let us return to our analogy of the risk assessment company. Imagine that SECURE concludes that there is minimal safety risk at the mansion, but only because the company is unaware of the man-eating grizzly bears who reside in the courtyard. Clearly any valuation made without awareness of this environmental feature will interfere with a successful assessment. Maybe SECURE is blameless in their ignorance; perhaps there was no way to know of the dangerous but sneaky bears. Risk assessment falls flat nonetheless. Similarly, Henry's ignorance of Fake Barn Country may be innocent, notwithstanding, it interferes with risk assessment and hence creditworthiness. Risk sensitivity demands accuracy regarding data, environment, and other relevant conditions. Mistakes regarding any of these result in an assessment that either (1) misrepresents epistemic risk, or (2) makes an accurate assessment but only by luck. Both (1) and (2) are incompatible with creditworthiness and thereby knowledge. In the former case inaccuracy is the problem; in the latter accuracy is powerless because it does not derive from the

agent's abilities. Henry's problem is with (1). His mistaken environmental assumptions give rise to an inaccurate assessment. He gravely misrepresents epistemic risk.

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1.6.2 When Things go Wrong

Both Morris and Henry arrive at true beliefs through their abilities. Morris's auditory faculties are functioning properly and we can say the same for Henry's vision. This makes it hard to explain the creditworthiness of the former but the lack in the latter. Greco argues the disparity is owing to Henry's unreliability in the given environment. There is some sense in which this is true, but it is also misleading. Because Henry's belief is formed via physiologically normal vision, there is intuitive pull that it is creditable to him. Why then are we hesitant to attribute

knowledge to Henry? According to critics, because credit theory is false; knowledge cannot be defined as credit for true belief. There is another answer, however, compatible with credit theory: Epistemic credit is credit for risk sensitive belief. Henry's failed risk assessment disqualifies him from creditworthiness.

S deserves credit for true belief only if S's abilities are responsible for the following (reasonably accurate) assessment: It is unlikely that p is false. S is reliable in those environments in which she can make an accurate assessment. Because Henry mistook his environment, he miscalculated risk. He falsely assumed, whether consciously or not, that he was in a regular barn environment and so his visual percept likely indicated a barn. But Henry was actually in Fake Barn Country and his visual percept was not the high probability indicator he thought. Risk assessment misfires. The key to excellence is getting things right or at least close to right. Henry's perceptual system, due to inaccurate conditional assessment, indicates an estimate that is not even close. He can acquire neither credit nor knowledge.

We can modify CHICAGO VISITOR, and place Morris in an analogous position to Henry. Suppose that unbeknownst to Morris, he stepped onto the Chicago sidewalk just as the National Convention of Liars Anonymous left for lunch.¹⁷ Imagine that just as in CHICAGO VISITOR, Morris asked the first adult passerby he sees for directions to the Sears Tower. Suppose that in this altered example, just like in the original example, the passer-by gives impeccable directions to the Sears Tower and Morris then forms a true belief about the Tower's location. With the added twist of the Liars Anonymous meeting, it seems we would be disinclined to consider Morris's true belief knowledge. This time around, Morris, like Henry, mistakes the conditions which skews his risk assessment. In the original example, however,

¹⁷ This example is courtesy of Jonathan Reibsam. I am also grateful to the John Templeton Foundation for providing the means to present this paper at the workshop in which Johnathan cleverly suggested the example.

Morris accurately evaluates his testimonial environment which leads to a risk sensitive and creditworthy assessment. Because Morris's belief is risk sensitive and Henry's is not, Morris but not Henry proves creditworthy and acquires knowledge.

1.6.3 Advantages

Greco is right to point out that environment affects reliability. But without more specifications, this can mislead. One difficulty is the tendency to identify a single cognitive function as the reliable one, or point to the environment at the time of belief formation as the relevant one. But as Sosa and others argued, belief can happen over time, be formed across many environments, and be owing to various sources and cognitive abilities.¹⁸ Greco has also recognized this, admitting that the "... causal structure is complicated: at least in the typical case, an outcome is produced by means of multiple contributing causal factors...explanatory salience distributes unevenly among causal contributors: some causal contributors are more important in an explanation than others" (2012:44). If this is right, then circumscribing reliability in accordance with one's cognitive faculty and a single environment leaves out something important. Greco's account creates a tendency to do just this. We must identify a practical environment and cognitive ability to judge the agent's competence. But what if a belief is formed via multiple cognitive abilities and there are various environments of practical relevance and more than one informational task? Whether it is possible for Greco's account to overcome these problems, Risk Sensitive Credit makes things easier. RSC can encompass the varied cognitive

¹⁸ "A belief forms in us over time through the subtle influence of diverse sources. Some are testimonial, others perceptual, others inferential, and so on. The belief might owe importantly to the believer's upbringing, or to later influence by his community. We are social beings and do well, socially *and* intellectually, to rely on such influence by our social and intellectual communities" (Sosa, 2010: 294).

faculties, information sources, and environments that collectively contribute to belief formation and creditworthiness.

Risk assessment is a big picture activity. It takes into account information right in front of the believer's eyes as well as bits and pieces of epistemic relevance acquired at different times and places potentially spanning many decades. Risk assessment incorporates not only present data but past data, not only the present environment but past environments (i.e., we must look at all of the "conditions"). This is what happens with Morris. We might imagine he makes an accurate assessment due to past encounters with directional inquiries and background information about tower locations. His risk assessment does involve the surrounding environment and the testimonial data, but also environments and data from various past experiences. All this matters when considering the likelihood that the passerby's testimony is reliable. The same holds for Henry. If he knew nothing of barns, farms, or the country, his visual data would have contributed to a very different assessment.

When an agent assesses the risk of false belief, she might make use of more than one cognitive faculty. Perhaps one cognitive faculty that contributes to her total risk assessment is reliable, while another faculty that similarly contributes to her total assessment is unreliable. One reliable faculty may not be enough to arrive at a risk sensitive belief. Even if one cognitive faculty plays its epistemic role reliably, another (unreliable) cognitive faculty may undermine total risk assessment. Although Henry's vision works fine, his combined epistemic sources mislead. The reverse side is when no single cognitive ability or information source is enough to justify belief, notwithstanding, the combination of all grounds risk sensitivity. Consider a scholar's conclusion that a long accepted theory is mistaken. If it amounts to knowledge, it is unlikely owing to a single cognitive faculty and there is probably various environments of justificatory relevance. All

epistemic sources must collectively demonstrate that the accepted theory is improbable. If so, the scholar can have a true risk sensitive (creditworthy) belief which amounts to knowledge.

1.7 Conclusion

Lackey's accusation that credit theory is either too strong or too weak has been hard to overcome. This paper attempted to show that with a few clarifications and theoretical alterations, credit theory can finally defeat her criticism. The first clarification is between credit for effort and credit for excellence. When arguing that credit theory might be too weak, Lackey assumes the former but credit theory should be understood as the latter. Credit for true belief is credit for epistemic excellence, not epistemic toil. Once this is understood, it becomes clear why, at times, the best epistemic response is an easy one. Life is short and intellectual resources limited; to preserve them savvy epistemic agents take advantage of means which require little effort. Morris earns credit because the relevant testimony was a reliable and efficient way to acquire a true belief.

Clarifying why Morris deserves credit only solves the first half of Lackey's dilemma. To put all worries to rest, credit theorists must also explain why fake barn Henry is unworthy. According to Greco, this is because epistemic ability and hence credit are tied to environment, and Henry's relevant dispositions are unreliable in Fake Barn Country. The problem with this is accounting for the intuition that Henry's properly functioning vision explains his true belief.

Risk Sensitive Credit has an explanatory advantages over Greco's account. When credit is understood in terms of risk sensitivity, theorists can more easily respond to Lackey: Morris deserves credit because his belief is risk sensitive while Henry's is not. Maybe Henry is worthy of a certain type of credit, perhaps, we can credit with him with an "A for effort." After all, Henry behaved just how most of us would have; it seems unreasonable to blame him. Notwithstanding, because knowledge requires an "A for *excellence*," effort was just not enough.

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CHAPTER 2

EPISTEMIC GREED

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The other ‘One Percent’

Let us pause and reflect on the following: those who hold PhD degrees are the Warren Buffetts of epistemic resources. They have been privileged with more educational experience and access to intellectual activities than 99% percent of living humans. Notwithstanding, it is rarely, if ever, suggested that PhD’s have a special obligation to share in this intellectual wealth. But why not? Given the importance of epistemic resources to a life well-lived, it seems a bit odd that intellectual elites lack special obligations of generosity. In various ways epistemic resources are as valuable as financial resources. So why *wouldn’t* epistemic 1%ers have as much of an obligation to share in their epistemic wealth as the financial 1%ers have to share in their monetary wealth? In this paper I argue that the epistemically wealthy *do* have this obligation. ¹In various ways epistemic resources are as valuable as financial resources. So why *wouldn’t* epistemic 1%ers have as much of an obligation to share in their epistemic wealth as the financial 1%ers have to share in their monetary wealth? In this paper I argue that the epistemically wealthy *do* have this obligation, and that epistemic 1%ers who fail to share in their unique type of wealth are both morally and epistemically blameworthy, i.e., they are

¹ Granted, long-ago when Aristotle discussed the virtue opposite greed (generosity) according to his specific virtue-theoretic framework, he had in mind a notion specifically associated with the giving of financial resources. Nonetheless, Aristotle’s opinion is hardly understood as the final word on virtue or ethics more generally.

How I will use the term “epistemic greed” is straightforward. Epistemic greed is greed for epistemic resources. “Epistemic resources” should be understood broadly. Examples include, physical goods, epistemic services, cognitive states and intellectual abilities that are specially related to knowledge, understanding, rationality, etc. Cognitive states which qualify as epistemic goods are knowledge and understanding themselves. Cognitive abilities help one acquire these valuable cognitive states; these abilities include analytic reasoning, sound judgment, and memory. Not all intellectual abilities are of the same value. Two individuals might both be capable of remembering, but one person might have a much better memory than the other. Insofar as this better memory is more helpful in acquiring valuable epistemic goods, so is it more epistemically valuable.

Those who are epistemically greedy keep, take, acquire, or stockpile epistemic goods which they might otherwise share with the epistemically less advantaged. Of course, most of us have *some* epistemic resources that we keep for ourselves which we could instead share. We could say the same about monetary resources – most of us keep some money for ourselves which we could give to others. In this vein, greed is helpfully understood as a vice in the Aristotelian

²¹ For what’s it’s worth, I consider this paper to fit equally into the philosophical sub-disciplines of ethics and epistemology. Epistemic greed is both a moral and epistemic vice, and it has both moral and epistemic implications. I suspect some who are fans of ‘traditional epistemology’ would differ with me on this. Many of these folks are good friends of mine, and we have amicable disagreements about what properly falls under the domain of epistemology. In one sense, it does not matter. This paper can speak to something others find philosophically important, whether or not they consider it “epistemology” or “ethics” proper. Notwithstanding, I think it is good for philosophy and epistemology alike that the scope of traditional epistemology expands in the general direction that virtue epistemology seems to have taken it. That is, epistemology should be not only about knowledge but in equal part about “knowers.” It also seems that the domain of ethics would benefit by considering the ethics especially involved in the acquisition and transmission of knowledge and justified belief.

tradition, on a spectrum of extremes.²² Those who are epistemically greedy keep an *excessive* amount of epistemic resources which they might instead share with the less fortunate. Those who are neither epistemically greedy nor generous give an *acceptable* amount, and those who are epistemically generous share what we might consider an *admirable* amount of their epistemic resources. With all that in mind, here is a first shot at defining the topic of this paper, *viz.*, epistemic greed.

Epistemic Greed (EG): To hoard, acquire, or use an excessive amount of epistemic resources with insufficient concern for those who less epistemically advantaged.

While the above definition is on the right track, I think too much is left vague by the expression ‘excessive’. Let us try a definition with more specificity:

Epistemic Greed (EG): Sharing comparatively little of one’s total epistemic resources with those who are less epistemically privileged than oneself.

In line with Aristotle’s notion of generosity, this second definition places a higher obligation on those who are epistemically wealthy. Aristotle argued that, “[I]n speaking of generosity we refer to what accords with one’s means. For what is generous does not depend on the quantity of what is given, but on the state [of character] of the giver, and the generous state gives in accord with one’s means. Hence one who gives less than another may still be more generous, if he has less to give”(2014;51). This Aristotelian understanding fits with an everyday understanding of the non-epistemic notion of greed. We expect those who are rich to give more than those who are not rich.

Notice that EG does not specify the greedy subject, *i.e.*, it does not claim that epistemic greed must be manifest in an individual. And indeed, this paper argues that greed can be manifest

²² According to Aristotle, virtue is “...a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it” (1006b36–1107a2).

both in individuals and institutions, each with their own vicious consequences. The consequences of *institutional* greed (whether epistemic or otherwise) are commonly manifest through social inequality, often of the sort we might call, “distributive inequality.”²³ I argue that the societal distribution of epistemic goods rivals in importance the distribution of financial goods. If I’m right, then the paucity of discussion regarding greedy institutions and epistemic distribution is a noteworthy philosophical oversight.

The plan for the rest of this paper runs as follows. Section 2 will be brief; it explains why the type of greed discussed in this paper is properly called “epistemic.” Section 3 considers why we ought to care about epistemic greed at all, as opposed to more traditional focuses such as monetary greed. The following section is an overview of the concept of epistemic greed itself. After that, Section 5 describes the epistemically elite class. Sections 6 and 7 argue for the ways that epistemic greed (and to a lesser extent, generosity) manifest in individuals and institutions, respectively. Things are summed up in the conclusion, Section 8. The goals of this paper are twofold. First, I want to introduce a new vice, viz. epistemic greed, into discussions of both moral and epistemic virtue. In other words, I am arguing that there is a vice called epistemic greed that has so far been overlooked in the virtue literature, and that we should from here on out stop overlooking it. Second, I am making a descriptive case for the conceptual contours of this vice (epistemic greed) and in so doing I explain how the vice might be manifest. There is hence both a descriptive and normative aspect to this paper. The descriptive aspect is describing what

²³ One critical difference between the points I make in this paper and many common discussions of distributive inequality is that I am not solely focused on *governmental* obligations and solutions. My focus, rather, is on the character of individual epistemic agents and how they ought to treat other epistemic agents. That said, this paper in no ways rules out either the possibility that the government might be *obligated* to rectify epistemic inequalities nor that it simply might be *prudent* to use the government for egalitarian ends.

epistemic greed is. The normative aspect is arguing that given what epistemic greed is, we (those who study moral and epistemic virtue) ought to be concerned about it.

2.2 What is “epistemic” about epistemic greed?

Some might be initially hesitant about the “epistemic” in what I am calling “epistemic greed”, for there is a sense in which the greed I discuss is not “uniquely,” “essentially,” or “distinctively” epistemic. For example, in the introduction to her landmark book, *Epistemic Injustice*, Miranda Fricker makes clear that the type of justice that concerns her is *distinctively* epistemic. In her own words:

There are a number of phenomena that might be brought under the general head of epistemic injustice...the idea of epistemic injustice might first and foremost prompt thoughts about distributive unfairness in respect of epistemic goods such as information or education...When epistemic injustice takes this form, there is nothing very distinctively epistemic about it, for it seems largely incidental that the good in question can be characterized as an epistemic good. By contrast, the project of this book is to hone in on two forms of epistemic injustice that are distinctively epistemic in kind, theorizing them as consisting, most fundamentally, in a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower (2007: 58-60).

Fricker convincingly argues that the type of epistemic justice that concerns her differs from other types of justice, and differs in a way that has a particular epistemic bent. I have no issues with this claim, however, the claim itself gives us little reason to infer that the absence of the distinguishing features Fricker describes makes a topic unworthy of epistemic investigation. Let us agree that the “epistemic” in “epistemic greed” is in some sense incidental; we can still argue that this vice presents distinctive philosophical problems hitherto unaddressed. For example, there is reason to believe that epistemic greed specially influences both moral and epistemic character in negative ways. Such influence is, in turn, an impediment to living an epistemically virtuous life. Insofar as an agent is concerned with epistemic virtue, she ought to

be concerned with epistemic vices that impede thus virtue and epistemic greed falls under this umbrella. Put differently: epistemic greed has consequences which are especially epistemic in nature (they are detriments to an epistemic life well-lived) regardless of whether such greed itself is distinctively epistemic.

Not only does epistemic greed have epistemic character repercussions for individual agents, it also effects the epistemic wellbeing of humankind more generally. A world in which a large part of humanity is epistemically impoverished, *ceteris paribus*, is an epistemically worse world than one in which this impoverishment is absent. So insofar as epistemic greed (or its absence) influences epistemic impoverishment, it has epistemic consequences for greater society. This impoverishment merits its own discussion. Speaking more generally, epistemic greed sheds light on contemporary social epistemology, in particular virtue and social epistemology. It relates to the former because the vice negatively impacts an individual agent's epistemic character and the opposing virtue (epistemic generosity) improves it. As for the latter, I argue that once the vice of epistemic greed is recognized as such, we will be forced to look differently at existing epistemic institutions and the role they play in the dissemination of information; we may even be challenged to change them. By "we" I mean "the intellectual elite" classes.²⁴ These elites are defined and described in the next section.

2.3 The Epistemic Elite

Who are the epistemic elites? Let us start with what is familiar. One of the largest and most coherent class of the epistemically wealthy are those who are highly educated, especially professors and others who work within the university system. Consider that simply having been

²⁴I am not suggesting that only the elite class should be concerned with inequality. Clearly the non-elite have great reason to be concerned about inequality. I do think, however, that those who are the best off have special ethical pressure to pay attention to the well-being of the less fortunate.

awarded a bachelor's degree puts one in the top 30% of educated persons in the United States, a Master's degree will put one in the top 7% and a PhD degree the top 1%. Worldwide, the statistics are much more striking.²⁵ Although there is plenty of criticism to direct at higher education, it is hard to argue against the following: *those who hold college degrees have had an experience of great epistemic value that others have not.* The epistemic value of a college education continues past graduation. Other things held equal, those with college degrees enter the world better epistemically equipped than those without. All this points to an epistemic advantage for the college educated and hence the important sense in which those with college degrees are epistemically wealthier than those without them.

While simply possessing a bachelor's degree puts one in the upper tier epistemically, it does not yet render one a "super elite" or membership in what we might call the class of "epistemic 1%ers." However, what is *generally* sufficient (but not necessary!) for epistemic super elitism is being a member of the class that the public refers to as "academics." This paper focuses specifically on this subset of elites, i.e., universities and university professors. This is done not only because these persons and institutions are amongst the richest of the rich epistemically, but also because they are an easily identifiable and unified class. However, we must first fend off a likely objection. Many will quickly point out that university professors, while quick reasoners and generally knowledgeable, are not good at everything epistemically. Car mechanics, for instance, have greater knowledge about automobiles than professors do, and there are many other specialties in which academics are extremely ignorant. This is a fair point.

²⁵ See https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_104.20.asp, and <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf>, and <http://cgsnet.org/data-sources-key-takeaways-2014-survey-earned-doctorates-0>. Note that often the statistics are shown in terms of age-group. For example, some charts show that roughly 35% of US citizens 25-34 have a BA degree or higher. This percentage is higher than the total percentage of US citizens who hold BA degrees because a large percentage of those older than 34 have not attained one. The younger generations are generally better educated than the older ones. (Better = have higher degree attainment).

It is both short-sighted and snobby to think that the only type of knowledge that matters is the kind taught in a university. The world is filled with what we might call “specialist intellectual elites”.²⁶ While these specialists might not have great analytical reasoning abilities nor be highly educated, they are elites in their own domain.

While acknowledging the existence of pragmatic and specialized expertise, this paper is focused on elites of a different kind, what we might consider a moral general sort of intellectual. These elites have advanced reasoning and analytic abilities and typically the acquisition of various sorts of knowledge is easier for epistemic elites than it is for most.²⁷ Most college professors fall into this category, and at the institutional level most universities do as well. It is this type of general intellectual that fits my stipulated definition of an “epistemic elite” or an “epistemically elite institution.” We should also keep in mind that elitism is a spectrum concept. Some persons are more elite than others, and there are some who are on the “borderline” of elite status. That said, however, most university professors are clearly in the elite class, for both their level of knowledge and their intrinsic intellectual talents very far surpass what is average.

Let us be clear that mere membership in the epistemically elite class does not render one epistemically greedy. Similarly, membership in the billionaire class does not necessarily make one financially greedy. Billionaires like Warren Buffett, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg are known for donating large sums of their wealth. Because of this, many think that Buffett, Gates,

²⁶ Many elites of this sub-category we might think of as the elites of the “knowing how” rather than the “knowing that” domain. There is a growing epistemic literature on the differences (if any) between “knowing how” and “knowing that”. While there is plenty of disagreement amongst these discussants, it is uncontroversial to suggest that “knowing how” does not always imply “knowing that” (and neither the contrary). So for all of the “knowing how” abilities of ordinary persons – this type of ability need not translate into the particular academic excellence that consist largely in “knowing that.”

²⁷ Epistemic elites need not possess all of these advantages. Having a lot of one is probably enough to be properly labeled an epistemic elite. For instance, in *Good Will Hunting*, Matt Damon plays a young genius, Will Hunting, with no formal higher education. Will Hunting is an epistemic elite, even though he only possess a low level of formal education.

and Zuckerberg not only lack the vice of greed but possess the virtue of generosity. There are surely similar cases in the intellectual realm. Yet in spite of the possibility of generous elites and also greedy non-elites, those who are especially wealthy are the first to whom we might direct our concern when discussing greediness in any domain. Those who are very wealthy are hurt the least by sharing, and so their greed is of special moral relevance; it does not seem to be asking too much of the epistemically privileged to spend some of their time sharing intellectual resources with those who are not so fortunate. (We might be more forgiving of those who have less to give.) Elites, moreover, carry the sort of influence that can have beneficial effects significantly greater than the benefits that might arise from the generosity of non-elites. For these reasons, the greed and generosity of elites warrants special attention. And because professors and universities are an easily recognizable class of elites, they will be the focus of this paper's remaining investigation. So I hope it is clear I am focusing on elites not because they are the only ones that can be or are in fact epistemically greedy, but rather because the vice is often a worse vice when manifest in an elite. It is worse first in the sense that it more negatively reflects on the person's character. (We might think anyone with modest income should give to charity. But there is a sense in which a superrich person who never gives is seen as morally worse than a stingy middle-classer). In addition, epistemic greed manifest in elites leads to worse consequences, i.e., those who have more to give have greater potential to help.

2.4 Greediness and Elitism

A common objection I hear when discussing epistemic greed runs as follows: *epistemic* impoverishment is closely tied to *economic* impoverishment. We should therefore focus on rectifying the latter as a means to rectifying the former. Now I agree that economic and epistemic inequality are closely connected. Educational achievement is closely tied to one's socioeconomic

history. This alone provides compelling reason to be especially concerned about economic inequality. However, this is not sufficient reason to neglect the unique phenomenon of epistemic greed. It seems suspect and self-interested for the epistemically elite to insist on focusing *entirely* on financial greed effectively pushing epistemic greed to the wayside. Imagine, for example, that community C is struggling with problem P. There are two potential solutions, X and Y. C can solve the problem by means X, but has no access to Y. Nonetheless, C refuses to use X insisting that Y should be used instead. This seems an odd response, and assuming the problem at hand is serious, this is also a blameworthy response. It is irrelevant both how preferable Y is to X and what obligations others might have toward implementing X. As long as C has access to problem-solving remedy Y, no access to X, and no reason to think that those who do have access will take it upon themselves, if C is a decent sort of person she will go ahead and remedy the problem with Y. A situation of this kind is illustrated in the following example:

EMERGENCY: There is a weather emergency in Frank's community. Frank has two vehicles that could be helpful for emergency crew workers, and he is asked if he might share them for the cause. Frank refuses. He points out that there are several millionaires in his community who might donate money to buy those vehicles, in addition to donating even more money to pay for other needed goods.

Frank's behavior seems uncaring and greedy. Sure others could help, but he can do immediate good with the means he has. Even if the millionaires in Frank's community are blameworthy, this does not resolve Frank of his own blame. The case remains: Frank could easily help but does not. Epistemic elites might be charged with a similar criticism. Even though those who are financially wealthy might help with the same problem, this does not excuse epistemic elites from not doing what they can in their own way, according to their own life advantages. After all, changes in tax policy or other legislative measures may take decades to get enacted, if they ever do. In the meantime, there are easily accessible persons that the

epistemically elite can help with only modest effort. This point is similar to one made in various places by Peter Singer, beginning with his landmark article, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality.”

Singer argues as follows:

The view that numbers do make a difference can be made plausible if stated in this way: if everyone in circumstances like mine gave £5 to the Bengal Relief Fund, there would be enough to provide food, shelter, and medical care for the refugees...therefore I have no obligation to give more than £5. Each premise in this argument is true... It may convince us, unless we notice that it is based on a hypothetical premise... The argument would be sound if the conclusion were: if everyone in circumstances like mine were to give £5, I would have no obligation to give more than £5. If the conclusion were so stated, however, it would be obvious that the argument has no bearing on a situation in which it is not the case that everyone else gives £5. This, of course, is the actual situation. It is more or less certain that not everyone in circumstances like mine will give £5. (1972:539).

Singer’s point can be summed up simplistically: simply because I would have no obligation to give *if* X obtained, it does not at all follow that I have no obligation given that X *does not* obtain. This is especially true if I have no reason to believe that X is likely to obtain in the near future. It makes no difference, moreover, that others bear some blame for X not obtaining. That this makes no difference is painfully obvious in a variety of quotidian cases. Suppose, for instance, that a drunk driver (1) hits a pedestrian and (2) fails to help that pedestrian even though he easily could. Suppose that in addition to the drunk driver not helping, several bystanders also see the pedestrian and also could easily help yet they also fail to do so. Such behavior speaks negatively against the character of these bystanders. (*We can also choose to speak about “character” rather than in terms of obligation violation. Character claims are usually considered weaker, for a mark against character does not require violating an obligation. I am arguing that whether or not the epistemically rich violate strict obligations of justice by refusing to share in their epistemic wealth, refusing to share tarnishes their epistemic and moral character.

When I do use the term ‘obligation’ I prefer this weak reading. That said, my argument is consistent with both the stronger and weaker reading, so I do not dwell on this point.*)

The point I am making about epistemic greed runs along Singer’s train of thought. While perhaps the financially rich *could* help the epistemically underprivileged by donating resources, this fact in no way excuses the epistemically rich from not doing their part (given that the financially rich are not doing what they could do). All things considered, we *all* ought to do our part, regardless if others fail to do theirs. Applying this to the matter at hand, there is no reason to think billionaires will step up tomorrow and solve our educational crisis. Given this unfortunate reality, and given that the epistemically rich are specially placed to help the epistemically disadvantaged, there is little excuse for not helping. Indeed, in not helping epistemic elites act as a bystander who sees another intellectually drowning and simply walks away.

For too long, moral and political discussions have focused primarily on economic inequalities, at the expense of ignoring other types of morally weighty inequalities. They seem to have been forgetting that just as an improvement in one’s economic means makes it easier to acquire epistemic resources, the converse is true as well: bettering one’s *epistemic* position makes it easier to improve one’s *economic* position. Intelligence can help one get a job, get accepted into college, and in various other ways provide means to a more satisfying life. Educational accomplishments, especially degree accomplishment, are closely tied to lifelong income prospects. In such respects financial and epistemic resources are importantly similar. Both are effective means to a variety of ends helpful in achieving life goals.²⁸ Not all goods are of this kind. While I may very much enjoy my leather couch, it cannot help me achieve my

²⁸ While there has long been a connection between wealth and education, recent empirical studies suggest that the last few decades have seen this correlation get much stronger. For a few studies on this increasing divide and more general research into income and education see Belley, P., & Lochner, L. (2007), Bailey, M. J., & Dynarski, S. M. (2011), and Mayer, S. E. (2002).

dream life of an enjoyable career and basic level of material comfort. Epistemic and financial goods, however, can indeed help me in this regard. Money and knowledge are general purpose tools for a variety of life goals. This similarity seems to have been overlooked by epistemologists and ethicists alike, and with it an appropriate focus on the moral implications of epistemic greed.

We should also be clear that while many epistemic deficiencies are tied to socio-economic class, they need not be. The epistemically less fortunate class includes both those of high and low income. Struggling students from wealthy or middle class families might even feel special stress from intellectual underachievement, because they are often burdened with especially high expectations.

2.5 Epistemic Greed: An Overview

I already explained that there is a sense in which the greed I discuss is not “distinctively” epistemic, but rather a variant of greed simpliciter. A greedy agent or institution can be greedy about particular goods, whether financial, reputational, or epistemic. The greed I discuss is *epistemic* in the following sense: it involves the hoarding of an *epistemic* resource by someone who is *epistemically* advantaged at the expense of someone who is *epistemically* disadvantaged. To make this clearer, it is helpful to delve into the general structure of epistemic greediness.

An act of greed simpliciter involves three structural components. The first component is that you cannot have greed without someone or something which exemplifies greediness; this “exemplar” can a greedy agent, institution, or a collective non-institutional agent. The second component is the object of greed’s desire. Greed is about something or directed toward some object(s). Now some greed is so extensive that it is directed toward just about everything: money, time, material objects, intelligence, etc. In this case there is many object of greed’s desire. Yet in other cases persons exemplify greed only toward certain things or in certain

respects. We might say, “He gives his money freely, but he is strangely greedy when it comes to parking spaces.” This paper, of course, is focused on greediness regarding epistemic resources.

In addition to greedy subjects and the object of their desire, there is usually a victim of sorts; someone who suffers at greed’s expense. Suppose that Bob insisted on parking in the very back of the parking lot in a spot no one else wanted. It seems strange to call this greedy. There are certain caveats. We might say that if Bob was disposed to insist on his parking spot even if others *did* want it, then he has a greedy disposition which is never manifest. Nonetheless, it is particularly salient to the character trait of greed that it is at someone’s expense. For discussion’s sake, let us say that greediness involves a greedy subject, an object that is the desire of the subject’s greed, and a victim(s) who suffers at greed’s expense. More formally:

$$\textit{Greediness} = \text{Greedy Agent (GA)} + \text{Desired Object (DO)} + \text{Greed’s Victim (GV)}$$

Filling things in, we might say that the greedy agent, Scrooge, desires money and that the victim is Tiny Tim. In this example, however, there is nothing epistemic about greed’s object nor victim. Epistemic greed distinguishes itself from other types of greed insofar as the desired object is an epistemic object and greed’s victim suffers an epistemic loss. Here is the formal structure:

$$\textit{Epistemic Greed} = \text{Greedy Agent (GA)} + \text{Object of Epistemic Desire (OED)} + \text{Epistemic Victim (EV)}$$

Filling in these variables, we might say that Professor Plum is a greedy agent, that his object of epistemic desire is the library’s collection of physics books, and that the victims are those who cannot read the hoarded books. This example is straightforward; most instances of epistemic greed are not. Complications arise because epistemic greed usually does not involve a medium-sized dry good as its object, the victim(s) of epistemic greed are hard to identify, and more often than not the wrong of epistemic greed is accounted for in terms of misused *epistemic opportunity costs*. Epistemic opportunity costs can be understood as follows:

Epistemic Opportunity Costs (EOC) = Epistemic goods sacrificed in the pursuit of other epistemic goods.

When we engage in any activity, we could instead be engaging in an alternative activity. The alternative activity is the opportunity cost of doing what we choose to do. If Bob decides to spend the weekend gambling, he cannot spend the weekend cleaning the house. The opportunity cost of gambling then, is cleaning the house. Likewise when we use a good for purpose P, we can therefore not use it for P2, and the opportunity cost is hence P2. If Bob decides to use lemons to make a lemon pie, he cannot use those same lemons to make lemonade and hence the opportunity cost of the lemon pie is the lemonade. Epistemic greed is usually manifested in these types of opportunity costs. We spend our time engaging in one epistemic activity, and hence, we do not use that time to engage in another epistemic activity. We use our epistemic resources to one epistemic purpose, and hence, not another. The epistemically greedy pursue activities which have high epistemic opportunity costs for persons *other than* themselves.

2.6 The (Individual) Vice of Epistemic Greed

2.6.1 Individual Epistemic Greed in Brief

Let us start by describing the epistemically greedy agent and her counterpart with broad intuitive strokes. We can move on to more specific examples, where the real controversy and arguments get started.

Let us review our definition of epistemic greed from section 1:

Epistemic Greed (EG): Sharing comparatively little of one's total epistemic resources with those who are less epistemically privileged than oneself.

The epistemically greedy individual has an engrained character trait that disposes them to exemplify epistemic greed. The epistemically greedy individual is one who, in comparison to her degree of epistemic wealth, is disposed to share comparatively little. This is in opposition to the

epistemically generous individual who, according to her level of epistemic wealth, is disposed to share comparatively much. An individual who is neither greedy nor generous is one that, according to her level of epistemic wealth, is disposed to share a minimally acceptable amount of epistemic resources.

We see that not only are epistemically greedy agents prone to spend ample amounts of time and energy adding to their already prolific epistemic wealth, but that this obsessive stockpiling of epistemic resources is rarely balanced by sharing. If someone suggests to an epistemically greedy agent that she *ought* to share, she tends to get defensive. Rather than stop and think about how she might use her wealth to help the epistemically less advantaged, she will seek to justify her own riches.²⁹ She will argue that an inclusive focus on enlarging her already prolific epistemic wealth is justified. She might even suggest that a mysterious epistemic hand will work everything out in the end. It seems plausible that such replies are grounded in the epistemically greedy person's concern with her own intellectual life and the absence of concern for those who are epistemically impoverished. A scholar might, for instance, argue that her seemingly obscure scholarly work will trickle down to help the masses, and thus that time she might spend directly sharing her own epistemic resources is actually better spent on her scholarly research. The problem with such reply is not necessarily that the predictions are false, but rather that such predications are at best mere speculation (and obviously self-interested speculation at that).

²⁹ Does epistemic generosity really demand sharing with the epistemically *disadvantaged*? Some might think that simply sharing is enough. While it might be better to share with the well-off than to never share at all, true generosity demands giving, in the Aristotelian tradition, to *the right person*, at the right time, etc. In his own words, "Therefore the liberal man, like other virtuous men, will give for the sake of the noble, and rightly; for he will give to the right people, the right amounts, and at the right time, with all the other qualifications that accompany right giving; and that too with pleasure or without pain..."(2009:61).

Admittedly, to some extent I am stipulating that the right persons are generally those who are the least advantaged. Although this is a stipulation, I hope it is a commonsensical one. Moreover, it is not an uncompromising requirement. There might be times where it is best to share with someone who is already advantaged. Like all the Aristotelian virtues, proper epistemic generosity requires practical wisdom.

Consider that whether we are giving epistemic goods or financial ones, the results of our giving are hard to predict. Even when we do our due diligence and thoroughly investigate our charitable giving, there will be important unknowns. First it will be hard to know exactly what will be the results (both short and long term) of the charity act itself. Will paying for someone to have a hot dinner really help in the long run, or will it just enable? Will a student appreciate the extra time we spend helping them in office hours, or will they just pretend to care (if they even do that much)?³⁰ These are hard questions to answer. And the other counterfactuals are even harder to answer. If, for instance, we decide *not* to give to charity and instead use our resources on other means, how much good will that do? How much epistemic good, for instance, will be done by spending five hours researching the background literature on a topic somewhat tangential to our next paper? This is very hard to say. With these uncertainties in mind, my response to those who insist that their epistemic resources are better spent on their own research rather than charitable giving is the same response I would give a business person in an analogous situation.

Suppose a business person tells me that rather than giving to charity, he thinks he would help the world more by investing in his business which will lead to higher pay for his employees and the hiring of additional resources. I would say that there is something virtuously suspect about this response. While it is hardly the demand of generosity that he spend all or even most of his money on charity, it is hardly asking too much that he spend some. Given the uncertainties in what happens when we share or when we keep our resources, we ought to err on the side of

³⁰ I do think that extra time spent helping students in office hours, i.e., time spent beyond that which could reasonably be considered contractual duties, counts as charitable giving. The key questions we must ask when considering if a case of epistemic helping counts as charity are (1) does the agent have purely self-interested motivation in helping, and (2) does such helping consist in the fulfilling of a contractual obligation? If we can answer “no” to both questions, then the particular case of epistemic giving probably qualifies as “charitable epistemic giving.” Those who possess the virtue of epistemic generosity frequently engage in charitable epistemic giving.

devoting *some* resources to direct giving. This not only helps in straightforward ways, it helps the character of the giver by keeping them in touch with those who have less. This seems true on both Wall Street and in the Ivory Tower. When the *epistemic* 1%ers give their resources, this is good not only because it directly benefits those who are the recipients of such generosity, but because it keeps the giver in touch with the 99%. Indeed one of the biggest dangers of greediness is the distance it creates between the well-off and the not so well-off. Both groups start to see one another as living lives completely divorced and unrelated to themselves. They see little in common with one another and this inability to identify makes it easy to dismiss the other group's concerns. Once this type of gap exists, it can be hard to close.

The nature of vice itself helps explain why a gap between the well-off and the not-so well off can be intractable. As Aristotle noted long ago, the more vicious one becomes, the less likely one is to recognize their vice. This is a constant across vices, including the vice I am calling epistemic greed. Like many who possess vicious character traits, the epistemically greedy are often unaware of their own vice and may even mistake it for a virtue. Indeed, this is *especially common* with epistemic greed. For unlike other vices, cultural norms rarely recognize epistemic greed as a moral failing at all. Hence not only do the epistemically greedy not recognize the vice in themselves, they may be disinclined to admit the existence of any such vice in the first place. This does not bode well for virtue. Consider, for instance, that one way Aristotle distinguished the merely *akratic* and curable person from the intemperate and incurable was that the former *regrets* her behavior:

The intemperate person, as we said, is not prone to regret, since he abides by his decision [when he acts]. But every incontinent is prone to regret. That is why the truth is not what we said in raising the puzzles, but in fact the intemperate person is incurable, and the incontinent curable (2014:110)

The experience of regret is a sign that one is not yet too far gone, and thus, there remains hope of improving one's character. However, when a person has become completely vicious, she makes no attempt to excuse her behavior for she sees nothing wrong. This inability to even recognize vice suggests that the road back to the right path is not only long and winding, but it is difficult to get the vicious person to even turn around and take the first steps. I fear that we (as a society, especially as a society of academics) have accepted the vice of epistemic greed for so long that we have become like the intemperate person. Not only is it uncommon for the intellectually wealthy to make a conscious effort to share in their epistemic riches, there is no social stigma nor personal regret for failing to do so. We are at a place where the default seems to be to do nothing at all, and hence, doing nothing at all is not even considered regrettable.

2.6.2 Epistemic Giving

In contrast to the epistemically greedy agent, the epistemically generous agent, although perhaps very wealthy, is not hesitant to share, and indeed, makes a conscious habit to do so liberally and frequently. She has a natural tendency to accept requests for epistemic help without any expectation of gaining something in return. One effective way to distinguish the epistemically greedy from the epistemically generous is to compare the totals of their opportunity costs. Recall once again that:

Epistemic Opportunity Costs (EOC) = Epistemic goods sacrificed in the pursuit of other epistemic goods.

The epistemically generous agent will have a long list of epistemic opportunity costs which are of no personal benefit. She frequently spends time and epistemic energy helping to improve the epistemic life of others, time and energy which she could have been using for her own epistemic purposes. This starkly contrasts with the epistemically greedy agent who carefully

manages her epistemic capital so its use is nearly always spent on improving her own epistemic life, a life which is already advantaged.

Let us consider the life of a tenure track professor. Generally speaking, academics spend incredible amounts of time engaged in intellectual activities that only those of comparable epistemic wealth ever could. Much of this comes through their employment of course, and some of this time is spent teaching other not quite as wealthy but still pretty epistemically well-off students. Professors also spend ample time researching in their own areas of interest, discussing this work with others and conversing about various intellectual matters with their colleagues. It is not only working hours, however, in which the epistemically rich spend their time engaging in intellectually elite activities. Consider academic conferences and workshops. These often take place outside of regular working hours, and are specially designed for the epistemic 1%ers to associate with others of their kind. We might compare such conferences to certain gatherings among the financially wealthy, for example, a wine-and-cheese gathering amongst billionaires to discuss their business prospects. Both the conferences and the wine –and- cheese gathering consist of an elite class which gathers amongst similar elites to further their elite interests. The difference, of course, is that the elite interest of academics is intellectual and the elite interest of business persons financial. While there is nothing wrong with these activities in themselves, they become suspect in the absence of any devotion to those who are less (epistemically or fiscally) advantaged.

This description of epistemic elites and their daily life does not yet point to epistemic greed. It only suggests that there is an intellectually rich class, and that this class frequently engages in classist activities. In the next section, I will argue that these epistemic elites have greedy tendencies, and that they are thereby more prone to develop the stable character trait of epistemic greed.

Improving Epistemic Character

Epistemic generosity, when instantiated as a dispositional trait, betters an agent's own epistemic character *in virtue of it being the sort of trait that motivates epistemic improvements in others*. This might seem strange, because the virtue epistemology literature has mostly focused on virtues that improve an agent's own epistemic status. Even many of the "character" virtues, i.e., open-mindedness, creativity, curiosity, etc., are usually understood as traits that help the agent herself acquire more knowledge, understanding, and other epistemic goods.³¹ But it seems a mistake to assume that epistemic virtue plays only this narrow, self-improvement, role. If an agent devoted her life to improving the moral character of others, it seems her own moral character would improve in virtue of this very behavior (assuming the behavior is not fueled by vicious motives). We certainly accept that many of the moral virtues can only be described with reference to the ways in which the bearer of moral virtue interacts with others (consider, for example, generosity, kindness, and justice). It seems plausible that some epistemic virtues (e.g. epistemic generosity) are of this same kind. Consider, for instance, that in exemplifying the virtue of epistemic generosity, an agent improves the epistemic state of others; and by doing this, she thereby displays her own epistemically virtuous character.

In spite of what was just said, virtue ethicists are all too often accused of advocating a "selfish" moral theory (often called the 'egoism' objection).³² Critics insist that because virtue ethics is a moral theory centered on how an agent improves her own character, it is one that encourages excessive self-concern. However, the virtue theorist can reply as follows: virtue theory is not selfish, for the improvement of personal character often depends on how the bearer

³¹ For an excellent survey of virtue epistemology, including the distinctions between responsibilism and reliabilism, see Battaly, 2008.

³² For more on virtue ethics and egoism/selfishness see Annas 2009, Hursthouse 2013, and Toner 2006 & 2010.

of virtue interacts with others. In fact, *if* someone *was* selfish, this character trait of selfishness would take away from virtue. Virtue theory then, not only does not demand selfishness but is incompatible with it. Along these same lines, many of the character traits which make an agent a better person also make an agent *a better person to others*. Virtue epistemology is prone to the same selfishness objection as is traditional virtue theory, but virtue epistemologists can also offer an analogous rebuttal. Critics might ask: is it really all that epistemically virtuous to be focused on personal epistemic character alone? The reply is yes, it could be compatible, because what constitutes personal epistemic virtue often includes the ways in which one's epistemic behavior impacts the epistemic position of others.

2.6.3 Are the Epistemic Elites Doing their Part?

Are the epistemically elite doing their part? From their vast intellectual wealth, are they sharing whatever we might think is minimally necessary to avoid epistemic greediness? Each person, of course, is different. Nevertheless, there is plenty of reason to think that many members of the intellectually elite class are *not* doing their part and that their enjoyment of epistemic riches is *not* accompanied with the sufficient epistemic giving. I have already suggested that one reason many of the intellectually elite are falling short is due to the lack of expectations or social norms that encourage them to do so. Vehement criticism of the financially rich is common place, but I have yet to hear parallel discussions about the intellectually wealthy. However, suppose we agree that the epistemically wealthy are obligated to share in their riches. How would they go about this? Obviously we cannot write a check for knowledge in the same way we can write a monetary check; the sharing of epistemic resources is far less straight-forward than the sharing of financial resources. Notwithstanding the necessary creative thought involved, there are many ways to share intellectual wealth. (We might also think that the epistemically wealthy are just the sort of people

best posed, via their advanced analytic abilities, to contrive such possibilities.) As mentioned, much epistemic sharing, probably most, occurs via the generous use of epistemic opportunity costs, i.e., when a selfish opportunity cost is replaced with a more altruistic one. Suppose that Justin generally spends four weekends per year at academic conferences. A move away from epistemic greed and toward epistemic generosity would consist in the following: one traditional academic conference weekend is replaced with a more egalitarian activity. Some might question whether there is any viable alternative option. This questioning, at best, shows a lack of creativity, and, at worst, is motivated by a wishful thinking that is uncomfortable with epistemic duties of generosity. The ways academics might spend their time to help the epistemically less advantaged is potentially endless. Below is just a short list of some possibilities: (When looking at this list, let us keep in mind that generosity is a dispositional character trait that must be looked within the context of a “complete life.” There might be times in which an academic is obsessively working to finish a project, and for months is engrossed in self-focused academic activity. This period of intense research does not preclude one from possessing the character trait of generosity, as long as this self-focused period is balanced with a period of greater giving. After the project is complete, for example, the academic might take a step back from his or her own research and focus on the direct sharing of intellectual resources with the less fortunate. Perhaps he/she might devote time to the research possibilities listed below.)³³

- Tutor high school students struggling with exit exams and college readiness tests.
- Help those struggling with literacy
- Volunteer to give lectures at prisons, hospitals, senior citizen homes, and public libraries.

³³ Many thanks to Shari Starrett for making this point.

- Help those who lack certain intellectual skills for everyday living like basic computer skills, how to file tax returns, formatting a compelling job application, etc.
- Tutor parents about the steps involved in helping their child prepare for acceptance and attendance at a college or university.
- Take the time to acquire an additional academic specialization that is likely to be of help to those who are epistemically disadvantaged.
- Make YouTube lectures of various topics designed for public consumption

One real-life example of epistemic generosity comes from Virginia Tech environmental engineering professor Marc Edwards. Edwards spent years of his life and an immeasurable amount of epistemic energy uncovering two public health crises mired in government corruption. On both occasions local residents were being endangered by lead contaminated water. Although residents had serious suspicions that something was wrong, they lacked the epistemic background to make viable complaints. Professor Edwards' expertise in lead contamination, alongside ample determination, eventually lead to a water cleanup and legal consequences for negligent government officials (Itkowitz: 2016). No amount of financial generosity on its own could have solved this problem. This sort of epistemic generosity has motivated Edwards' research for years. Carnegie Mellon professor David Dzombak specifically remembers an occasion at a 2002 conference in which Edwards encouraged other scientists to take the topic of decaying water infrastructure seriously. Edwards argued that while this might not be the most popular research area, he and his colleagues were nonetheless obligated to protect the public (Itkowitz: 2016).

It should go without saying that the way persons should share their epistemic wealth will depend on their particular academic skills. A professor who teaches tax law can help the less

epistemically privileged with their taxes, a history teacher can help high school students prepare for advanced college placement exams, those who teach writing courses might be especially equipped to tutor English language learners and so on. Now we must admit that it is sometimes the case that a given academic specialization is not the sort of thing that interests non-specialists. This, however, *does not* excuse highly specialized academics from duties of epistemic generosity. Specialists have other more generalizable skills apart from their specialty that can be of help. A metaphysician specializing in mereology, for instance, might not use one's unique expertise directly when helping those who are epistemically disadvantaged.³⁴ But even mereologists have above average writing skills, analytic reasoning ability, etc., and these skills will suffice for epistemic giving. By definition membership in the intellectually elite class means that one has intellectual advantages that others lack. While some types of intellectual advantages may be easier to share than others, with a bit of effort there is always (or very nearly always) a possible avenue for using one's intellectual privileges to help the less privileged.

The epistemically elite are can be prone to take their privileged vantage point for granted, forgetting that many of the skills that the elite consider basic either had to be taught, or that they are skills that come naturally to elite but not naturally others. I myself have been privy to professors and university administrators mocking the following sorts of things: ill-formatted CVs and job applications, ignorant comments made on television or online, polls which demonstrate just how uniformed a great number of the populace happens to be, and the fact that so few students can pass high school exit exams. While I do not think all such criticisms are inappropriate, many of them are. And I do not mean morally inappropriate, although this is

³⁴ It has come to my attention that 'applied ontology' is gaining popularity. See, for instance, Munn and Smith (2008). Perhaps, then, it will be easier for metaphysicians to find practical ways to share in their unique skill set than many might be quick to assume.

probably true as well. I mean that such criticisms are based on insufficient reason: we are epistemically criticizing without the appropriate reasons, or shall we say, without the appropriate epistemic grounds. After all, no one is born knowing how to format a resume or job application. Similarly, facts about the world and our political system are not innate, they need to be taught and many have just not had the right teachers. Lastly, let us keep in mind that the ease at which many academics engage in analytical reasoning can be attributed to nothing other than the luck of natural selection. Hence those of us who are inclined to believe we “deserve” our epistemic position in life may be overestimating the influence of our own choices while simultaneously underrating the bad luck that contributed to the misfortunes of the epistemically underprivileged.

2.7 The *Institutional Vice of Epistemic Greed*

2.7.1 Greedy Institutions at a Glance

Institutional epistemic greed/generosity bears many similarities to individual epistemic greed/generosity. The epistemically *generous* institution is one that, according to its level of epistemic wealth, is disposed to share comparatively much with the epistemically disadvantaged. An institution which is neither greedy nor generous is one that, according to its level of epistemic wealth, is disposed to share a minimally acceptable level with the disadvantaged. An epistemically *greedy* institution uses an *excessive* amount of resources to improve the epistemic life of itself. The opportunity cost of the greedy institution’s resource expenditure are those persons and programs to whom the resources *could* be devoted to if they *were not* spent to help the rich get richer. Formally, institutional epistemic greed can be understood as follows:

Institutional Epistemic Greed: To hoard, acquire, or use an excessive amount of epistemic resources while sharing comparatively little with those who are less epistemically advantaged.

To use our formula from earlier sections, intuitional greed *simpliciter* consists of a greedy institution, an object of greed's desire, and greed's victims. Institutional *epistemic* greed then, is simply institutional greed in which the object of greed's desire is *epistemic*, and the victim of greed suffers an *epistemic* loss. Put formally,

Institutional Greed Partitioned= Greedy Institution (GA) + Object of Desire (OD) + Greed's Victim (GV)

Institutional Epistemic Greed Partitioned= Greedy Institution (GA) + Object of Epistemic Desire (OED) + Epistemic Victim (EV)

An example of *financial* greed would consist of an institution, Enron, the object of Enron's desire, money, and the victims who suffered financial losses at Enron's expense. An example of institutional *epistemic* greed would consist of an institution, e.g. a university, an epistemic object of the university's desire, e.g., epistemic resources, and the victim of greed e.g., those outside of the university who cannot take advantage of the epistemic resources within it.

Prima facie, it might seem that universities are by their very nature epistemically *generous*, not epistemically greedy. After all, universities are committed to the creation and sharing of knowledge. Most persons within a university are students, not teachers, and hence they are improving their epistemic position. This line of argument continues as follows: "Even professors spending their time on personal research are often working on projects that will be accessible to public consumption or aid the public in some way..."

While it is true that university endeavors are often epistemically valuable, universities are not thereby generous nor does this show that they lack the vice of epistemic greed. We can compare universities to stockbrokerage companies. Suppose that stockbrokerage entity *Supertrade* is devoted to wealth creation. Clearly, this devotion in and of itself is not enough to render *Supertrade* generous. If *Supertrade*'s financial activities can be accounted for by the

companies' desire to (1) make the rich richer (that is, to make their clients richer), and (2) further their own financial interests, then it seems that rather than generosity, *Supertrade's* wealth creation may actually exemplify greed. There is something similarly true with universities. If a university's engagement in advancing epistemic ends furthers the university's own interests and also makes the rich richer, this is hardly an illustration of epistemic generosity. And most universities goals fit into both categories. The more students they educate, the more tuition they receive. Such money is needed to keep them in business. I myself have overheard and taken part in many conversations about increasing undergraduate enrollment for the sake of allowing professors to pursue their own research interests. Without enough undergraduates, it is contended, departments will close and the elites will lose their jobs. Similarly, without graduate students professors at prestige research universities would have to grade their own undergraduates (gasp). And as we have already mentioned, university undergraduates are already fairly well-off epistemically. Most universities simply are not examples of the best off altruistically helping the least well-off. Now none of this is meant to suggest that most professors see students as mere means. This is far from the case. It is certain that many (and likely that the majority) of professors sincerely aim to better the epistemic life of their students. But that fact alone does not make the university a generous institution.³⁵ Generosity both goes above and beyond what is required of one and what is in one's own self-interest. The institution of the university itself clearly has institutional self-interest in the knowledge it spreads. This does not preclude the university from being generous. It does suggest, however, that in order to be generous it must go beyond the fulfillment of traditional university missions and set certain goals that have generally been considered outside the bounds of its institutional purpose.

³⁵ Nor would the fact that most financial advisors want to help their clients make *Supertrade* generous.

Speaking of the “traditional practices” of universities, the common practice of college admissions perpetuates principles of epistemic elitism. For instance, the university admission model itself assumes that we ought to epistemically enrich those who are already comparatively epistemically privileged. After all, it is those students with the best grades and test scores who are allowed to attend the university, while those with worse grades and test scores are allowed precluded from taking part. That this is a fair practice is almost never questioned. Moves are made, of course, to promote the acceptance of students from minority and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. But even in these cases, universities seek to admit the epistemically best members of such underrepresented groups. I am about to suggest something which is surely controversial, although it is hard for me to understand what the controversy is all about. *What would be wrong about securing a select number of spots for students who are primarily epistemically disadvantaged?* For instance, universities might choose to admit students with *lower grades, lower test scores, and less polished* writing samples. The details, of course, would need to be worked out. We would want to admit students who are truly interested in improving their epistemic position and not simply those who are lazy. But once we control for these sorts of non-epistemic factors, colleges could choose to help a select group of students who struggle epistemically, and specifically because they so struggle. This would of course require spending the time and money to establish the type of learning opportunities that are best suited to these group’s needs. This should not be surprising. After all, central to the very concept of generosity is the sacrificing of resources for the sake of helping others even when this might do nothing to help oneself.

Let me emphasize that I am not suggesting that the current university model be completely overturned. It is fine that universities, for the most part, continue about business as usual. It is

fine that professors pursue research and that admissions committees try to ensure that most of the admitted students display high levels of epistemic merit. As has been mentioned before, richness in itself does not amount to greediness. Nevertheless, riches justifiably signal to others that they might be suspicious of such greediness. Those who are rich (whether epistemically or financially) have a lot they might share. In spite of having a lot, they are often especially devoted to securing their present and future wealth. If such well-off persons and institutions are to avoid stumbling into the path of greed, proactive steps should be taken; time and energy should be spent helping the less advantaged. And that is just what I am suggesting that universities ought to do. As with individuals, the list of ways that institutions might share in their epistemic wealth is endless. To satisfy potential skeptics, below is a short list of such possibilities:

- Reserve spots in university admissions for those who are not so epistemically meritorious. Resources should also be set aside for the unique educational needs of such students.
- Hold workshops, seminars, and conferences that are especially dedicated to helping those who are among the worst off epistemically.
- Recruit university employees from the epistemically disadvantaged population. This might include taking time to design university positions which fit the skills of this disadvantaged population.
- Set aside funding for grants that encourage projects that study topics likely to help those who are epistemically disadvantaged.

As with the individual epistemic virtue, institutional greediness, and its opposite virtue, generosity, are best understood in terms of epistemic opportunity costs. Suppose, for example, that a university currently devotes none of its public workshops to helping the epistemically disadvantaged. Such institution can take a step away from greed and toward generosity by

replacing one of its current workshops with one especially devoted to the needs of those who are epistemically underprivileged. Similarly, some spots that the university currently reserved for the *most* epistemically meritorious can be reserved for some of those who are the *least* epistemically meritorious. The point is to transfer a portion of the time, resources, and energy that are primarily devoted to those who are among the best off epistemically and transfer them to those who are less fortunate.

2.8 Conclusion

2.8.1 Give the people what they want (and they do want something).

Academics, perhaps because of their great respect for reasoning, knowledge, and other intellectual endeavors, seem prone to mistaken assumptions about those who are epistemically underprivileged. Discussing these ideas with academic friends and colleagues, I have heard many object that those with lower educational levels or poor analytic skills have little desire for epistemic goods. “I see your point,” they would protest, “But no one wants what we (academics) have to share.” To me such assertions suggest disconnect between epistemic elites and their less privileged counterparts. While it may be true that many ‘ordinary people’ dislike college classes and love The Kardashians, I would surmise that even Kardashian fans have some areas of epistemic interest in which some academics could be of help. Yes, often these epistemic interests are pragmatic. The non-elite want to improve their writing, reading, and mathematical abilities for the purpose of securing employment or helping their children. But it should not matter whether or not desires are pragmatic. What matters is that there are epistemically disadvantaged persons that can be helped by the advantaged. This might require epistemic elites to step out of their comfort zone. While many people in academia are *capable* of helping persons improve their resumes and learn basic computer skills, few are *familiar* with this type of tutoring. This is no

excuse, however, because it is quite easy to become so familiar. Learning what the epistemically disadvantaged desire and how to help requires dedication and open-mindedness, but not much more.

2.8.2 The scope of Epistemic Duties

This paper's focus on the university in no way implies that universities and their employees are the only ones guilty of epistemic greed nor the only ones that have a duty to share in their epistemic goods. Nearly everyone has the potential to acquire the vice of epistemic greed, and nearly everyone has a duty to share some epistemic resources. The duty to share, however, is commensurate with one's comparative epistemic riches. Because academics are amongst the intellectually richest of all, they are fairly burdened with higher obligations of epistemic giving. Hence this paper selected an easily identifiable subgroup of these elites to illuminate the features of epistemic greed and how we might counteract it.

Aptness and clarity were not my only reasons for focusing on the university. The other reason should be fairly obvious. This paper will be read and heard primarily by academics. If epistemic greed is indeed a problem in need of a solution, the first step forward is recognizing it as such. The second step is agreeing on courses of action that might remedy the troubles at hand. This paper noted a few possible ways to reduce epistemic greed. The larger point, however, was that there are endless ways to display epistemic generosity, ways that are easy enough to implement given an honest commitment to addressing the problem. Epistemic greed has long been assumed non-existent or morally permissible. Changing moral sentiments and patterns of behavior will not be an easy endeavor.

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CHAPTER 3

INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY: AN INTERPERSONAL THEORY

Key Words: Humility; Intellectual Humility; Virtue Epistemology; Assholes

3.1 Introduction

In this paper I try to describe what we mean when we preference the term “humility” with “intellectual.” In contrast to much of the existing literature, I will argue that humility and intellectual humility are interpersonal (as opposed to personal) virtues. Also in contrast with what has been said before, I will further argue that the fruits of intellectual humility are *external* to the virtue holder. My plan runs as follows: I will first discuss humility and then move on to its close cousin intellectual humility. The detour is necessary because I disagree with the contemporary literature on key features of humility and its intellectual variant. Hence, I cannot just use the existing literature to build my own theory, but must instead use it as a point of contrast.

Section II begins with reviewing the literature on humility and modesty simpliciter. (I use “modesty” and “humility” interchangeably. See note four.) I narrow in on one particular feature of many accounts, what we might call the “self-assessment assumption.”³⁶ (The assumption that

³⁶ Unfortunately, I will not have time to discuss all accounts in the prolific literature. Rather, I analyze a select set of theories of particular relevance of the purposes of this paper. I have a bit of a disagreement with some friends who argue that if I write a paper on intellectual humility, then I should cite nearly everything that has been published on the topic. (I am not exaggerating their claim). I disagree for various reasons, one is that citation just becomes a long list of random works that the author pulls from a Google search. Second, there is only so much room in a paper, and only so much time to write. Too much cross literature engagement can make a paper messy and take away from work’s original content. Anyhow, that is my humble take on things.

the essence of humility is the virtuous assessment of the self.) After reviewing humility simpliciter, I move on to the literature on *intellectual* humility. I then offer my own alternative account. I begin describing the virtue broadly, in terms of what intellectual humility *is not*. In Section 5, I address the more gritty details. The paper concludes with three brief sections addressing potential objections: first, I make clear that the particular virtue I describe is intellectual humility and not a related virtue. I then explain why intellectual humility is indeed a virtue rather than simple “intellectual politeness.” Lastly, I explain the ways in which intellectual humility betters the world in a uniquely intellectual fashion.

3.2 Self -Assessment Accounts and Alternatives

At first glance, humility seems rather peculiar. On the one hand, many religions and cultures consider it foundational for a good life or virtuous character.³⁷ On the other hand, there is a sense in which humility is importantly different from many other popular moral principles. That is, many if not most widely shared moral principles are focused on the good of *others*. Along these lines, moral virtues are character traits that generally concern the virtue holder’s behavior toward *others*. Generosity, for instance, is about sharing with others and kindness about

³⁷There is an endless array of literature I might cite to demonstrate the centrality of humility to various religions and strains of moral thought. There is note, of course, time for this in a footnote. Yet here are just a few illustrative examples, so the reader might get a taste of the general sentiment. From The Bhagavad Gita, “Be humble, be harmless, have no pretension.” (13:7-8). From the Qur’an “Successful indeed are the believers who humble themselves in their prayers and who shun vain conversation.” Surah 23:1-3; Humility is the solid foundation of all virtues.” ~Confucius; “Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues, hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance.” ~St. Augustine; “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom”; Becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love...” Book of Mormon, Mosiah 3:19. (The compilation of these quotes was found at http://serenityweb.com/?page_id=80.)

treating others with respect. This interpersonal quality, however, is strangely at odds with humility, a virtue often assumed to be all about how agents relate to *themselves*.³⁸

Let us take a look at some of the recent philosophical literature. Appealing to Adam Smith Jason Breenan has argued that the humble person judges himself according to an ideal. Kupfer (2003) has suggested that humble persons are especially aware of the role that other persons and luck play in their accomplishments; this awareness comes with the recognition that one lacks appropriate grounds for self-aggrandizing. Richards (1988) argues humility is simply about an accurate perception of the self, Schueler (1997&199) contends that what matters is an indifference to *one's accomplishments* that matters³⁹. Another much-discussed view put forth by Julia Driver is that the humble person actually holds a false self-perception and under evaluates his own worth.⁴⁰

Let us call the views on humility discussed thus far “self-assessment accounts.” Although they might differ in various respects, self-assessment accounts have at least two features in common.

Self-Assessment Accounts of Humility:

1. The virtue consists of a certain cognitive stance toward the self.
2. The virtue holder refrains from going overboard in (1) (in other words, the cognitive stance is not one that “overrates” the self.)

³⁸ Admittedly, it is not outside of the realm of moral thought to believe that moral duties include duties to the self. Nonetheless, on a basic intuitive level it seems odd that a virtue primarily concerned with the self would be such a foundational for fundamental moral virtue. “The Golden Rule” does, after all, require not only that we treat others as ourselves but ourselves as others. Yet for most of us, treating ourselves justly is the easier requirement. Arguably it is because of this tendency to treat ourselves better than others, that the moral life seems primarily a domain about the treatment of other persons.

³⁹ There are other accounts as well. I do not list them all – but most fit into the category of what I will soon describe as “Self-assessment Accounts.”

⁴⁰ As Nicolas Bommarito has noted, “This account of modesty (Driver’s account) has seen more than its fair share of attacks (see Statman 1992; Maes 2004; Raterman 2006; Brennan 2007; and nearly anyone else writing on modesty since Driver).” (2013:95). It should not be surprising that the criticism of Driver’s view coming from the perspective of ‘intellectual humility’ is just as strong. For epistemologists and ethicists alike then, there is something very unsettling about a virtue being dependent upon ignorance (Socrates has made his mark). I agree with these general criticisms. My greatest concern is that ignorance of the self is a vice, and a foundational moral virtue like humility should surely not depend upon a moral vice.

A main thesis of this paper is that self-assessment accounts of humility are mistaken: I propose that humility is a virtue concerning our attitudes and acts *not* toward ourselves but rather toward *others*.

Before moving from humility to *intellectual* humility, let us take a brief look at a view outside the bounds self-assessment.⁴¹ In contrast to many who wrote before him, Nicholas Bommarito has proposed an “attention” view of modesty. (While Bommarito uses the term “modesty” he himself intends the term to be interchangeable with humility.)⁴² In his own words, “...modesty is about neither accuracy nor ignorance but instead is rooted in certain patterns of attention” (2013:93). Put differently, modesty is not so much about how one assesses the self but rather about *how often* (and in what way) one does. The modest person simply does not pay that much attention to himself at all, whether good attention or bad. We can assume that he thereby spends little time assessing the self, whether in a good way or bad way. The modest person is uncomfortable with such attention, whether the attention is coming from himself or his peers.⁴³ I think Bommarito’s account sheds light on a flaw common to many self-assessment theories.

Consider the following example,

Eeyore: Eeyore does not think of himself too highly. Indeed, let us assume that according to one’s favored self-assessment account Eeyore cannot be described as anything other than humble. Notwithstanding, he engages in behavior which many find painfully irritating. He incessantly discusses *his* work, *his* goals, *his* accomplishments and failures, and *his* disdain of rush-hour traffic. None of this self-talk is balanced with inquiries into the lives of others.

⁴¹ Robert Roberts & Jay Wood (2007) also put forth an account which falls outside of the self-assessment perspective and empathizes the humble person’s absence of excessive concern for the admiration of others.

⁴² From Bommarito, “I take the terms (modesty and humility) to be interchangeable but will use the term “modest” in my discussion”(2013:93).

⁴³ From reading Bommarito’s paper, I get the impression that most of the time modesty exemplifies itself via a lack of self-attention. However, Bommarito is clear that other ‘patterns of attention’ can also qualify. He argues, “Sometimes, however, a modest person does pay attention to the quality they are modest about and its value. Such a person is not modest through inattention but by directing his or her attention toward certain factors” (2013: 103).

It is consistent with self-assessment accounts that Eeyore is both humble yet behaves narcissistically. Eeyore might hold himself in low regard, and yet nonetheless think of nothing other than his low-regarded self. While this type of personal disposition is surely possible, it is also counterintuitive to think of persons like Eeyore as humble. More likely descriptions are, “narcissistic,” “self-obsessed,” “depressed” or even “infuriating.”

Now we can admit high self-assessment and humble behavior might be *correlated*. Perhaps someone like the just described Eeyore is rare. But this is no defense. Rare or common, self-assessment accounts leave room for humility alongside arrogant behavior. This gap is a red flag and Bommarito capitalizes on the warning. His attentiveness view renders the coincidence of arrogance and humility appropriately uncomfortable. According to Bommarito, the humble person is ill-disposed to think about himself at all, much less might he ever be disposed toward self-obsession.

Although I do not agree with his whole account, I think Bommarito has made an important discovery about humility: *how much a person thinks about himself is just as important as how highly he thinks of himself*. My account will prove compatible with this important insight. That being said, my account will also go beyond what Bommarito proposes. One potential problem with his account, for example, is that a person may spend very little time reflecting on the self or reasons that are simply accidental. An individual in a coma, for instance, will spend very little time on self-reflection but this clearly does not make one modest. You could modify the account and argue that the “virtue of attention” theory first demands *the possibility* of paying

close attention to the self. This, however, still seems to come with problems. Consider an individual, “Mack,” completely overwhelmed with his life. Perhaps he is stressed because of his new high-paying job and while he is simultaneously dealing with ill family members. Let us suppose that the busyness of Mack’s situation prevents him from thinking much about himself, and this goes on for a period of years. It does not seem that Mack becomes humble even though he rarely spends time focusing on the self. So while self-attention might play a role in humility, I do not think it plays the central role Bommarito proposes.

3.3 Two Varieties of Intellectual Humility

3.3.1 Intellectual humility: Epistemic & Non-Epistemic Perspectives

Like humility simpliciter, most accounts in the contemporary literature argue that intellectual humility is a virtue of self-assessment. What distinguishes humility from intellectual humility, then, is the latter’s self-assessment is not of the self simpliciter but rather particular aspects of the self. More specifically, according to self-assessment accounts,

1. Humility consists of a certain cognitive assessment of the self, most notably, aspects that are specially “intellectual” or “epistemic.”
2. The intellectually humble agent refrains from going overboard in (1) (their cognitive assessment of the intellectual self is not higher than it ought to be.)

There is a sharp divide amongst self-assessment theorists of *intellectual* humility. On the one hand, there are theorists who advocate what we might call “epistemic” accounts. For simplicity, let us say that those who disagree defend “non-epistemic” accounts. We can point out at least two major differences between the epistemic and non-epistemic positions. The first is that those of the epistemic ilk do not understand intellectual humility as a variant of humility

simpliciter, but nearly a different virtue all together. By “a different virtue altogether” I mean that this “distinct” view of intellectual humility *need not be informed by regular humility*. In contrast, according to non-epistemic theorists, intellectual humility is just humility “applied to intellectual matters” or “in an intellectual way” or “insofar as the virtue relates to knowledge, understanding, and other intellectual goods.” In other words, *intellectual humility is a kind, type, or variant of humility simpliciter*.⁴⁴

If the non-epistemic theorists are right and intellectual humility is a variant of humility simpliciter, it would make sense that we look to the virtue of humility to help us understand the virtue of intellectual humility. For example, in their recent paper on intellectual humility, Baehr et. al., argue that, “Proper pride is having the right stance towards one’s strengths; humility is having the right stance towards one’s limitations. Intellectual humility, then, is having the right stance toward one’s intellectual limitations” (2015: 15). In this quote we see the authors first describe regular humility (not the intellectual variant) as “owning one’s limitations.” They then note that *intellectual* humility is simply the intellectual variant of such limitation owning disposition. This type of strategy is not that used by those who adhere to an epistemic version of intellectual humility. Those in the epistemic camp variety have no need to first look at regular humility to then inform them of intellectual humility because they do not see the latter as derived from the former.

Besides disagreement over the distinctiveness of intellectual humility, epistemic and non-epistemic theorists disagree over the importance of epistemic accuracy. Epistemic theorists claim that we simply cannot judge whether S is intellectually humble without information about S’s

⁴⁴ Not all theorists describe their accounts in these terms. What I have said (and will say below) is only what I consider a helpful way to differentiate what appears a serious divide.

epistemic track record.⁴⁵ By track record, I mean the record of arriving at the correct epistemic stance toward one's beliefs. Consider, for example, a definition of intellectual humility recently put forth by epistemic theorists Ian Church and Peter Samuelsson,

Church & Samuelson's Epistemic Account of Intellectual Humility: 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 (forthcoming).

According to the above account, in order to know if an agent is intellectually humble, we must know whether the agent has a history of accurately tracking positive epistemic status. Or at the very least, a track record of accurately assessing what one "could non-culpably take to be the positive epistemic status of one's own beliefs." In other words, this approach suggests what matters is whether or not an agent might be held epistemically blameworthy.⁴⁶ In contrast to such clusters of epistemic views which focus on accuracy or perceived accuracy, according to those in the non-epistemic camp, accuracy and intellectual humility bear no direct connection: it is at least possible that some who are intellectually humble have terrible track records of epistemic accuracy or are in various ways epistemically blameworthy.⁴⁷ So the two major differences between the epistemic and non-epistemic accounts are

⁴⁵ Bommarito notices that those who oppose Driver's account of modesty also strive to preserve a type of accuracy as essential to modesty (2013:96). This type of accuracy, however, is simply accuracy about one's own self-assessment. In contrast, the type of accuracy that concerns those who defend 'epistemic intellectual humility' is of a different type. Those in this epistemic camp understand intellectual humility as accuracy regarding all of one's beliefs, not just self-assessment beliefs.

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⁴⁷ Examples of those who take the epistemic stance include Allen Hazlett and co-authors Peter Samuelson, Ian Church, Matt Jarvinen and Tom Paulus. Hazlett focuses on higher order beliefs in particular, that is, beliefs about the epistemic status of one's beliefs.

1. the latter but not the former derives the virtue of “intellectual humility” from the simple virtue of “humility proper”
2. the former and not the latter claims that appealing to an agent’s epistemic track record helps us uncover whether or not an agent is intellectually humble.

While I will ultimately disagree with both the epistemic and non-epistemic accounts thus far been put forth in the literature, my own proposal does fit the general non-epistemic framework. I take a rather strong stance in this respect: *intellectual humility is simply the disposition to behave humbly in intellectual domains* (where intellectual is understood broadly to include reasoning, understanding, knowledge, belief, understanding, etc.). In the next section, I explain why I reject epistemic accounts of intellectual humility. I will then move on to non-epistemic accounts and explain why I reject those currently on offer.

3.3.2 Why Epistemic Accounts of Intellectual Humility Fall Short

We already looked at one epistemic account, that of Church and Samuelson. For our purposes it is helpful to extract the basic features of their proposal in order to derive a generic version of those who adhere to an epistemic view of intellectual humility. We can call this *Bare Bones Intellectual Humility*⁴⁸

Bare Bones Epistemic Intellectual Humility: Intellectual Humility is the disposition to hold beliefs as strongly as one epistemically ought.

⁴⁸ Those who hold views of this variety include Barrett, Church, Hardy, Hazlett, Jarvinen, Paulus, and Samuelson. It is worth making clear that none of the aforementioned hold the exact view I describe as “BBIH”. BBIH, rather, is intellectual shorthand; it is a stipulation that emphasizes what I am considering an especially important aspect of certain accounts of intellectual humility, an aspect which distinguishes this particular account of intellectual humility from other scholarly perspectives. The especially important aspect of emphasis is that intellectual humility is grounded (in one way or another) in a type of epistemic accuracy. For Hazlett this accuracy is accuracy about *higher order* beliefs, for most others the relevant accuracy is first-order beliefs. But whether it be, first, second, third, or all orders of beliefs, the common trait is still doxastic accuracy. We will see that in contrast, non-epistemic theories of intellectual humility are not especially dependent upon, nor described in terms of, epistemic accuracy. For non-epistemic theories epistemic accuracy is at best an accidental feature of intellectual humility.

BBIH states that an intellectually humble agent's beliefs are always *just right* epistemically.⁴⁹ She neither believes with greater nor lesser strength than that which is epistemically appropriate. We might even think of this in Aristotelian terms, as does Allen Hazlett who argues,

Intellectual humility is a mean between two extremes (in the manner of moral virtues, according to Aristotle): intellectual dogmatism and intellectual timidity. The dogmatic overestimate the epistemic status of their doxastic attitudes; the timid underestimate the epistemic status of theirs (*forthcoming*).

BBIH and all those accounts that see epistemic accuracy as central to the virtue of intellectual humility have various intuitive appeals. For instance, it is intuitive that those who *are* intellectually humble *are not* epistemically overconfident. In other words, it would seem odd to call an individual intellectually humble one moment while admitting the next moment that he holds beliefs with far more confidence than the evidence merits. BBIH rules out this possibility. Those who are epistemically overconfident, after all, are those whose strength of belief goes beyond that which is epistemically apt. By barring epistemically inapt beliefs, BBIH bars overconfident beliefs. Eliminating those who are epistemically overconfident from membership in the class of the intellectually humble seems to make sense. After all, the following just sounds off: "Jim is extremely overconfident. Again and again he insists on believing p even without evidence. But at least we can say he is intellectually humble."

Despite some intuitive appeal, a closer look makes it crystal clear that the epistemic camp is heading down the wrong path. To see how, it is helpful to engage in some analysis of virtues

⁴⁹ There is a non-intellectual variant of what I am calling the 'epistemic perspective'. Various self-assessment theorists have argued that humility or modesty consists of having an accurate perspective of the extent and quality of one's own abilities and accomplishments. Consider Norvin Richards, for instance, "... (Humility) is not a matter of thinking that one's accomplishments and virtues come literally to naught, but just of esteeming them no more highly than they deserve" (1992:xxi). Others who defend similar positions include Flanagan (1990 & 1996). Those who hold the epistemic version of this view

apart from intellectual humility. Let's try generosity. Many agree with Aristotle that the 'wasteful person is not generous: The generous person needs basic money management skills.⁵⁰

Notwithstanding, ideal money management does not define generosity.⁵¹ We can imagine, after all, an agent who manages her finances perfectly and is also perfectly *greedy*. We might also imagine someone that readily shares his time, money, and material possessions, but on occasion goes a bit *overboard* in giving. Despite his flaws, many would still call such a person generous.⁵² So while one cannot be both generous and fiscally reckless, fiscal responsibility and generosity do not track each other all the way through. Likewise, while those that extremely undervalue their objective epistemic position are not intellectually humble, the two nonetheless fail to track all the way through. Let us consider two examples:

Baxter: Baxter is a Harvard grad with admirable epistemic accuracy. His episteme track record is impeccable. He also knows as much and is very pleased with his epistemic excellence. Everyone that comes in contact with Baxter soon knows this as well. Not only is Baxter the type that flaunts his intellectual expertise, he rudely shuns those he justifiably believes are inferior.

Compare Baxter to Toby.

Toby: Toby is pretty good at accurately tracking his epistemic status. Although he is not as accurate as Baxter, Toby usually comes close to tracking as he ought. In addition, Toby patiently listens to the opinions of others, even his intellectual

⁵⁰ "Wasteful" sometimes translates as 'prodigal' or 'profligate'.

⁵¹ In Aristotle's words, "[T]he generous person is the one who spends in accord with his means, and for the right purposes, whereas the one who exceeds his means is wasteful... (2014:51)

⁵² Aristotle has argued that while the wasteful person is not generous, wastefulness is a little bit closer to generosity than greediness. He suggests that, "(The wasteful person) seems to be quite a lot better than the ungenerous person, since he is easily cured...he has the features proper to the generous person, since he gives and does not take, though he does neither rightly or well" (2014:52). Along similar lines, it seems to me that while strength of belief does not track intellectual humility, diffidence fits more comfortably with the virtue than intellectual arrogance. I would explain this in terms of the ways in which the relevant attitudes relate to a sense of intellectual entitlement. Those who are intellectually arrogant are far more likely to have a sense of intellectual entitlement compared to those who are intellectually diffident. Since a sense of intellectual entitlement, I will argue, is the polar opposite of intellectual humility, it is easier for diffident persons to acquire the virtue of intellectual humility than it is for the intellectually arrogant to acquire the same.

inferiors. This, in turn, occasionally results in Toby having a little less faith in his beliefs than his epistemic status merits.

Between Baxter and Toby, the latter seems non-controversially more humble. If so, then epistemic accuracy is neither necessary nor sufficient for intellectual humility. The problem, as I see it, is this: epistemic theories takes us too far afield from intuitions. As Baxter and Toby demonstrate, it is intuitively implausible that those who many would call intellectually arrogant are actually intellectually humble. Theorists of intellectual humility should aim to talk with one another rather than past one another. Talking with each other involves an attempt to reach some equilibrium by appeal to at least *some* pre-theoretical intuitions. Notwithstanding, epistemic theorists are, of course, welcome to stipulate their own definition.

If those who support epistemic theories of intellectual humility want to offer an entirely stipulated definition, I have no objections. But let us also note that in this case there is no disagreement between the two camps; they are just engaged in different debates. I am attempting to describe the pre-theoretical concept of humility through an intellectual lens. Because epistemic accounts take us very far from these pre-theoretical conceptions, for my purposes they must be rejected.⁵³

⁵³ I am sincerely open to the possibility that both epistemic and non-epistemic theorists are pointing out important intellectual virtues. Consider, for instance, the two-different camps of virtue epistemologists, the ‘reliabilists’ and the ‘responsibilists’. Reliabilists argue that intellectual virtues are defined in terms of epistemic accuracy. They see cognitive skills like good memory and vision as exemplars of the intellectual virtues. Responsibilists, on the other hand, focus on moral character traits like courage and open-mindedness as applied to the intellectual realm. The two sides have argued, and often continue to argue, that their own focus is better than the focus of the other side. Although they might not say so in so many words, it seems like many responsibilists are insisting that the ‘real intellectual virtues’ are of course those of the responsibilist variety. Likewise many reliabilists seem to argue against this position in favor of their own reliabilist understanding of intellectual virtues as the ‘real thing’. And it may be the case that one of these camps is getting much closer to the ‘true’ understanding of intellectual virtues than is the other camp. But it might also be that each side is right. Perhaps intellectual virtue consists of both responsibilist and reliabilists virtues. Perhaps both are indispensable to living a virtuous epistemic life. While I do not want to say that both the non-epistemic and epistemic camps might accurately describe intellectual humility (I believe there is only one account of intellectual humility), I do want to say that each might describe a true intellectual virtue. So even if one camp is calling a virtue by the wrong name, both might be describing genuine intellectual virtues which are each important features of the intellectual life well-lived.

3.3.3 Non-Epistemic Accounts

The non-epistemic self-assessment account that will be my primary focus is put forth by Jason Baer, Heather Battaly, Daniel Howard-Snyder, and Dennis Whitcomb. We can call it the “Limitations Owning View.” Baer et al. argue that, “Intellectual humility...is having the right stance toward one’s intellectual limitations” (forthcoming). They then flesh this out further, arguing that, “On our view, humility partly consists in a disposition to be aware (even if just implicitly) of one’s limitations, for them to come to mind when the occasion calls for it” (forthcoming), and also, “Proper attentiveness is not enough for IH, however; the intellectually humble person will also own her intellectual limitations” (forthcoming). More specifically, we might sum up the Limitations Owning View (LOV) with the following quote,

Limitations Owning View: “...a dispositional profile including cognitive, behavioral, motivational, and affective responses to an awareness of one’s limitations.”⁵⁴

While I ultimately disagree with the above account, I am largely sympathetic with this train of ideas. I object insofar as intellectual humility seems to demand *much more* than just limitation owning. For instance, let us imagine a professor who is acutely aware of his own limitations. He also justifiably believes that he is better than most of his students in physics. With this realization in mind, he looks down on them with contempt as his intellectual inferiors. He mocks their “stupid questions.” Even when they understand, he lectures patronizingly making sure they recognize his superiority. He acts this way not only toward his students but all who he justifiably believes have less intellectual acumen. Not only this, but he jumps at every opportunity to mention his success and prominently displays his awards and accomplishments wherever and whenever he can. To summarize, he is both aware of his limitations and responds

⁵⁴ Bommarito also mentions limitations owning, “One of the qualities that makes a Gandhi or a Mandela so great is the relationship they have with their own goodness; they refrain from tooting their own horns and instead seem to focus on their own limitations” (2013:93-4).

appropriately. He is also, however, aware of his strengths, wants everyone else to be so aware, and thinks these strengths entitle him to treat intellectual inferiors contemptuously. It is counterintuitive that such a professor is intellectually humble (to say the least).

Baer et al. do address concerns very similar to my own. I am not satisfied with their response. One line of argument they use is an example of a diffident agent who does not own her own strengths. Baer et al. argue that if humility involves “owning ones strengths,” we would have to conclude that this diffident agent is “not humble enough.” This conclusion, they suggest, is odd (2013: 20). I have two responses. First, arguing that the virtue of humility needs to pay attention to strengths is not equivalent to claiming that you need to define things in terms of “owning one’s strengths.” There are many ways to incorporate a stance toward strengths that are not in terms of owning and do not run into this problem. Second, although calling the diffident student “too humble” is odd, I do not think it is as odd as the alternative. That is, I think it is *even odder* and *even more counterintuitive* to have an account of humility that allows for the types of arrogant behavior that is displayed in the Baxter example. Next, Baer et al. claim that their account gets rid of at least “half of arrogance,” for it eliminates the arrogance that comes along with a refusal to own one’s own limitations. I do like this feature of their account. However, I think halfway is not good enough. Again, the type of arrogance described in the Baxter example is so counterintuitive that a proper theory of humility (and intellectual humility) should do all it can to eliminate this possibility if it hopes to describe our pre-theoretical intuitive conception of the character trait (2013:26).⁵⁵ For

⁵⁵ Lastly, Baer et al argue that even if their account does not make arrogance and intellectual humility practically incompatible, it would make the co-occurrence of arrogance and intellectual humility internally not rational (2013:26). I do not have the time to address all of their arguments here, but let me just say I am skeptical. At the end of the day, I ask that the reader rely on the strength of my counterexamples, for even taking all of the replies from the limitations owning crew into account, the possibility of such cases is compatible with their theory of intellectual humility. I am suggesting that any account that leaves room for this compatibility can be improved to better fit our pre-theoretical intuitions.

these reasons, I think the Limitations Owning View, at best, tells half of the story.⁵⁶ In the next section, I will do my best to tell the rest.

3.4 Profanities and Entitlement

3.4.1 Virtues: personal and interpersonal

In addition to leaving out the importance of intellectual strengths, The Limitations Owning Account makes what I consider the all too common self-assessment error. Like other theorists, Baer, et al., understand intellectual humility as self-reflective rather than other reflective. This section details the specific problems with self-reflective accounts and also lays the groundwork for an other-directed theory.

In earlier sections we discussed something peculiar about self-assessment accounts. It seems fishy that a core moral virtue is so self-focused. The humble Robison Crusoe, for instance, seems a serious possibility according to most self-assessments accounts. Let us try a thought experiment:

Island: At age 8 Rob was left to fend for himself on a deserted island. He is now 30, and has been living on his own for the past 22 years, surviving by drinking rainwater and eating fish and berries.

Is it plausible that Rob is humble? This virtue just does not seem to fit. Given his situation, it makes little sense to say that Rob does or does not possess humility. If someone claimed that Rob was humble, another might ask “Humble about what?” Something is missing in Rob’s life that makes the virtue difficult or impossible to acquire. I propose that this something is

⁵⁶ Baer et. al. also argue that even if their account does not make arrogance and intellectual humility practically incompatible, it would make the co-occurrence of arrogance and intellectual humility internally not rational (2013:26). I do not have the time to address all of their arguments here, but let me just say I am skeptical. At the end of the day, I ask that the reader rely on the strength of my counterexamples, for even taking all of the replies from the limitations owning crew into account, the possibility of such cases is compatible with their theory of intellectual humility. I am suggesting that any account that leaves room for this compatibility can be improved to better fit our pre-theoretical intuitions.

other persons. So my first proposal is that humility cannot be described without reference to others. In other words, humility is an *interpersonal* rather than a *personal* virtue.

The way I am using the term, not all virtues are interpersonal, although many are. Courage and temperance are arguably *personal* virtues. We can imagine that Rob is courageous insofar as he jumps off cliffs, chases scary animals and swims in stormy waters. We can also imagine that Rob is incredibly temperate; he has the self-control to store food for the winter, go hunting when he would rather sleep, and endure the hot sun as he waits to catch fish. It is much harder to think of the ways that Rob might be humble. Maybe Rob does not think too highly of himself, but without comparison, what this means is unclear. This difficulty in conceptualizing a humble Robinson Crusoe can be explained when we view humility through an interpersonal lens. For clarity, let us formalize:

Personal Virtue (PV): If virtue PV is a personal virtue, then PV can be adequately described while referencing the virtue holder alone.

Interpersonal Virtue (IPV): If virtue IPV is an interpersonal virtue, then IPV can only be adequately described with reference to agents other than the virtue holder.

The above distinctions explain our worries in ISLAND. Because humility requires “other reference,” it is very difficult to describe how isolated Rob can be humble. Let us clarify, however, that because virtues are dispositions, there are certain ways to sneak around this. Even while on the island, Rob might compare himself to others via imagination. Perhaps as he is trying to hunt for food, he thinks back to his early childhood and finds himself fixated on how much better his brother would be at this endeavor. Maybe Rob fantasizes about finding a tribe of native islanders who are wiser and more skillful than himself. This imaginative process is likely evidence of a disposition, i.e., Rob *would act* humbly *if* he ever had the chance for interpersonal

interaction. The point is this: Rob might be disposed to act humbly, even though he will never have the opportunity to do so.

“Dispositional humility” is perfectly compatible with our interpersonal theory. To compare, we might think that generosity is interpersonal in this same sense. For instance, let us suppose that because Rob is stranded on a deserted island, it is impossible for him to share his time or possessions. There is a sense in which this clearly makes the virtue of generosity a difficult one. Yet if Rob dreams about sharing with others and is disposed to do so, we might say that he is generous even though he could never act on this generosity. Because virtues (both personal and interpersonal) are dispositions, agents can possess the virtues even if it is impossible to act on them. One sign of possessing a dispositional virtues is that an agent thinks about acting virtuously even though she lacks the opportunity. All of this fits with the above distinction between personal and interpersonal virtues. For while isolated individuals can possess an interpersonal virtue all by their lonesome, the virtue still cannot be adequately defined or described *without interpersonal reference*. In describing Rob’s status as “generous,” for instance, we would need to say something like, “Rob is disposed to give to *others*.” (The term “others” still appears in our description.)

But what if Rob was extremely overconfident? Suppose Rob believed he was fantastic at fishing when he was only mediocre, he foolishly believed that he could kill a bear with his bare hands even though he had no chance of doing so, and he would repeatedly look for rare berries when he had no chance of finding them. We can imagine that this is a consistent disposition for Rob, that day after day he goes through life believing that he can do things that he cannot. If humility is defined in terms of the absence of overconfidence, then Rob is clearly not humble. And if arrogance is in some sense the contrary of humility, then Rob is arrogant. The problem

with this view of things, as I see it, is Rob strikes me as neither arrogant nor as obviously lacking the virtue of humility. This is especially so if we add certain details to the story. Suppose, for instance, that we keep everything the same but we further stipulate that *if* some humans were to appear on the island and point out Rob's flaws, he *would* listen. So as things are, Rob is extremely overconfident. Notwithstanding, he is disposed to correct this overconfidence if other persons were to make a good case for why he should do so. It seems to me that Rob's overconfidence makes him not arrogant but rather a fool. I would rather pity Rob's misplaced self-confidence, but I would not conclude that this showed his lack of humility. Indeed, if Rob is in fact disposed to change his mind in response to correction of others, it seems possible that Rob is actually humble in spite of his overconfidence.

3.4.2 A first glance at intellectual humility as an interpersonal virtue

I want to begin my positive account with an example to bring us all together. For while there is clearly disagreement over just what constitutes intellectual humility, I suspect we can more quickly agree on who is *not* intellectually humble. Consider this example:

SAM: Sam, a second-year undergraduate, always arrives late, sits in the back of the class with a bored expression on his face, and every so often makes comments which either (1) suggest that he is right, and his classmates are wrong and stupid, or (2) suggest that he is right and his professor is wrong and stupid. Sam is immune to constructive feedback, convinced that he knows more than anyone who might offer advice. Not an assignment goes by in which Sam does not complain about his grade, demanding that it be adjusted upward in light of his own genius and his professor's obvious mistake.

We might disagree over the particular traits that best describe Sam. But I hope most can agree, that whatever else we might say of Sam, the one thing he is not is intellectually humble. It is also helpful to note that Sam exemplifies many of the vices Roberts and Wood have described as "the counterparts of humility." According to Roberts and Wood this includes: presumption,

haughtiness, self-righteousness, domination, selfish ambition, and self-complacency (2003: 257-258). And this is where I see us coming together, for the listed vices can be grounded in the common description of a certain sort of person. Those disposed to arrogance, egoism, pretentious and the like are everyday examples of, well, *assholes*. My suggestion is that if the humble person is anything at all, *he is not an asshole*. There is something painfully unfitting in the following assertion: “Toby is such a sweet, humble guy. But what an asshole!” Let us turn to the detailed account of assholes recently put forth by Aaron James in hope that it might shed light on humility. According to James,

Asshole: A person counts as an asshole when, and only when, he systematically allows himself to enjoy special advantages in interpersonal relations out of an entrenched sense of entitlement that immunizes him against the complaints of other people (2012:4).

Let us notice that both James and Roberts and Wood focus on the notion of “entitlement.” Roberts and Wood note that, “...humility is a disposition not to make unwarranted intellectual entitlement claims on the basis of one’s (supposed) superiority or excellence, out of a concern for self-exaltation, or some other vicious concern, or no vicious concern at all...” (2007: 2050-1). There is clearly something about “a sense of entitlement” that is particularly off-putting. And off-putting in a way that is likely incompatible with humility. With helpful reference to Roberts, Wood, and James, the gist of my proposal is that the humble person is counterpart to the asshole. With that in mind, a person is *intellectually* humble just in case he:

1. Systematically declines intellectual advantages in interpersonal relations because he feels no sense of entitlement;
2. Respects the intellect of others as his own, and so rarely feels immune to their complaints and criticisms.

*** Bothe dispositions derive from the absence of a sense of entitlement. It is because the humble agent does not think of himself or his intellect as entitled that he thereby treats other intellects just as his own.

The humble person's dispositions are contrary to what in some sense "comes naturally" to most. Most persons tend to put themselves in a special position regarding their thoughts, attitudes, and actions. In the average person, such tendencies do not necessarily rise to the level of what we would call "a sense of entitlement." Nonetheless, subtle entitlement is always in the background. After all, most do not consider the special attention that they pay themselves problematic. Many of us simply begin from the assumption that we can treat ourselves with at least a little more care and attention than we give others. We see nothing wrong with this. It is as though we are 'entitled' to a certain amount of personal partialism. The humble person, however, lacks this assumption. This absence of entitlement leads to certain characteristic patterns of humble behavior. For instance, those who are intellectually humble:

1. Rarely demand special intellectual treatment, even when deserving
2. Tend to take complaints and criticisms seriously. Even when the criticizers are not authority figures and even when the criticism is rude.
3. Tend to take the ideas (which are not always complaints) of others seriously, even the ideas of intellectual inferiors.

Let me be clear that simply because the intellectually humble person does not demand special treatment, it does not follow that they do not believe they deserve it. (Unlike the view put forth by Annas, I do not think false beliefs are characteristic of humility.) A humble person might, for instance, sincerely believe that he deserves a certain award. Such belief, however, is

compatible with believing he is *not entitled to what he deserves*. In an essay contest, for instance, the humble person recognizes that the committee who chooses the winning essay had to sort through many talented papers and that the committee acts within reason in giving the award to another. Recognizing this, the humble person would never be a defensive loser or demand the award. Notwithstanding, the humble person might quietly believe he deserves it.

Like those who prescribe to self- assessment accounts, I do believe the intellectually humble lack abrasive overconfidence, but only because this is incompatible with other-directed respect. I also believe that the intellectually humble, for the most part, own their own limitations. But this is because they take advice and criticism seriously, not the other way around. An interpersonal (anti-asshole) account can save “personal virtue intuitions” while avoiding downfalls of a purely personal virtue. Those who refuse to revisit opinion indeed lack humility. This, however, is best explained in terms of the complaints and disagreements that are surely being dismissed. After all, if there is *no one at all* suggesting that our ideas are off base, there seems little need to reconsider. Along similar lines, an obnoxious professor convinced of his own superiority indeed lacks humility. However, this is best explained *not* via overconfidence, but in the offhanded dismissal of disagreeing parties.

We can now understand the intuitive appeal of self-assessment accounts without needing to accept them. There are various reasons theorists are tempted with self-assessment views, but all of these temptations can be explained away. For example, the self-reflective character trait of overconfidence appears incompatible with intellectual humility. Because intuitions run so strongly against the compatibility of overconfidence and humility, theorists are tempted to define the virtue in terms of its absence. But on my account, we can explain why the humble are rarely overconfident without using “overconfidence” as a defining feature of humility. Rather, because

the humble agent is especially concerned with peer opinion, she is rarely overconfident. The humble agent is one who has a deep respect for her peers and she is ever aware that good folks disagree. This awareness tempers her intellectual brashness. Even in instances when the humble agent is quite sure of her beliefs, she does not flaunt this assurance. Her reasoning often runs along the following lines, “I am fortunate to have come down on the right side of things. Many intelligent persons have gone wrong, and in another world I may have been one of them.” Thoughts like this are not examples of the humble agent doubting her beliefs. They are examples of the humble agent doubting that her own intellectual brilliance made arriving at those beliefs inevitable. The humble agent’s respect for reasonable and intelligent others tempers *not her enthusiasm in p, but rather her enthusiasm in “look how special I am to believe p.”*

Like the absence of overconfidence, “limitations owning” is a common trait of the intellectually humble agent. But it is a trait that arises from her *interpersonal habits*. The intellectually humble agent, in a critical respect, is one who always obeys the “intellectual golden rule.” She views the intellect of others as she views her own, rarely seeing herself as entitled to this or that intellectual privilege. Of course, it is important that we do not take this too far. Direct epistemic access to our own intellect puts us in a privileged position *vis-a-vis* the self. Peter van Inwagen, for example, has discussed how he considers it possible for him to so strongly disagree with David Lewis, who he considers a “philosopher of truly formidable intelligence and insight and Ability” (1996:138). Van Inwagen admits his uncertainty about how he could disagree with Lewis, and offers this tepid explanation:

I suppose my best guess is that I enjoy some sort of philosophical insight (I mean in relation to these three particular theses) that, for all his merits, is somehow denied to Lewis. And this would have to be an insight that is incommunicable - at least I don’t know how to communicate it-, for I have done all I can to communicate it to Lewis, and he has understood perfectly everything I have said, and he has not come to share my conclusions (1996:138).

While van Inwagen is unsure why and how it comes to be that he disagrees with Lewis, he does seem much more confident that, "...the question must have some good answer" (1996:139). In other words, while he is not sure what it is, he is sure there is something that explains his disagreement with Lewis, and explains it in such a way that it makes sense for van Inwagen to stay confident in his beliefs. It does not seem fair that someone like van Inwagen must necessarily lack intellectual humility, merely because of his confidence in the face of smart disagreeing peers. Indeed, this would render intellectual humility far beyond the reach of most philosophers (for most philosophers strongly disagree with other "equally smart" philosophers). There is some sense in which our own epistemic evidence is especially weighty. The intellectually humble agent "discounts" for this privilege *and then* gives her peers the epistemic credit that they both morally and epistemically deserve. When she does so, she is very often forced to *face her own limitations*. After all, for those who are not too proud to ignore them, the world and its inhabitants are constantly putting checks on the epistemic limitations of even the intellectual best of us. Journal referees, students, colleagues, friends, and enemies alike are there to tell us when and where we went wrong. (They will commonly do this regardless of whether we actually went wrong or just seem to have done so.) The humble agent (like all of us) is frequently bombarded with these whistle blowers; she is forced to face where she may have gone wrong. And when is so forced, she does not feel entitled to dismiss the criticism; indeed she is especially responsive to it. It is this sort of intellectual disposition which explains why the intellectually humble agent tends to own her limitations.

As with overconfidence and limitations owning, my account can also explain the appeal of what Roberts and Woods saw as intellectual humility's defining feature, "low concern for praise", without having to accept it. I have already mentioned that I find Roberts and Wood's

account compelling. Some exemplars of the *clearly not* intellectually humble are those obsessed with intellectual praise: the graduate student who has his walls papered with awards dating back to elementary school, the professor who becomes noticeably defensive when his ideas are challenged, and the colleague who is constantly tweeting about his new publication (and his older publication, and the forthcoming one too, and...) In contrast the intellectually humble academic might not bother to update his CV and website (if he has a website at all), or if he does have one and does so bother, he does so begrudgingly and with noticeable discomfort taking part in such a self-aggrandizing practice. Along these same lines, the humble intellectual is rarely if ever defensive in talks and welcomes criticism with genuine openness regardless of the critic's pedigree or prestige. In short, it appears that the arrogant intellectual agent is obsessed with praise while the humble one cares very little. I want to suggest, however, that more is going on here than immediately meets the eye.

At bottom, the characteristic which manifests itself in persons who *are prima facie* vain is not so much a low concern for status but rather a special concern for others. Self-aggrandizing behavior is behavior that puts oneself in the spotlight. But the humble person sees himself in the same light as he sees everyone else. So while there may be occasions when he mentions his own accomplishments, he is just as likely to mention the accomplishments of others. Intellectual humility is exemplified in treating the intellect of others like the intellect of one's own. Those who are humble simply do not privilege their own accomplishments. This absence of privileging can come across as a lack of self-concern. And there is a sense in which humble persons indeed lack self-concern; the sense is comparative. It is because most people privilege themselves far above others that the humble person's equal treatment can come across as self-effacing. In fact, the intellectually humble are not so much self-effacing as they are self-equalizing. The humble

do not have a low-concern for the self, they simply have an equal concern for others. The difference is important. According to Roberts and Wood the humble agent downplays peer opinion. Those who are vain are especially concerned with praise, and those who are humble are especially unconcerned. My account, however, *raises rather than suppresses* the importance of peer opinion. Approval and praise often go hand in hand. It is because the humble person so greatly respects peer opinion that she can so greatly appreciate their praise and approval. Contra Roberts and Wood, we can imagine an agent who cares a lot about the praise of her peers but is nonetheless remarkably humble. Consider the following example:

Dr. Humbleton: Dr. Humbleton is presenting his work at the annual student/faculty research conference. He has been working hard for months on his paper, "Methods of Student Assessment". Humbleton wants to offer a promising scholarly contribution, and is nervous about how his work will be received. He gives a great talk which is indeed very well received by students and faculty alike. Dr. Humbleton is incredibly happy to have the support of his colleagues and he thanks them profusely for all their help. He is even happier, though, to receive the praise of his students. He had been working hard to develop a research paper that they found both accessible and exciting.

I find it intuitively plausible that Dr. Humbleton lives up to his name. He seems like a guy we would all want for a colleague or teacher: someone who is both concerned with scholarly contributions and also helping his students. He is definitely not an asshole. Rather than assume his work will succeed, however, Humbleton is aptly attentive to colleges and student opinion. Because he respects their intellect he both appreciates and desires their praise. And now we can take a closer look at the thesis of Roberts and Wood. Although vanity, an excessive concern for praise, seems in conflict with humility, this is only because we are imagining this desire manifest in particular ways. (As Roberts and Wood say, the vain person is concerned about status, "for the sake of status itself".) But I am suggesting that Roberts and Wood make us think not so much of someone who is excessively concerned with praise but one who feels *especially entitled to it*. C.

S. Lewis has argued that, "...if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, "How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronise me, or show off?" (2009:122). The person who lacks humility (and for simplicity we can call this person, in a loose sense, "a prideful person") is oversensitive. They are not just hurt when others snub them or ignore, them, they are angry at those who do not give them what they think is their *rightful due*. And we have already seen that the asshole intellectual, the one with an entrenched sense of entitlement, is anything but humble. So we must be clear that while a sense of entitlement to intellectual praise is in conflict with intellectual humility, *the mere desire for praise is not*. Those who are intellectually humble may very well be hurt when others do not respect and take note of their work. A person who completely lacks humility will be not only hurt but be angry and resentful. Rather than a humble sentiment of, "I wish others paid attention to my work," the prideful sentiment is, "I cannot believe those fools did not give my work the attention that it deserves. This oversight just shows what a sorry state of the profession we are in and what pathetic persons are allowed to be a part of it." Lewis's sentiment seems right in the following way: the greater the angry entitlement in response to the lack of attention of others, the less humble the person. If we then apply this to intellectual matters, the greater the angry entitlement in response to a perceived lack of praise for one's intellectual work, the less humble the intellectual.

3.5 The Finer Details

In the previous sections we saw that while Roberts and Wood explain many important features of or associated with intellectual humility (like the absence of a sense of entitlement) they ultimately go wrong in defining the virtue in terms of a low concern for praise. The virtue is more interpersonal than that. The humble person might or might not desire praise; all will depend

on the details. Because those who are humble respect their peers, they are very often happy to be praised by them. Indeed those who are humble respect not only the intellect of their peers and superiors but also that of their inferiors. It need not follow, however, that humble persons are naïve nor that they fail to recognize their own superiority. Rather, the humble professor, for instance, might engage in the following:

1. He recognizes his own intellectual superiority.
2. In spite of (1) he listens to each opinion carefully.
3. He is motivated to do (2) because he respects the intellectual autonomy and ability of his students (even in spite of (1)).
4. He occasionally revises his own opinion in light of his student's thoughts.

A professor who exemplifies (1)-(4) seems just the sort of person we might call intellectually humble. My account explains this in systematic terms: our descriptions of intellectual humility latch on to an interpersonal virtue characterized by an absence of entitlement alongside a disposition to seriously consider the comments and complaints of both peers and non-peers.

In contrast to (1) – (4), the intellectual asshole consistently disrespects the intellect of others, especially inferiors. He operates with an entitlement to manipulate, to deceive and to ignore, which are all hallmark manifestations of intellectual disrespect. The flip side of the coin is that the intellectual asshole is *especially disposed to dismiss criticism* for he is especially disposed to see his own rationality as “above” that of so many, many, others. The intellectual asshole manages to possess two characteristics which are in logical tension but nonetheless commonly arise together. He sees himself as having the right (as completely entitled) to overrule the thought of others. This often goes so far as to thinking he has the right to *control* the thought

of others. Notwithstanding, he has a habit of becoming especially defensive when his peers, his superiors⁵⁷, or his inferiors, attempt to influence his own thought in any way. What is distinctive of the intellectual asshole is not so much that he thinks his intellect is superior (though he often does). What matters is that he thinks this superiority entitles him to exceptional intellectual privilege.

Intellectual Humility can be viewed on a spectrum of “Intellectual Respect.” Here is a model:

Contempt for intellectual Autonomy **V.** Complete Respect for Intellectual Autonomy

Arrogance

Humility

Behaviors along this Spectrum

Deception. Manipulation. Disregard. Impatience. Dialogue. Collaboration

****Note that further down the spectrum line toward the right is ‘diffidence’.
Humility is a mean between arrogance and diffidence.*

We see that for conceptual purposes, intellectual arrogance is grounded upon disregard for intellectual autonomy. Behaviors commonly associated with this disregard include deception and manipulation. Manipulation and deception are vices that dismiss the intellect of its victim, i.e., they fail to show proper concern for the intellectual interest that rational beings have in autonomous reasoning. In an important sense manipulators and deceivers attempt to *control*. Salient examples are found in cults and extremist political parties. These groups not only disregard intellectual autonomy, they act to *undermine it* via engagement in the following.

1. Attempt to get persons to hold certain beliefs (truth need not matter)
2. Will try to achieve (1) regardless of the evidence
3. Will try to achieve (1) without concern for the intellectual process of manipulated agents.

⁵⁷ If he believes there be any, and he sometimes does.

The line between innocent attempts at convincing others of *p* and malicious attempts of manipulating others is often a fine one. In both convincing and manipulating, there is a sense in which you attempt to get another to believe specific things. The difference lies in the way in which the manipulator demonstrates a sense of entitlement and *control*. The “convincer,” unlike the manipulator, cares that an agent comes to her beliefs through acceptable epistemic means. Those who are intellectually humble would, all other things equal, prefer that others believe the wrong thing than that they believe the right thing via manipulation or deception. In contrast, intellectual arrogance is not caring about this. The more important that a testifier believes her cause, the more likely she throws intellectual humility to the wayside. Evangelical religious adherents might think that religious truth is so important that they are justified in telling half-truths as a means to get to whole ones. Professors, also, might think it is so important that students learn certain truths that they give up on their students acquiring appropriate reasoning habits. When we think of the humble person, however, I doubt most of us think of these types. Rather, those who are intellectually humble are the types who feels extremely uncomfortable in engaging in these suspect epistemic practices. Speaking more generally, the intellectually humble feel extremely uncomfortable in “overriding” the intellect of fellow rational beings.

3.6 Intellectual Humility and Open-Mindedness

What I am describing as intellectual humility might appear similar to open-mindedness. Indeed, the virtues have been mixed up before. Baer, et al., for instance, take the time to explain why their view of intellectual humility is not open-mindedness.⁵⁸ Turning to my account, it appears that both open-mindedness and intellectual humility require sincere listening skills, often

⁵⁸ 2013, p.14

regardless of the speaker's intellectual status. Similarities notwithstanding, it is especially clear under my account that the virtues are distinct. Central to intellectual humility is respect for intellectual autonomy. This is what makes it an interpersonal virtue: it cannot be described by referencing only an agent and her own intellect. On the other hand, it seems possible to describe open-mindedness in a purely personal fashion. Consider the following:

Open-mindedness: S possesses open-mindedness if and only if she is disposed toward reflecting on her deeply held beliefs and is thereby especially willing to change beliefs when faced with new ideas.⁵⁹

I am not arguing for the above definition. I am just suggesting that it is plausible. More importantly, I want to bring attention to the fact that the above definition does not mention any other agent besides the open-minded agent. What matters for open-mindedness is not so much listening to the ideas of others as the willingness to change one's own beliefs. Perhaps this often comes along with a willingness to listen. However, this willingness is grounded in the agent's openness to changing personal beliefs. The intellectually humble agent shows a similar willingness to change, the direction of fit, however, is opposite the open-minded agent. *It is because she so greatly respects the intellect of another* that she is open to adjusting her views. This direction is modeled below:

Open-mindedness

Openness to new ideas > Tendency to sincerely listen

Intellectual Humility

Respect for the intellect of others > Willingness to change ideas

⁵⁹ Accounts in the literature of open-mindedness include those by Jonathan Adler and Wayne Riggs. Both describe the virtue of open-mindedness in a way that I would call 'personal'. Adler argues that open-mindedness is centrally concerned with second-order attitudes directed toward one's first-order beliefs. Riggs account emphasizes the importance of self-monitoring and self-knowledge. I did not use either account for my example, for there would not be time to give either account the just discussion it would deserve. For what it's worth, I think that both Adler and Riggs are on the right track in describing open-mindedness in personal as opposed to interpersonal terms. Open-mindedness seems particularly unlike intellectual humility insofar as the former is a personal virtue and the latter is an interpersonal one. Additional discussions on open-mindedness can be found in Baer(2011), Hare (1979), Montmarquet (1993), Roberts & Wood (2007), and Zagzebski (1996).

The above chart demonstrates how intellectual humility and open-mindedness are similar and also how they differ. This is just the tip of the iceberg; the two virtues differ in more salient ways. For instance, because an essential feature of intellectual humility is respect for another's intellect, someone who is intellectually humble might spend an entire afternoon listening to an intellectual inferior work out her thoughts. An open-minded person can be without this disposition. Suppose that the thoughts of an inferior are familiar to an open-minded superior. Refusing to spend the afternoon listening to familiar thoughts would not render the superior close-minded. The refusal, after all, is grounded not in a closed mind but in the fact that, in this given situation, there are no new ideas to be heard. Repetition of this sort has less relevance for the intellectually humble agent; she is happy facilitating the intellectual wellbeing of another even if she personally will not be exposed to new ideas. This difference in motivation further distinguishes humility and open-mindedness. Open-mindedness is a *personal virtue*, hence the open-minded person is motivated to listen because she is eager to change personal views in response to compelling reason. The intellectually humble person's motivation is interpersonal: she respects the person speaking and is therefore motivated to listen. Because of these motivational differences, steadfastness or intellectual stubbornness is not in conflict with intellectual humility, but it is in conflict with open-mindedness. Consider this case:

Grandma: Grandma Opal is an intelligent woman, the first female in her state to become a doctor. Nonetheless, she is approaching her nineties and "stuck in her ways." Opal holds many personal and political views which are quite old fashioned. Opal has progressive neighbors; they have little chance of changing her views, and she accepts that she has little chance of changing theirs. Notwithstanding, she loves listening to their arguments and good-naturally pointing out any flaws.

Grandma Opal seems an endearing figure, but nonetheless she does *not* seem open-minded. If open-mindedness means anything at all, it cannot be compatible with close-

mindedness. A strong unwillingness to change perspective (despite good evidence) is certainly close-minded. Nonetheless, it does seem plausible that Grandma Opal is intellectually humble. She is, after all, an intelligent woman who will happily listen to others with whom she disagrees. But why is she willing to listen if she is unwilling to change her views? Well, because she both cares about and is interested in views she disagrees with. This is a hallmark feature of intellectual humility. The intellectually humble appreciate views they find totally wrong and admire features of reasoning and rationality apart from truth. This should be unsurprising. A complex theory can be false but intellectually admirable. Most philosophers, for instance, know philosophers whom they admire intellectually even though they disagree on just about everything.

There is something admirable in listening to disagreeing parties distinct from open-mindedness. Likewise, there is something admirable about open-mindedness apart from intellectual humility. Of course, two virtues are better than one. Hence someone who is both open-minded and intellectually humble is more admirable than an agent who only possesses one virtue or the other. Nonetheless, the virtues need not come together. Consider this last case:

Obnoxious Professor: Professor Jasper is an eccentric English professor who often uses his own classes to benefit his work. Jasper asks his students various questions that might help him finish a journal article. Jasper will entertain even the most outlandish suggestions. Nonetheless, he becomes extremely impatient if a student mentions something he has already heard. In these cases he quickly stops the student from speaking midsentence; he has no time to waste on rehashing what are old ideas.

Jasper is open-minded but not intellectually humble. For while he is open to changing his views, he cares little about the intellect of anyone other than his own. Because he sees little value in the autonomous thought of others, he dismisses those who show no signs of benefiting himself.

3.7 Intellectual Humility & Politeness

When discussing my thoughts on intellectual humility, I was asked the following question: Are you talking about intellectual humility or just ‘epistemic politeness? My first response is that the two possibilities are not mutually exclusive. Perhaps those who are disposed to intellectual humility are also disposed to epistemic politeness. This should not be controversial. Politeness, at least in one sense of the term, consists of social norms that function as a means to display respect. Along similar lines, intellectual humility demands respect. Notwithstanding, my account is not equivalent to any plausible understanding of intellectual politeness. Intellectual humility demands much more.

Politeness can be what it is even if it is all just an act. The following is perfectly intelligible: “Beware of Scott. He is polite but he could not care less about anyone in lower management.” What this hypothetical observation suggests is that one can be both polite and an asshole. Although most who are polite are not assholes, most of us know a few people who fit into both categories and they are especially malicious. With polite assholes, you can miss the danger that is to come. Humility, on the other hand, is not only incompatible with assholism but is its direct contrary. It is not good enough *to pretend* to care about Other intellects, the concern must be *sincere*. This is what can render humility so difficult. It is easy to pretend to care, actual concern is another story. Biases can be powerful, especially intellectual biases. If we believe p we also believe that those who believe p believe truly. Intellectual humility can cause cognitive conflict. We must continue to believe p but also listen to someone who believes the opposite. This is why intellectual autonomy is so central to intellectual humility: concern for the truth cannot breed intellectual humility by itself. We hold many beliefs with extreme confidence, often for good reason. What then will get us to listen if not a search for truth? The answer is this: respect and appreciation in *another’s quest for truth*. Central to intellectual autonomy is each

individual's ability to use her own truth-seeking cognitive powers. Those who are intellectually humble recognize this as an intellectual good and this motivates them to listen to others they know are wrong.

3.8 Why Intellectual Humility is a Good Thing Intellectually

I have argued that intellectual humility is an *interpersonal* virtue that need not directly improve the virtue holder's own intellect. Rather, as an intellectual virtue, intellectual humility's primary benefits might be to other intellects. Imagine that a brilliant professor devotes his summer to tutoring undergraduates. Suppose that in so doing this professor exemplifies both intellectual generosity and intellectual humility. At the summer's completion, there is a sense in which the professor is worse off intellectually: all his time spent on basic intellectual matters put a small dint in his analytic acumen; he forgot a few things and his understanding of the subject is worse than when he started tutoring. This does not speak against the professor's intellectual virtue. Much the contrary, by sacrificing his own intellectual wealth he has enriched that of others.

Let me be clear that I am not suggesting we turn to utilitarian principles to understand intellectual humility. Rather, I am suggesting a "big picture" approach. First, intellectual virtue stretches beyond knowledge and true belief. While this has been challenged in the literature, the dominant approach seems to still be narrowly focused on knowledge, true belief, and perhaps understanding at the expense of anything more general like honest inquiry, autonomous thought, consistent reasoning, etc. I think the aforementioned processes are good things in themselves, apart from the good ends that they tend to produce. Second, intellectual virtue goes beyond improving an *agent's own* epistemic character directly. Interpersonal virtue improves the intellectual life of others. Because the virtuous agent plays a role in this improvement, her own intellectual character improves indirectly.

3.9 Conclusion

In this paper I offered an alternative account of intellectual humility. Reading through the existent literature, I had noticed that something (in my own humble opinion) seemed a bit off with many accounts. I noticed two common faults. The first is that many described the virtue as a self-assessment virtue. The other is that most accounts described the virtue as a personal one. In contrast to much of the literature, I have argued that intellectual humility is both other-reflective and interpersonal. The intellectually humble person does not see herself as intellectually entitled; this allows her to treat other intellects with as much respect as she treats her own. Above all, the intellectually humble person is *not* an intellectual asshole.

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CHAPTER 4

COLLECTIVE INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Key Words: Social Epistemology; Virtue Epistemology; Humility; Intellectual Humility; Liberalism

Draft: Please do not cite or circulate

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4.1 Introduction

In this paper I will discuss just what it takes for a collective to be intellectually humble. I am not attempting to offer my own stipulated definition, but rather describe with some clarity the concept we sometimes reference in everyday life. We sometimes call persons humble. Although it is less frequent that I hear the term “intellectually humble,” we do on various occasions preference descriptive terms with “intellectual.” So when I discuss “intellectual humility,” I am attempting to describe what we mean when we preference the term “humility” with “intellectual”. Ultimately, I aim to explain what we might mean if we were to describe a *collective* as “intellectually humble.” Key points I argue for include:

1. Both humility and intellectual humility are interpersonal (as opposed to personal) virtues.
2. Intellectually humble collectives tend to adopt politically liberal principles and policies.
3. Common structural characteristics of collective entities make intellectual humility especially difficult and hence rare at the group level.

I will first discuss humility, then its close cousin intellectual humility before arriving at the paper's thesis topic *collective intellectual humility*. This longish route is necessary because I disagree with the contemporary literature on key features of humility and its intellectual variant. Hence, I cannot just use the existing literature to build my own theory, but must instead use the existing literature as a point of contrast with my own. The plan runs as follows: I will first discuss current philosophical positions on humility (and modesty) with particular emphasis on what I call "self-assessment accounts."⁶⁰(Unfortunately, I will not have time to discuss all accounts in the prolific literature. Rather, I mention those that will help paint a nice point of contrast for the purposes of this paper). In Section Two, I delve into an analogous discussion focused on *intellectual* humility. As with humility simpliciter, many intellectual accounts are also self-assessment ones. In Section Three, I offer my alternative position on both humility and intellectual humility. Section Four explains my account of the virtue as applied to collectives. Section Five addresses objections.

4.2 Self -Assessment Accounts and Alternatives

At first glance, the virtue of humility seems rather peculiar. On the one hand, many religions and cultures consider it foundational for a good life or virtuous character. On the other hand, there is a sense in which humility bears little relation to widespread moral principles. Consider, for example, "the golden rule" which can be summed up as "Treat others how you want to be treated." The widespread moral acceptance of something like the golden rule seems rooted in the idea that the moral domain stretches outside the personal domain. This, however,

⁶⁰ Many authors have used the terms 'modesty' and 'humility' interchangeably. At the very least, modesty and humility are virtues that seem specially related. This being so, what theorists say about one virtue is often informative for discussions about the other. For these reasons, I will only distinguish previous works on humility from those on modesty with special cause. The default assumption will be to use the terms interchangeably.

seems strangely at odds with the virtue of humility. Traditionally humility has not been understood as a virtue like kindness or generosity that is directed toward others. Rather humility is often assumed to involve an agent's attitudes toward *the self*.

Let us take a look at some of the recent philosophical literature. Appealing to Adam Smith, Jason Breenan has argued that the humble person judges himself according to an ideal. Others suggested that humble persons are especially aware of the role that other persons and luck play in their accomplishments; this awareness comes with the recognition that one lacks appropriate grounds for self-aggrandizing. Still others have suggested humility is simply about an accurate perception of the self. Still others contend that it is an indifference to one's accomplishments that matters⁶¹. Another much-discussed view put forth by Julia Driver is that the humble person actually holds a false self-perception and under evaluates his own worth.⁶²

Let us call the views on humility discussed thus far "self-assessment accounts." Although they might differ in various respects, self-assessment accounts have at least two features in common.

Self-Assessment Accounts of Humility:

1. The virtue consists of a disposition to hold a certain self-assessment
2. Refraining from going overboard in (1)

⁶¹ See Kupfer (2003), Richards(1988), and Schueler (1997 & 1999) . There are other accounts as well. I do not list them all – but most fit into the category of what I will soon describe as "Self-assessment Accounts."

⁶² As Nicolas Bommarito has noted, "This account of modesty (Driver's account) has seen more than its fair share of attacks (see Statman 1992; Maes 2004; Raterman 2006; Brennan 2007; and nearly anyone else writing on modesty since Driver)." (2013:95). It should not be surprising that the criticism of Driver's view coming from the perspective of 'intellectual humility' is just as strong. For epistemologists and ethicists alike then, there is something very unsettling about a virtue being dependent upon ignorance (Socrates has made his mark). I agree with these general criticisms. My greatest concern is that ignorance of the self is a vice, and a foundational moral virtue like humility should surely not depend upon a moral vice.

A main thesis of this paper is that self-assessment accounts of humility are wrong: I propose that humility is a virtue concerning our attitudes and acts not toward ourselves but rather toward others.

Before moving on to intellectual humility, let us take a brief look at a view outside the bounds self-assessment.⁶³ In contrast to many who wrote before him, Bommarito has proposed an “attention” view of modesty. (Also, while Bommarito uses the term “modesty” he himself intends the term to be interchangeable with humility).⁶⁴ In his own words, “...modesty is about neither accuracy nor ignorance but instead is rooted in certain patterns of attention” (2013:93). Put differently, according to Bommarito modesty is not so much about how one views the self but rather about *how often* (and in what way) one does. The modest person simply does not pay that much attention to himself at all (whether good attention or bad) and he is even uncomfortable when others pay attention.⁶⁵ I think Bommarito sheds light on a flaw common to many self-assessment theories. Consider the following example,

ERINE: Ernie does not think of himself too highly. Let us assume that according to one’s favored self-assessment account Ernie cannot be described as anything other than humble. Notwithstanding, he engages in behavior which many find painfully irritating. He incessantly discusses *his* work, his goals, *his* accomplishments and failures, and *his* disdain of rush-hour traffic. None of this self-talk is balanced with inquiries into the lives of others.

⁶³ Another account that does ascribe to self-assessment views is found in G. F. Schueler (1997). Schueler argues that humility is not about how we assess our own worth, but rather how little we care about how others assess our own worth. Robert Roberts & Jay Wood (2007) also put forth an account which falls outside of the self-assessment perspective and empathizes the humble person’s absence of excessive concern for the admiration of others.

⁶⁴ From Bommarito, “I take the terms (modesty and humility) to be interchangeable but will use the term “modest” in my discussion”(2013:93).

⁶⁵ From reading Bommarito’s paper, I get the impression that most of the time modesty exemplifies itself via a lack of self-attention. However, Bommarito is clear that other ‘patterns of attention’ can also qualify. He argues, “Sometimes, however, a modest person does pay attention to the quality they are modest about and its value. Such a person is not modest through inattention but by directing his or her attention toward certain factors” (2013: 103).

In spite of meeting self-assessment requirements for humility, Ernie seems anything but. More likely descriptions are, “Narcissistic”, “Self-obsessed”, or even “Infuriating.” This is hard to reconcile with theories that describe humility as a virtue of self-assessment. Ernie demonstrates how we might be self-obsessed without overconfidence. Self-obsession, moreover, *does* seem in conflict with humility but *does not* seem in conflict with self-assessments theories. It is consistent with self-assessment accounts, for instance, that Ernie is both humble yet behaves narcissistically; this is surely counterintuitive. Admittedly, self-assessment and behavior might be correlated. Perhaps someone like Ernie is rare. But this is no defense. Rare or common, self-assessment accounts leave room for humility alongside arrogant behavior. This gap is a red flag and Bommarito capitalizes on the warning. His attentiveness view renders the coincidence of arrogance and humility appropriately uncomfortable. According to Bommarito, the humble person is not disposed to think about himself at all, much less might he ever be disposed toward self-obsession.

Although I do not agree with his whole account, I think Bommarito has made an important discovery about humility: *how much a person thinks about himself is just as important as how highly he thinks of himself.* My account will prove compatible with this important insight.

4.3 Two Varieties of Intellectual Humility

4.3.1 Intellectual humility: Epistemic & Non-Epistemic Perspectives

Similar to humility simpliciter, most accounts in the contemporary literature argue that intellectual humility is a virtue of self-assessment. What distinguishes humility and intellectual humility, then, is the latter’s self-assessment is not of the self simpliciter but rather particular aspects of the self. More specifically, according to self-assessment accounts of intellectual humility,

1. The virtue consists of a disposition to hold a certain assessment of aspects of the self, most notably, aspects that are specially “intellectual” or “epistemic.”
2. The agent who is intellectually humble necessarily refrains from going overboard in (1).

There is a sharp divide amongst those who prescribe to self-assessment accounts of intellectual humility. On the one hand, there are theorists who advocate what we might call “epistemic” views of intellectual humility. For simplicity, let us say that those who disagree take a “non-epistemic” stance. We can point out two major differences between the epistemic and non-epistemic positions. The first is that those of the epistemic ilk do not appear to understand intellectual humility as a special variant of humility simpliciter, but nearly a different virtue all together. In contrast, those who take a non-epistemic stance describe intellectual humility as humility “applied to intellectual matters” or “in an intellectual way” or “insofar as the virtue relates to knowledge, understanding, and other intellectual goods.” In other words, intellectual humility is a kind, type, or variant of humility simpliciter.⁶⁶ For example, let us turn to Baer et al.’s recent paper, “Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Own Limitations”, in which they argue:

“Proper pride is having the right stance towards one’s strengths; humility is having the right stance towards one’s limitations. Intellectual humility, then, is having the right stance toward one’s intellectual limitations” (2015: 15).

In the above quote, we see the authors first describe humility as “owning one’s limitations.” They then note that intellectual humility is simply the intellectual variant of such limitation owning disposition. This is a clear example of deriving the virtue of ‘intellectual humility’ from the virtue of plain old “humility”. While this seems a reasonable enough methodological approach, it is not the one taken by everyone. Indeed, such method is clearly at

⁶⁶Not all theorists describe their accounts in these terms. What I have said (and will say below) is only what I consider a helpful way to differentiate what appears a serious divide.

odds with what I am calling “epistemic accounts”. Epistemic accounts do not so clearly derive their understanding of intellectual humility from their understanding of regular humility.

Besides disagreement over the extent of the distinctiveness of intellectual humility, epistemic and non-epistemic theorists disagree over the relation between *intellectual accuracy* and intellectual humility. Epistemic theorizers notice a very close relation: some epistemic accounts suggest that it is impossible or at least very difficult to judge whether S is intellectually humble without information about S’s track record of epistemic accuracy.⁶⁷ However, according to those in the non-epistemic camp, accuracy and intellectual humility bear no direct connection: it is at least possible that some who are intellectually humble have terrible track records of epistemic accuracy.⁶⁸ So the two major differences between the epistemic and non-epistemic accounts are (1) the latter but not the former derives the virtue of “intellectual humility” from the simple virtue of “humility proper”; (2) the former and not the latter claims that epistemic accuracy is a feature that helps define intellectual humility.

I will ultimately disagree with both the epistemic and non-epistemic accounts currently on offer. Nonetheless, my own account is *non-epistemic*. I take a rather strong stance in this respect: *intellectual humility is simply the disposition to behave humbly in matters intellectual* (where intellectual is understood broadly to include reasoning, understanding, knowledge, belief, understanding, etc.). Collective intellectual humility, moreover, is the *group* disposition to behave humbly in regard to all matters intellectual. In the next section I explain why I reject

⁶⁷ Bommarito notices that those who oppose Driver’s account of modesty also strive to preserve a type of accuracy as essential to modesty (2013:96). This type of accuracy, however, is simply accuracy about one’s own self-assessment. In contrast, the type of accuracy that concerns those who defend ‘epistemic intellectual humility’ is of a different type. Those in this epistemic camp understand intellectual humility as accuracy regarding all of one’s beliefs, not just self-assessment beliefs.

⁶⁸ Examples of those who take the epistemic stance include Allen Hazlett and co-authors Peter Samuelson, Ian Church, Matt Jarvinen and Tom Paulus. Hazlett focuses on higher order beliefs in particular, that is, beliefs about the epistemic status of one’s beliefs.

epistemic accounts of intellectual humility. I will then move on to non-epistemic accounts and explain why I reject those that have so far been put forth in the literature.

4.3.2 Why Epistemic Accounts of Intellectual Humility Fall Short

Here is a generic version of epistemic intellectual humility

Bare Bones Epistemic Intellectual Humility: Intellectual Humility consists of the disposition to hold beliefs as strongly as one epistemically ought.

BBIH states that an intellectually humble agent's beliefs are always *just right* epistemically. She neither believes with greater nor less strength than that which is epistemically appropriate, or at the very least, *that which she has good reason to believe is epistemically appropriate*. Although to my knowledge no one has put it quite this way, it seems that many of those defending epistemic theories are arguing that those who are intellectually humble are those who are *epistemically blameless*. (I am using the vague term "epistemically appropriate" to accommodate a wide-range of knowledge theories. In this paper I will focus on Church and Samuelson's account in particular; they use the term, "positive epistemic status.")

BBIH has various intuitive appeals. Intuitively those who are intellectually humble are *not epistemically overconfident*. And those who are epistemically overconfident, in turn, are just those whose strengths of belief goes beyond that which is epistemically apt. By barring epistemically inapt beliefs, BBIH bars overconfident beliefs. Eliminating the class of the epistemically overconfident from membership in the class of the intellectually humble seems a promising path. After all, there is indeed something jarring, for instance, in calling Jim "intellectually humble" while simultaneously admitting that he is overconfident. The following, for instance, just sounds off: "Jim is extremely overconfident. Again and again he insists on believing p even without evidence. But at least we can say he is intellectually humble."

Despite some intuitive appeal, a closer look makes it clear that the epistemic camp is heading down the wrong path. To see how, let us turn to virtues apart from intellectual humility. For instance, let's try generosity. Many agree with Aristotle that the profligate person is not generous: The generous person needs basic money management skills. Notwithstanding, ideal money management does not define generosity. We can imagine, after all, an agent who manages her finances perfectly and is also perfectly *greedy*. We might also imagine someone that readily shares his time, money, and material possessions, but on occasion goes a bit *overboard* in giving. Despite his flaws, many would still call such a person generous. So while one cannot be both generous and fiscally reckless, fiscal responsibility and generosity do not track each other all the way through. Likewise, while those that extremely undervalue their objective epistemic position are not intellectually humble; the two fail to track all the way through. Let us consider two examples:

BAXTER: Baxter is a Harvard grad with admirable epistemic accuracy. He is epistemically flawless in respect to all of his beliefs all of the time. Moreover, he knows as much and is very pleased with his epistemic excellence. Everyone that comes in contact with Baxter soon knows this as well. Not only is Baxter the type of guy that flaunts his intellectual expertise, he purposely and rudely shuns those he justifiably believes are inferior.

Compare Baxter to Toby.

TOBY: Toby is pretty good at accurately tracking his epistemic status. Although he is not as accurate as Baxter, most of the time he comes close to tracking as he ought. Toby patiently listens to the opinions of others, even his intellectual inferiors. This, in turn, occasionally results in Toby having a little less faith in his beliefs than his epistemic status merits.

Between Baxter and Toby, the latter seems non-controversially more humble. If so, then epistemic accuracy is neither necessary nor sufficient for intellectual humility. It seems that the epistemic stance just takes us too far afield from intuitive conceptions of intellectual humility. It is intuitively implausible that an individual many would call “intellectually arrogant” is actually

intellectually humble. A collective discussion needs a common starting point that at some level appeals to pre-theoretical notions of intellectual humility. And I am suggesting that appealing to this common starting point shows us that those who support the epistemic account of humility are very far off base. Epistemic theorists, however, might argue that they are just stipulating their own definition. If so I have no objections. Everyone is, of course, free to stipulate whatever terms they want as they want. However, if this is the case, epistemic and non-epistemic theorists are engaged in distinct and non-competitive projects. To be clear, this paper attempts to describe the pre-theoretical concept of humility through an intellectual lens. Because epistemic accounts take us very far from the pre-theoretical conceptions of humility, for my purposes they must be rejected.

4.3.3 Non-Epistemic Accounts

The non-epistemic self-assessment account that I will focus on is one put forth by Dennis Whitcomb, Heather Battaly, Jason Baehr, and Daniel Howard-Snyder. We can call it the “the Limitations Owning View”. Baer et. al. argue that intellectual humility consists in “owning one’s intellectual limitations.” In the words of the theorists themselves:

Limitations Owning View: “...a dispositional profile including cognitive, behavioral, motivational, and affective responses to an awareness of one’s limitations.”⁶⁹

I am sympathetic to many of these ideas, but must object that intellectual humility seems to demand more than just limitation owning. We can imagine a professor who is acutely aware of his own limitations. He also justifiably believes that he is better than most of his students in physics. With this realization in mind, he looks down on them with contempt as his intellectual

⁶⁹ Bommarito also mentions limitations owning, “One of the qualities that makes a Gandhi or a Mandela so great is the relationship they have with their own goodness; they refrain from tooting their own horns and instead seem to focus on their own limitations” (2013:93-4).

inferiors. He mocks their “stupid questions.” Even when they understand, he speaks to them patronizingly making sure they recognize his superiority. He acts this way not only toward his students but all who he justifiably believes have less intellectual acumen. Not only this, but he jumps at every opportunity to mention his success and prominently displays his awards and accomplishments wherever and whenever he can. To summarize, he is both aware of his limitations and responds appropriately. He is also, however, aware of his strengths, wants everyone else to be so aware, and thinks these strengths entitle him to treat intellectual inferiors contemptuously. It is counterintuitive that such a professor is intellectually humble (to say the least). Baer, et. al., argue that “proper pride” is the virtue that is concerned with our strengths. Perhaps this is so, but it does not follow that strength is irrelevant to humility. We might respond appropriately to our weaknesses and yet fail miserably in regard to our strengths and hence fail to be humble. For these reasons, I think *The Limitations Owning View* at best tells only half of the story.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Baer et al. do address concerns very similar to my own. I am not satisfied with their response. One line of argument they use is an example of a diffident agent who does not own her own strengths. Baer et al. argue that if humility involves owning ones strengths, we would have to conclude that this diffident agent is not humble enough. This conclusion, they suggest, is odd (2013: 20). I have two responses. First, arguing that the virtue of humility needs to pay attention to strengths is not equivalent to claiming that you need to define things in terms of ‘owning one’s strengths’. There are many ways to incorporate a stance toward strengths that are not in terms of owning and do not run into this problem. Second, although calling the diffident student ‘too humble’ is odd, I do not think it is as odd as the alternative. That is, I think it is even more odd and even more counterintuitive to have an account of humility that allows for the types of arrogant behavior that is displayed in the Baxter example. Next, Baer et al. claim that their account gets rid of at least half of arrogance, for it eliminates the arrogance that comes along with a refusal to own one’s own limitations. I do like this feature of their account. However, I think halfway is not good enough. Again, the type of arrogance described in the Baxter example is so counterintuitive that a proper theory of humility (and intellectual humility) should do all it can to eliminate this possibility if it hopes to describe our pre-theoretical intuitive conception of the character trait (2013:26). Lastly, Baer et al. argue that even if their account does not make arrogance and intellectual humility practically incompatible, it would make the co-occurrence of arrogance and intellectual humility internally not rational (2013:26). I do not have the time to address all of their arguments here, but let me just say I am skeptical. At the end of the day, I ask that the reader rely on the strength of my counterexamples, for even taking all of the replies from the limitations owning crew into account, the possibility of such cases is compatible with their theory of intellectual humility. I am suggesting that any account that leaves room for this compatibility can be improved to better fit our pre-theoretical intuitions.

4.4 Profanities and Entitlement

We already discussed something fishy about self-assessment accounts of humility. It seems fishy that a core moral virtue is so self-focused. The humble Robison Crusoe seems a serious possibility according to most Self-Assessments accounts. Let us try a thought experiment:

ISLAND: At the age of 8 Rob was dropped off at on a deserted island. He is now 30, and has been living on his own for the past 22 years, surviving by drinking rain water and eating fish and berries.

Is it plausible that Rob is humble? To me it seems that this virtue just does not fit. Given his situation, it makes little sense to say that Rob does or does not possess the virtue of humility. If someone claimed that Rob was humble, another might ask “Humble about what?” It seems that there is something missing in Rob’s life that makes the virtue difficult or impossible to acquire. I propose that this something is other persons. So my first proposal is that humility cannot be described without reference to others. In other words, humility is an *interpersonal* rather than a *personal* virtue.

The way I am using the term, not all virtues are interpersonal, although many are. Courage and temperance are arguably *personal* virtues. We can imagine that Rob is courageous insofar as he jumps off cliffs, chases scary animals, and swims in stormy waters. We can also imagine that Rob is incredibly temperate; he has the self-control to store food for the winter, go hunting when he would rather sleep, and endure the hot sun as he waits to catch fish. It is much harder to think of the ways that Rob might be humble. We might argue that Rob does not think too highly of himself, but without comparison, what this means is unclear. This difficulty in conceptualizing a humble Robinson Crusoe can be explained when we view humility through an interpersonal lens. For clarity, let us formalize:

Personal Virtue (PV): If virtue PV is a personal virtue, than PV can be both defined and adequately described without reference to anyone other than the virtue holder.

Interpersonal Virtue (IPV) If virtue IPV is an interpersonal virtue, than IPV can only be defined and adequately described with reference to agents other than the virtue holder.⁷¹

The above distinctions explain our worries in ISLAND. Because humility requires reference to others, we cannot adequately describe Rob's humility. We might make plausible attempts, but nothing convincing; humility's interpersonal nature makes this an unreasonable demand.

But what if Rob was extremely overconfident? Suppose Rob believed he was fantastic at fishing when he was only mediocre, he foolishly believed that he could kill a bear with his bare hands even though he had no chance of doing so, and he would repeatedly look for rare berries when he had no chance of finding them. We can imagine that this is a consistent disposition for Rob, that day after day he goes through life believing that he can do things that he cannot. If humility is defined in terms of the absence of overconfidence, then Rob is clearly not humble. And if arrogance is in some sense the contrary of humility, then Rob is arrogant. The problem with this view of things, as I see it, is Rob strikes me as neither arrogant nor as obviously lacking the virtue of humility. This is especially so if we add certain details to the story. Suppose, for instance, that we keep everything the same but we further stipulate that *if* some humans were to appear on the island and point out Rob's flaws, he *would* listen. So as things are, Rob is

⁷¹ The above bears obvious similarities to much discussed distinction between 'other-regarding' and 'self-regarding' virtues. I indeed considered using this much more familiar terrain to make my case. In the end, however, it seems that 'personal' and 'inter-personal' gets at something important that 'other-regarding' and 'self-regarding' does not (at least for the particular issue under consideration in this paper). Consider, for instance, that a virtue might be 'other-regarding' and not interpersonal. Generosity might be like this. A generous agent might give great sums of personal wealth but do this in an impersonal way, for instance, by having automatic deductions from one's pay check every month. The type of interpersonal virtue I am concerned with requires more than just treating another person in a particular way. It requires taking a personal stance toward another, as not just any individual but as a particular individual. An interpersonal interaction of the kind that I am concerned with demands that each agent recognize the other as a unique person with a unique epistemic life and an intellectual perspective that cannot be reduced to the intellectual perspective of any other autonomous thinker.

extremely overconfident. Notwithstanding, he is disposed to correct this overconfidence if other persons were to make a good case for why he should do so. It seems to me that Rob's overconfidence makes him not arrogant but rather a fool. I would rather pity Rob's misplaced self-confidence, but I would not conclude that this showed his lack of humility. Indeed, if Rob is in fact disposed to change his mind in response to correction of others, it seems possible that Rob is actually humble in spite of his overconfidence.

4.4.1 A first glance at intellectual humility as an interpersonal virtue

I want to begin my positive account with an example to bring us all together. For while there is clearly disagreement over just what constitutes intellectual humility, I suspect we can more quickly agree on who is *not* intellectually humble. Consider this example:

SAM: Sam, a second-year undergraduate, always arrives late, sits in the back of the class with a bored expression on his face, and every so often makes comments which either (1) suggest that he is right, and his classmates are wrong and stupid, or (2) suggest that he is right and his professor is wrong and stupid. Sam is immune to constructive feedback of any kind, convinced that he knows more than anyone who might offer advice. Not an assignment goes by in which Sam does not complain about his grade, demanding that it be adjusted upward in light of his own genius and his professor's obvious mistake.

We might disagree over the particular traits that best describe Sam. But I hope most can agree, that whatever else we might say of Sam, the one thing he is not is intellectually humble. It is also helpful to note that Sam exemplifies many of the vices Robert Roberts & Jay Wood have described as "the counterparts of humility." According to Roberts & Wood the counterparts of humility include: presumption, haughtiness, self-righteousness, domination, selfish ambition, and self-complacency. (2003: 257-258). And this is where I see us coming together; the listed vices can be grounded in the common description of a certain sort of person. Those disposed to arrogance, egoism, pretentiousness and the like are everyday examples of, well, *assholes*. My

suggestion is that if the humble person is anything at all, he is not an asshole. There is something painfully unfitting in the following assertion: “Toby is such a sweet, humble guy. But what an asshole!” Let us turn to the detailed account of assholes recently put forth by Aaron James in hope that it might shed light on humility. According to James,

Asshole: A person counts as an asshole when, and only when, he systematically allows himself to enjoy special advantages in interpersonal relations out of an entrenched sense of entitlement that immunizes him against the complaints of other people.

I find it quite interesting that both James and Roberts and Wood focus on the notion of “entitlement.” Roberts and Wood note that, “...humility is a disposition not to make unwarranted intellectual entitlement claims on the basis of one’s (supposed) superiority or excellence, out of a concern for self-exaltation, or some other vicious concern, or no vicious concern at all.” (2007: 2050-1). There is clearly something about “a sense of entitlement” that is particularly off-putting. And off-putting in a way that is likely incompatible with humility. With helpful reference to Roberts, Wood and James, the gist of my proposal is that the humble person is the counterpart to the asshole. With that in mind, a person is *intellectually* humble just in case he:

1. Systematically declines intellectual advantages in interpersonal relations because he feels no sense of entitlement;
2. Respects the intellect of others as his own, and so rarely feels immune to their complaints and criticisms.

Persons who meet these criteria tend to behave in ways that signify their intellectual humility. For instance, the intellectually humble:

1. Rarely demand special intellectual treatment, even when deserving
2. Often refuse special intellectual treatment, even when deserving.

3. Tend to take the complaints and criticisms of others seriously. Even when those others are not authority figures and even when the criticism is rude.
4. Tend to take the ideas of others seriously, even the ideas of intellectual inferiors.

Like those who prescribe to self-assessment accounts, I do believe the intellectually humble lack abrasive overconfidence, but only because this is incompatible with a certain respect for the intellect of others. I also believe that the intellectually humble, for the most part, “own their own limitations.” But this is because they take advice and criticism seriously, not the other way around. An interpersonal (anti-asshole) account can save “personal virtue intuitions” while avoiding downfalls of a purely personal virtue. If groups or individuals consistently refuse to revisit their opinions then they indeed lack humility, and this is best explained in terms of the complaints and disagreements of others that are surely being dismissed. Along similar lines, an obnoxious professor convinced of his own superiority does indeed lack humility. However, this is *not* best explained in terms of the professor’s overconfidence but rather in the professor’s refusing to listen to ideas and objections of others who surely disagree. What we see is that overconfidence does not so much define humility as it is a symptom of its absence. Similarly so with other self-assessment characteristics like the lack of overconfidence or a willingness to own one’s own limitations. These traits do not constitute intellectual humility but are rather common traits that arise from the humble agent’s interpersonal habits.

Let us further contrast the obnoxious professor with the humble professor. The humble professor is open to revising his ideas because, (1) he commonly runs into others who suggest that he should, and (2) his respect for their thoughts motivates willingness to change. This can be true even if disagreeing parties are intellectual inferiors. This concern that the humble person has for the ideas of others marks an important distinction between my account and the account of

Roberts and Wood. Like myself the aforementioned authors describe humility as an interpersonal virtue. That is, they define humility so it is necessary to reference persons other than the virtue holder. However, they also claim that an essential aspect of humility is a lack of concern for the praise of others. The role of “others” is much different in my account. Rather than in some way downplay the importance of others, *my account emphasizes their importance*.

Imagine a professor who presents his own work to undergraduates. The professor listens to the ensuing objections with an openness to admitting mistakes. It need not follow that the professor is naïve, nor that he fails to recognize his own superiority. Rather, the humble professor might engage in the following:

1. He recognizes his own intellectual superiority.
2. In spite of (1) he listens to each opinion carefully.
3. He is motivated to do (2) because he respects the intellectual autonomy and ability of his students (even in spite of (1)).
4. He occasionally revises his own opinion in light of his student’s thoughts.

A professor who exemplifies (1)-(4) seems just the sort of person we might call intellectually humble. My account explains this in systematic terms: our descriptions of intellectual humility latch on to an interpersonal virtue that is characterized by the absence of a sense of entitlement and the presence of a disposition to seriously consider the comments and complaints of peers and non-peers alike.

In contrast to (1) – (4), the intellectual asshole consistently disrespects the intellect of others, especially inferiors. He operates with an entitlement to manipulate, to deceive and to ignore, which are all hallmark manifestations of intellectual disrespect. The flip side of the coin

is that the intellectual asshole is especially disposed to dismiss criticism for he is especially disposed to see his own rationality as “above” that of so many, many, others.

4.5 Intellectual Humility and Groups

The rest of the paper will be focused on *collective* intellectual humility and the social and political consequences which follow. As hinted, what I am trying to describe is how intellectual humility manifests at the collective level. I am not then, trying to describe another virtue entirely; but rather, I want to understand the ways in which one and the same virtue (intellectual humility) might manifest itself in unique ways when present in collectives. As with individual humility, I see collective humility as a virtue that can be defined in opposition to the asshole, more precisely, in opposition to a “group asshole” or a “collective asshole.” Prima facie it may sound funny to call a group an asshole. However, there seems no conceptual reason why groups cannot be assholes, and common experience suggests that they can.⁷² It appears, moreover, that James’s entitlement theory can be amended to apply to groups. Here is a first attempt:

Collective Asshole: A Group G counts as an asshole when and only when G systematically allows itself to enjoy special advantages in interpersonal relations out of an entrenched sense of entitlement that immunizes the Group against the force of complaints of other people.

The above offers a good sketch of the sort of groups that clearly lack humility, i.e. the sort of groups that are assholes. Let us imagine a university collective; we can call them the “University Parking Administration Services.” Suppose that UPAS is ruthless. Parking officials hide behind the athletic building in wait for those who sneak in reserved spots to quickly return

⁷² Although it is not crucial for the discussion in this paper, I do want to note that it seems possible for a group to be humble even if no members of the group are humble. What it takes for a collective to have an attitude seems irreducible to the attitudes of the individual group agents. Please see Margaret Gilbert’s (2013) recent collection of essays on group attitudes, *Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World*. This collection thoroughly covers the debates in the literature about group attitudes and beliefs.

library books. Parking officials gleefully take advantage of the situation. Even worse, when off duty, they flagrantly disregard all parking rules. Because there is a “brotherhood” amongst parking officials, they refrain from issuing tickets to colleagues. The UAPS seems clearly an asshole. It systematically takes advantage of persons with a sense of entitlement, while simultaneously seeing itself as above the rules. I am sure many of us can think of similar examples. Perhaps The Department of Motor Vehicles, our least-favored political party, bureaucratic committees, the PTA at our children’s school, or we might even conjure up unpleasant memories of the high school football team.

At this point let us note that groups can be assholes in one sense yet not another. The UAPS example only showed that this particular group behaved as an asshole toward external members. This is compatible with the UAPS displaying much different behavior toward its own members. They might pay members well, hold great holiday parties, and willingly work for the good of employees. If so, employees at the UAPS might not consider the group an asshole at all. This is one important way in which group virtue differs from individual virtue. Groups can have differing dispositions toward its own members versus outsiders versus. Let us amend our definition:

Collective Asshole: A Group G counts as an asshole when, and only when, G systematically allows itself to enjoy special advantages in at least one of three following types of interpersonal relations: the group’s relation with its own members, the group’s relation with outside individuals or the group’s relation with outside groups. These systematic tendencies to take advantage stem from the group’s entrenched sense of entitlement that immunizes itself from the force of criticisms which come from either the group’s own members, external individuals, or external groups.

Let us note that criticism coming from the class that the group systematically disadvantages, whether it be its own members or outsiders, is criticism especially likely to be ignored. After all, if groups feel entitled enough to systematically disadvantage, they are

probably not open to revising in response to the disadvantaged group's complaints. This speaks to the difficulty of changing the customs of groups who are a special type of asshole: a discriminatory asshole. Those who are abused have the most motivation to fight back, but the disadvantaged are also the most likely to be ignored by the discriminatory group.

Another reason it is especially salient that groups might behave as an asshole in one sense but not another is that this dynamic influences how asshole groups might better themselves. For instance, if a group is an asshole only toward outsiders, its own members might feel no incentive to change it. However, once a group becomes a "total asshole"; that is, once a group becomes an asshole to both outsiders and insiders, there might be hope of change. Members who are tired of being treated poorly might spark a revolution; the revolution might change the group's behavior to outsiders as well as insiders. In this sense, groups that "hit rock bottom" can offer greater hope of change than groups which have not yet reached the same level of maliciousness. Although there is no time to consider it in this paper, an investigation into the ways groups become and "un-become" assholes seems worth considering.

4.5.1 Collective Intellectual Humility

If groups can be assholes, groups can also be humble. Collective humility is the opposing end of collective assholeism. It is exemplified via an absence of a sense of entitlement, a disposition to reject taking advantage of others, and a special responsiveness to complaints and criticisms. Formally, we can say that collective intellectual humility, in its fullest sense, amounts to the following:

Collective Humility: A group G possesses the virtue of intellectual collective humility if:

1. G Systematically declines special intellectual advantages in interpersonal relations (whether these relations are with G's own members, external individuals, or external groups) because G feels no sense of entitlement;
2. G respects the intellect and the intellectual autonomy of its own members, external individuals, and external groups; and hence, rarely feels immune to their complaints and criticisms.

*** Both dispositions derive from the absence of a sense of entitlement. It is because the humble group does not think of itself as entitled that it thereby respect the intellectual autonomy of its own members and also outside groups.

There is likely some correlation between group size and collective intellectual humility. It seems only natural that the interpersonal nature of humility becomes increasingly difficult as a group becomes larger and thus impersonal bureaucratic norms replace spontaneous personal interactions. Many of us have seen this happen in our own place of work, noticing that as our work place institution grows, so does animosity and communication failures. Consider, for instance, a lower-level employee with an original idea that he wishes to share with management. In a small company this employee might go directly to the boss with his suggestion. In a large company, however, the employee will have to go through layers upon layers of managerial appointees and might never talk to the boss directly at all. It seems uncontroversial that the former situation provides a much better chance for the lower-level employee to be heard. And let us remember that this "being heard" is of foundational importance to collective intellectual humility. This virtue, after all, is grounded upon an egalitarian respect for autonomous thought. *Ceteris paribus*, the larger the collective the less-likely that a group will respect the autonomous thought of all, and hence the less likely it is that the group is intellectually humble.

In much contrast to large corporations or bureaucratic institutions, groups of two might have especially great potential for collective intellectual humility. An ideal marriage, for example, is probably one in which the spouses come together in such a way that they can rightly be said to hold the virtue of collective intellectual humility. In this intellectually humble union each partner would have great respect for the intellectual autonomy of the other partner. This respect, in turn, would lead to habitual patterns of interaction that include patiently listening to one another even in the face of disagreement.⁷³ This is not to say that a marriage of this kind is easy – virtue of all stripes is difficult – it is only to say that small intimate groups have a path to collective intellectual humility which is much smoother than the inevitably complex path of large groups.

While small groups might have a greater chance of acquiring the virtue of collective intellectual humility than do large groups, we should not render large groups a lost cause. Our worries might first be tempered by taking note that intellectual humility (both the collective and individual variant) comes in greater and lesser degrees. Groups that are *more humble* more consistently display behaviors exemplifying humility, i.e., they are less likely to act with entitlement and more likely be responsive to criticism. So while possessing the virtue of collective intellectual humility in its “fullest sense” might be an immense challenge for any group and an especially immense challenge for large groups, collectives can nevertheless approach this challenge with baby-steps. A group completely lacking collective intellectual humility might start out slowly, perhaps beginning with a basic level of egalitarian intellectual respect that barely registers on the “virtue scale.” With principled commitment and an allegiance to the right sort of institutional norms, principles, and legislation, such a group might increase its level of intellectual

⁷³Let us note that as the feminist movement begun to take hold, this sparked a change in the nature of the common marriage relationship. Marriage, once a relationship of power and dominance in which the husband had little respect the thoughts and ideas of his wife, slowly become an egalitarian partnership.

humility inch by inch. In the next section, I argue that an essential characteristic of intellectually humble collectives is that they tend to adopt politically liberal principles and policies. Hence as society becomes more liberal, it is simultaneously in the process of becoming more humble. The democratic experiment of creating liberal social orders amongst very large groups of loosely associated persons is an experiment in collective virtue on a grand scale.

4.6 Liberalism & Intellectual Collective Humility

Let us understand “liberalism” broadly. We need assume only what follows from Rawls’s first principle of justice as fairness: all citizens are entitled to the same basic rights and liberties, including speech, association, religion, and the right to vote. Here is Rawls in his own words.

The basic liberties of citizens are, roughly speaking, political liberty (the right to vote and to be eligible for public office) together with freedom of speech and assembly; liberty of conscience and freedom of thought; freedom of the person along with the right to hold personal property; and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure. . . . These liberties are all required to be equal by the first principle, since citizens of a just society are to have the same basic rights” (Rawls, 2009:53) (emphasis added).

Intellectually humble collectives are just the sort of collectives which are especially disposed to act in ways that exemplify respect for Rawls’s first principle of justice insofar as this principle proves intellectually relevant. We can look at collectives as landing somewhere along a spectrum of “Intellectual Respect.” Here is a model:

Contempt for intellectual Autonomy **V.** Complete Respect for Intellectual Autonomy

Arrogance

Humility

Behaviors along this Spectrum

Deception. Manipulation. Disregard. Impatience. Dialogue. Collaboration

****Note that further down the spectrum line toward the right is ‘diffidence’. Humility is a mean between arrogance and diffidence.*

We see that for conceptual purposes, *intellectual arrogance is nearly equivalent to total disregard for intellectual autonomy*. Behaviors commonly associated with this disregard include deception and manipulation. Manipulation and deception are vices that dismiss the intellect of its victim, i.e., such practices fail to show proper concern for the intellectual interest that rational beings have in autonomous reasoning. There is an important sense in which those who manipulate and those who deceive *attempt to control* the intellect of others. Salient examples are found in cults and extremist political parties. These groups not only disregard intellectual autonomy; they act to *undermine it* via engagement in the following types of behavior.

1. Attempt to get an individual to hold certain beliefs (truth need not matter)
2. Will try to achieve (1) regardless of the evidence or despite of it
3. Will try to achieve (1) without concern for the manipulated agent's intellectual process in arriving at the target belief.

At times there is a fine line between innocent attempts at convincing others of p and malicious attempts of manipulating others into believing p. In both convincing and manipulating, there is a sense in which you attempt to get another to believe specific propositions. The difference lies in the way in which the manipulator demonstrates a sense of entitlement to intellectual control. The person who aims to convince, unlike the person who aims to manipulate, cares that an agent comes to her belief through acceptable epistemic means. Those who are intellectually humble would, all other things equal, prefer that others believe the wrong thing than that they believe the right thing via manipulation or deception. In contrast, *intellectual arrogance is not caring about this*. The more important that a testifier believes her cause to be, the more likely she is to put intellectual humility to the wayside. Evangelical religious adherents might think that religious truth is so important that they are justified in telling half-truths as a means to get to whole ones. Professors might think it is so important that

students learn certain philosophical truths that they give up on their students acquiring appropriate reasoning habits. When we think of the humble person, however, I doubt most of us think of these types. Rather, those who are intellectually humble are the types who feel extremely uncomfortable in engaging in these suspect epistemic practices. Speaking more generally, the intellectually humble feel extremely uncomfortable in “overriding” the intellect of fellow rational beings.

Although a penchant for manipulation is a sure sign of intellectual arrogance, perhaps it is *the refusal to respond to criticism* which most distinguishes the intellectual asshole from those persons and institutions which exemplify the virtue of intellectual humility. Indeed, the intellectually humble collective is especially receptive to criticism. Because humble collectives do not see themselves as “above” the intellect of others, they simply view it as good sense to take criticism seriously, wherever it may come from.⁷⁴ At the collective level, this aspect of intellectual humility is often visible in institutional structure and policy. And although liberal democracies often fail to live up to their principles, we can nonetheless see intellectual humility imbedded within their laws and constitutions. The voting process itself is one that arises from intellectually humble commitments. Tyrannical governments do not let the people voice their criticism through a vote, for they have an entrenched sense of entitlement that self-justifies dismissing the will of the people. Freedom of speech and assembly are other core principles of intellectual humility. Although those in government might be more educated than the common folk, respect for the intellectual life of its people demands that *the people* be allowed to voice their opinions nevertheless.

All of the aforementioned examples concerning democratic decision making only tells half of the story of collective intellectual humility. We explained earlier that collective humility

⁷⁴I say this while acknowledging that we must allow for the compatibility of pragmatism and humility. Those who are humble can manage their time in such a way that they privilege expert opinion. What is key to humility is that they don't dismiss the opinion of another entirely on the ground that such other is intellectually inferior. They would rather listen to the inferior as a means of allowing that inferior to exercise his/her intellectual autonomy.

is about not only how a collective treats its own internal members, but also how it treats outsiders. Intellectually humble collectives are especially likely to form alliances with other collectives who hold similar intellectual values, i.e., respect for freedom of speech and reasoning, public deliberation, democratic decision making, etc. Alliances formed between different liberal societies themselves exemplify intellectual humility. Despots and tyrants are unwilling to work with others. They have no respect for other nations, their ideas, or their right to autonomy. The more entitled that a nation feels to control other nations and to shut-off lines of open-communication, the less humble that nation. The rise of liberal societies has benefited from a commitment against this philosophy of intellectual arrogance. Liberal alliances like the European Union and NATO are both a cause and consequence of the rise of intellectual humility within democratic societies. In contrast to a long world history of imperialism in which one nation saw it fit to control other nations, modern democratic societies are increasingly recognizing the right of self-determination.

There is arguably an increasing movement to dispense of the liberal principles of intellectual humility that have risen over the past two centuries. Both in Western Europe and in the United States, nationalism and anti-immigrant movements are on the rise. If we view this through the lens of intellectual humility, this should not be surprising. Virtue is difficult. If we accept Aristotle's framework, it requires long-periods of habituation before it becomes an engrained dispositional character trait. One interpretation of recent nationalistic movements is that they are a sign that intellectual humility was never an engrained character traits of Western Nations, but rather, so-called "liberal societies" at best *acted as if* they had intellectual humility. It is, of course, possible for persons and groups to act as if they had a virtue when they do not. This acting is hardly a bad thing, indeed, it may be the only way to acquire the real virtue. Yet until a

long-enough time period of habituation happens, the virtue (being only an appearance) is at great risk. Given the long-history of illiberalism and imperialism, it is not surprising that the short-period in which liberal societies have practiced intellectual humility is not enough to acquire the real virtue. This is why it is especially important for those who believe intellectual humility is a valuable trait of democratic social orders to fight back against anti-humility movements that suggest nations are entitled to overrule the autonomy of both insiders and outsiders.

Other Groups

Let us make clear that it is not only governments that can display either collective intellectual assholism or collective intellectual humility. Many forms of groups and collectives can display either this virtue or vice. Corporations, for instance, can either respect lower tier employee opinions or dismisses them. Along these lines, modern tech companies are learning that intellectual humility can help its own bottom line. When employees are encouraged to think freely and criticize inefficient company policies, the company is likely to improve. However, it is well-recognized that corporations were not always so humble. It was once accepted by many that only a strict hierarchy with well-established roles for superiors and their subservient inferiors could ever lead to business efficiency. Notwithstanding, many are now arguing that greater respect for employee freedom (including freedom of thought) leads to greater ideas, greater ideas to better politics and practices, and better policies and practices improve the collective as a whole.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Marketing consultant Martin Thomas (2011) has written a book on the business's worlds' quickly transforming culture. Thomas argues that the once accepted authoritarian and hierarchical business model is being replaced with a less-authoritarian and decentralized model that appears much more favorable to autonomous non-elitist thought. Interestingly enough, Thomas even takes some time to frame this shift in terms of a Plato versus Aristotle debate. For additional evidence of this changing attitude in the business world, all one needs to do is look at the business section of any popular books store. Two examples of recent books on this area are "Make More Money by Making Your Employees Happy" (Nelson:2012), and "The Happy Manager: How to Make Your Team Happy and Increase Productivity" (Masarykova : 2015). In addition, business magazine *Forbes* has reported on awards given to employees who are doing the most to 'make their employees happy'

Why Collective Intellectual Humility is Difficult

It is rare that I hear anyone talk about humble collectives. This might be explained simply in virtue of the unfortunate truth that humble collectives are hard to find. And upon reflection there are many factors that suggest intellectual humility is more difficult a virtue for collectives than for individuals. First, many groups are hierarchical. By their very nature some within the hierarchy are positioned above others, and often those lower in rank see their role as one of subservience. This does not bode well for intellectual humility. Those who are subservient submit their will to the will of those they serve. This, in turn, threatens to turn into a relationship of general intellectual subservience. For even if those who serve are not commanded to completely abandon autonomous thought, it is often easier that they do so. After all, if servants are not allowed to act in accordance with their own reason, they might give up on autonomous reasoning all together.

In addition to hierarchies, collectives have problems with humility because in-groups create outgroups. A group's reason to organize is often used as a reason to discount outsider opinion. Religious institutions, for example, commonly claim that, and act as though, their religious beliefs speak to *the complete and only truth*. Outsiders then, by definition, have a clear epistemic mark against them. Similar things occur in other organized groups. The *Society of Historian Scholars* might believe that membership in the group signifies special historical knowledge. Hence outsiders are viewed as less knowledgeable by virtue of being outsiders. The problem might be the very worst in organizations that utilize popular election. Those who are elected are prone to see themselves as "entitled" to their position. And in one sense, those who are fairly elected are indeed entitled. Nonetheless, this entitlement to govern can too easily expand its scope. Those who are elected may forget that their entitlement to rule *is not* an entitlement to dismiss the opinions of the ruled. Quite to the contrary, elected office is often supposed to signify just the opposite: those who govern are elected specifically so they might rule in response to the will of the governed. Despite humble intentions,

institutions formed through popular elections can breed a sense of entitlement in direct conflict with envisioned principles. It is not hard to find examples. Brief research on the history of democratic societies is teeming with examples of self-interested, entitled, representatives who fail to fulfill their duty to work for those who elected them. Intellectually humble governors are a very rare breed.

4.7 Objections

4.7.1 Why Intellectual humility is not just open-mindedness

What I am describing as intellectual humility might appear similar to open-mindedness. Indeed, the virtues have been mixed up before. Whitcomb et al., for instance, take the time to explain why their view of intellectual humility is not open-mindedness.⁷⁶ When it comes to my account, admittedly, it appears that both open-mindedness and intellectual humility require a willingness to pay close attention to others, often regardless of intellectual status. Despite these similarities, the virtues are distinct, and one does not necessitate the other. Central to intellectual humility is respect for intellectual autonomy. This is what makes it an interpersonal virtue: it cannot be described by referencing only an agent and her own intellect. On the other hand, it seems possible to describe open-mindedness in a purely personal fashion. Consider the following possibility:

Open-mindedness: S possesses open-mindedness if and only if she is disposed to toward reflecting on her deeply held beliefs and is thereby especially willing to change beliefs when faced with new ideas.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ 2013, p.14

⁷⁷ Accounts in the literature of open-mindedness include those by Jonathan Adler and Wayne Riggs. Both describe the virtue of open-mindedness in a way that I would call 'personal'. Adler argues that open-mindedness is centrally concerned with second-order attitudes directed toward one's first-order beliefs. Riggs account emphasizes the importance of self-monitoring and self-knowledge. I did not use either account for my example, for there would not be time to give either account the just discussion it would deserve. For what it's worth, I think that both Adler and Riggs are on the right track in describing open-mindedness in personal as opposed to interpersonal terms. Open-mindedness seems particularly unlike intellectual humility insofar as the former is a personal virtue and the latter is an interpersonal one. Additional discussions on open-mindedness can be found in Baer(2011), Hare (1979), Montmarquet (1993), Roberts & Wood (2007), and Zagzebski (1996).

Notice that the above definition does not mention any other agent besides the open-minded agent. What matters is not so much the ideas of others as the willingness to change personal views. Perhaps this often comes along with a willingness to listen. However, this willingness is grounded in the agent's openness to changing personal beliefs. Although the intellectually humble agent shows a similar willingness to change deeply held beliefs, the direction of fit is opposite the open-minded agent. It is because she so greatly respects the intellect of another that she is open to change personal beliefs. This diction is modeled below:

Open-mindedness

Openness to new ideas > taking seriously the intellect of others

Intellectual Humility

Respect for the intellect of others > willingness to change ideas in the face of disagreement

The above chart demonstrates how intellectual humility and open-mindedness are similar, and also how they differ. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Intellectual humility and open-mindedness differ in more salient ways. For instance, because the essential feature of intellectual humility is respect for another's intellect, she might be willing to spend an entire afternoon listening to an intellectual inferior work out her thoughts. An open-minded person can be without this disposition. Suppose that the thoughts of the inferior are familiar to the open-minded agent. Refusing to spend the afternoon listening to familiar thoughts would not render him close-minded. Repetition has less relevance for the intellectually humble agent; she is happy facilitating the intellectual well-being of another. This difference in motivation further distinguishes humility and open-mindedness. Open-mindedness is a personal virtue, and hence the open-minded person is motivated to listen because she is eager to change personal views in response to compelling reason. The intellectually humble person motivation is interpersonal: she

respects the person speaking and is therefore motivated to listen. Because of these motivational differences, steadfastness or intellectual stubbornness is not in conflict with intellectual humility, but *it is* in conflict with open-mindedness.

Like the individual virtue, collective intellectual humility and open-mindedness can come apart. Groups can be open-minded but not intellectually humble and intellectually humble but not open-minded. Indeed, having one virtue without the other is more common in collectives. Features of *individual* intellectual humility encourage open-mindedness and vice versa. This mutual encouragement is less common in collectives. Group identity, whether religious, political, or personal is commonly tied to a shared belief-system. Hence many groups, by their very nature, are close-minded or the group ceases to exist. If, for example, a political party was open to changing its core beliefs system, it might become another political party entirely.

4.8 Intellectual Humility & Politeness

When discussing my thoughts on intellectual humility, I was asked the following question: Are you talking about intellectual humility or just “epistemic politeness?” My first response is that the two possibilities are not mutually exclusive. Perhaps those who are disposed to intellectual humility are also disposed to epistemic politeness. This should not be controversial. Politeness, at least in one sense of the term, consists of social norms that function as a means to display respect. Along similar lines, intellectual humility demands respect. Notwithstanding, my account is not equivalent to any plausible understanding of intellectual politeness. Intellectual humility demands much more.

Politeness can be what it is even if it is all just an act. The following is perfectly intelligible: “Beware of Scott. He is polite but he could not care less about anyone in lower management.” What this hypothetical observation suggests is that one can be both polite and an

asshole. Although most who are polite are not assholes, most of us know a few people who fit into both categories and they are especially malicious. With polite assholes, you can miss the danger that is to come. Humility is not only incompatible with assholism but is its direct contrary. It is not good enough *to pretend* to care about the intellect of others, the concern must be *sincere*. This is what can render humility so difficult. It is easy to pretend to care, actual concern is another story. Biases can be powerful, especially intellectual biases. If we believe p we also believe that those who believe p believe truly. Intellectual humility can cause cognitive conflict. We must continue to believe p but also listen to someone who believes the opposite. This is why intellectual autonomy is so central to intellectual humility: concern for the truth cannot breed intellectual humility by itself. We hold many beliefs with extreme confidence, and often for good reason. What then will get us to listen if not a search for truth? The answer is this: *respect and appreciation in another's quest for truth*. Central to intellectual autonomy is each individual's ability to use her own truth-seeking cognitive powers. Those who are intellectually humble recognize this as an intellectual good and this motivates them to listen to others they know are wrong. In special cases, this willingness to listen to falsehoods takes an interesting turn as we reform our beliefs and realize that we were the ones to hold the falsehoods in the first place. The possibility of error, however, is neither what constitutes intellectual humility or justifies its status as an intellectual virtue but is merely a positive by product.

Just as with individuals, group humility demands more than just a show of politeness. Many, many, organizations feign politeness in the total absence of humility. This, in fact, is probably more common with collectives. For while their internal structure renders intellectual humility a difficult disposition cf. individuals, the opposite holds with politeness. Groups can create an internal structure in which humility's facile appearance is almost automatic. Imagine a

large cable company, and suppose that whenever the company receives an angry call from the company's customer service line, employees are very polite. They ask how the customer's day is going and promise to help however they can. After the customer conveys the problem, the customer service center says just what you might expect from the intellectually humble: "I understand your problem. I am sorry to hear about it, and I will try my best to help." The bad news for the customer is that these are mere words. Customer service often does not understand the problem and could personally not care less about what it is or how severe. Rather than helping, they do what they can to get the customer off the line. Saying the right things is obviously not enough for humility. Within many collective environments like the corporate one, saying the right thing and *not* meaning it is par for the course.

If systematic collective environments *command* certain responses, it is especially hard to be intellectually humble. The command itself is in conflict with the virtue. If companies command customer service representatives to issue a specific reply, they are slighting that employee's intellectual autonomy. Rather than allowing the employee to use her own judgment, the company is insisting that upper-management's judgment takes absolute priority. We are again faced with another conflict between collective organizations and humility. Not only are many collective organizations hierarchical, many have systematic policies that limit the amount of individual judgment. Both features, hierarchy and systemizing, make it especially hard for the organization to become intellectually humble.

4.9 Why Intellectual Humility is Good a Good Thing Intellectually

I argued that intellectual humility is an *interpersonal* virtue, and that being so it need not directly improve the virtue holder's own intellect. Rather, as an *interpersonal* virtue, intellectual humility's primary benefit might be to the intellect of persons other than the virtue-holder. This

is true at both the individual and the collective level. Imagine that a brilliant professor devotes his summer to tutoring undergraduates. Suppose that in so doing this professor exemplifies both intellectual generosity and intellectual humility. At the summer's completion, there is a sense in which the professor is worse off intellectually: all his time spent on basic intellectual matters put a small dint in his analytic acumen; he forgot a few things and his understanding of the subject is worse than when he started tutoring. This does not speak against the professor's intellectual virtue. Much the contrary, by sacrificing his own intellectual wealth he has enriched the intellect of others.

I am not suggesting we turn to utilitarian principles to understand intellectual humility. Rather, I am suggesting a "big picture" approach. First, intellectual virtue stretches beyond knowledge and true belief. Second, intellectual virtue goes beyond improving an agent's own epistemic character directly. Rather interpersonal virtues improves the intellectual life of others and because the virtuous agent plays a role in this improvement, her own intellectual character improves indirectly.

The ability to see things from a "big picture" perspective may be especially important in respect to collective virtue. Institutions can be specifically devoted to improving the intellectual character of others. The most obvious example is the university. Humble universities do not take their status "as an institute of higher learning" as grounds to dismiss others who lack this standing. Many universities appear to lack this collective virtue. They might dismiss the findings of less prestigious universities, refuse to take community members seriously, or express an attitude of mocking disdain toward undergraduates. The humble university, on the other hand, takes the time to consider research and ideas of other universities regardless of prestige.

4.10 Conclusion

This paper was an attempt at illuminating, describing, and analyzing the virtue of intellectual humility as applied to collective entities. My starting point was the pre-theoretical notion of “humility.” In contrast to many existing accounts, I argued that “humility” is a virtue best described in terms of the virtue holder’s relation to *other* persons, entities, or institutions. Intellectual humility, hence, is best described in terms of the virtue holder’s intellectual relation to other persons, entities, and/or institutions. I argued that liberal principles that manifest respect for the intellectual and autonomous worth of all are the sort of principles adopted by humble collectives. The most humble collectives of all apply such principles to their own members, external members, and external groups. Unfortunately, structural components of many collective entities makes the virtue of intellectually humility especially hard to acquire. For this reason, it is especially important for collective entities to adopt, both formally and informally, liberal norms and policies. The failure to do so can result in a collective institution completely devoid of intellectual humility; or what scarily amounts to the same thing, an institution with a total lack of respect for the intellectual autonomy of its own members and outsiders alike.

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CHAPTER 5

INFERIOR DISAGREEMENT

Keywords: disagreement; peers; superiors; inferiors; evidence; justification

5.1 Introduction

Suppose you are a rational, careful, and critical thinker—someone who evaluates evidence seriously and reconsiders opinion in light of compelling reason. After carefully considering relevant evidence, you become convinced that *p*. But then, you meet an epistemic peer whose opinion you trust in matters concerning *p*. He claims not-*p*. You have both looked at the same evidence, and you have no reason to believe that he is biased, intoxicated, or otherwise functioning below his usual competency. How should you respond? The epistemology of disagreement literature has offered various answers. At first, the debate was primarily between conciliatory views that argue to weaken your confidence and steadfast views that argue your assurance should remain unchanged.⁷⁸ Since then, many have offered positions that are more moderate. However, the debate has remained focused on *peer* disagreement—disagreement between those with equal or similar cognitive abilities and access to the same or similar evidence. Thomas Kelly (2010) describes a standard case: “Suppose that you and I have been

⁷⁸ David Christensen (2007) points out this contrast nicely by comparing himself (a conciliatory partisan) to Peter van Inwagen (a steadfast partisan). van Inwagen (1996) argues that, “I think any philosopher who does not wish to be a philosophical skeptic... must agree with me that... it must be possible for one to be justified in accepting a philosophical thesis when there are philosophers who, by all objective and external criteria, are at least as equally well qualified to pronounce on the thesis, and reject it” (emphasis in the original) (p. 139). But Christensen (2007) is not convinced, “I will argue that in a great many of cases that van Inwagen and others seem to have in mind, I should change my degree of confidence significantly toward that of my friend (and similarly, she should change hers toward mine)” (p. 189).

exposed to the same evidence and arguments that bear on some proposition: there is no relevant consideration which is available to you but not to me, or vice versa” (p. 183).

Peer disagreement raises difficult epistemological questions. But what about disagreement between superiors and inferiors? The literature does include some discussion. In “Reflection and Disagreement”, Adam Elga argues that his theory of peer disagreement extends to superior/inferior disagreement.⁷⁹ And in “Discovering Disagreeing Peers and Superiors,” Bryan Frances offers a detailed account focused on the perspective of inferiors. Nonetheless, my paper aims to add to the discussion via an analysis of under-theorized aspects of superior/inferior disagreement: various types of inferiors, which of such variants bear epistemic import, and how these differing inferiors might affect appropriate superior reactions.

Prime facie, it may seem that disagreement with epistemic inferiors is trivial or at least less interesting than peer disagreement. If A claims p and finds out that: (1) B claims not-p, and (2) B has less evidence, it seems that (2) nullifies the impact of (1). A can account for the disagreement via B’s evidence paucity and remain steadfast in her belief. The case is similar with cognitive inferiors. Maybe A is an expert on the subject and B a novice, or perhaps B is just plain stupid. In either case, it seems A has little reason to alter her belief. One aim of this paper is to show that these *prima facie* intuitions are often mistaken or at least misleading. The first step in understanding inferior disagreement is to distinguish two types of inferiors—competents and incompetents. We can then see that disagreement from competent inferiors can give superiors reason to adjust credence and reevaluate evidence, and hence that epistemic inferiority alone is

⁷⁹ Although the main focus of his paper was not inferior disagreement, Elga (2007) does argue that when disagreeing with a peer, a superior, or an inferior, one should, “... be guided by your prior assessment of her judging ability conditional on what you later learn about the judging conditions” (p. 489). Nothing said here straightforwardly conflicts with this rule from Elga. This paper aims to fill out further details and note the special impact of disagreeing inferiors.

insufficient grounds for dismissing opinion. Next comes more nuanced difficulties.

Disagreements between superiors and *incompetent* inferiors should sometimes boost the superior's justification. On the other hand, *agreement* from incompetent inferiors can defeat justification. Either way, inferior opinion carries epistemic weight. But this still fails to cover all ground; uninformative inferior disagreements remain. In the final section, I describe these uninformative disagreements, how to distinguish them from the informative cases and the proper reactions thereof.

5.2 Peer Relations and Epistemic Competence

5.2.1 What we do when we disagree

When met with disagreement, disagreeing parties must consider what epistemic actions are most appropriate. Two considerations are particularly important. First, subjects must consider how to adjust their belief credence, or if any adjustment is needed at all. In other words, when A finds that B disagrees with him about *p*, A may lower, maintain, or increase belief credence. Related to yet distinct from credence adjustment is evidence reevaluation. Disagreeing parties may take steps to reconsider their evidence by engaging old evidence, searching for new, or reevaluating the latter in light of the former. Sometimes an agent will adjust credence but not reevaluate evidence. This might occur, for instance, if practical considerations make reevaluation unfeasible. Alternatively, a subject may be moved to reevaluate her evidence while maintaining belief credence. Depending on the disagreement at hand, an agent may adjust credence, reevaluate evidence, do both, or neither. In section 4, I argue that disagreement from certain types of epistemic inferiors can give superiors reason to both adjust their belief credence and reevaluate their evidence.

5.2.2 Competence

Let us consider an example similar to one offered in the peer disagreement literature by Elga (2007, p.486). A and B watch a horse race; A has great vision, a clear view of the finish line, and confidently judges that Mabel finished first. Nonetheless, B disagrees, insisting that Dixie won. Considering B her perceptual peer, A has good reason to pause, lower belief credence, and reconsider p. Perceptual disagreements like these are sometimes used to motivate a conciliatory position known as the *equal weight view*. Simplified, proponents argue that peers who disagree ought to give each other's opinion equal epistemic weight, and thus that the reasonable response in the horse race example is judgment suspension⁸⁰. This is intuitively compelling. A says one thing, B says the other, and they are equally likely to be right. But what if A and B are not peers? Suppose that A has 20/20 vision, and B 40/60. A knows B's vision is terrible: she has witnessed B mistake dogs for easy-chairs and his own spouse for his own mother. In short, she is skeptical because she has good reason to believe B is incompetent. It seems the reasonable response is to give B's opinion little or no weight and for A to remain steadfast in her belief about Mabel's triumph. In more general terms, when: (1) A disagrees with B over p, and (2) A judges that B is incompetent in matters concerning p, then (2) justifies A remaining steadfast in her belief.

The above notwithstanding, disagreeing with inferiors is sometimes more complicated than the previous example suggests, because we sometimes disagree with *competent* inferiors. A may be B's epistemic superior in subject S, but B might still be competent. Epistemic skill levels range from incompetence to expertise, so A can be close to the expertise end, while B just enters

⁸⁰ For instance, responding to a similar example, Elga (2007) argues, "Here is the bottom line. When you find out that you and your friend have come to opposite conclusions about a race, you should think that the two of you are equally likely to be correct" (p. 487).

the competence range. Disagreement between superiors and inferiors becomes noteworthy when both parties are competent. Of course, drawing a line where incompetence ends and competence begins presents obvious difficulties; but for clarity, I define competence as follows:

Competence: A is competent in subject matter S when it is more likely that A forms true beliefs about S than false ones.

Likelihood is construed modally: In one hundred nearby worlds, A is competent if at least 51/100 beliefs about S are true. This is not a conceptual analysis of our pre-theoretical notion of competence, but a criterion to circumscribe inferior disagreements that might provide countervailing evidence. Likelihood is construed modally: In one hundred nearby worlds, A is competent if at least 51/100 beliefs about S are true. This is not a conceptual analysis of our pre-theoretical notion of competence, but a criterion to circumscribe inferior disagreements that might provide countervailing evidence. It is important to keep this in mind. For I do not want to suggest that expertise should be understood via track records. One might be tempted to think, for instance, that if a 51% modal track record is sufficient for competence, then a 99% modal track record makes one an expert. But the way I am understanding competence, this is not necessarily the case. Expertise will be highly contextual, and will vary from subject to subject. So in some subjects expertise might require only a 60% success rate, while in other areas expertise requires a 99.8% success rate. Competence is notion meant simply to flag that an individual's opinion carries epistemic merit. A 51% track record demonstrates that the individual is more likely to be correct than incorrect. This is enough to provide some minimal degree of positive epistemic support (If one thinks 51% is not enough for minimal support, she can increase the percentage. The exact number is not critical to my argument).

Disagreement with competent inferiors has epistemic demands importantly different from disagreement with incompetents. Knowing that competent inferiors are more likely to be right

about p than wrong, superiors should recognize the inferior's disagreeing testimony as evidence. To see why, we need only imagine a case in which a superior has no opinion on p, and then learns that a competent inferior believes p is true. Because competent inferiors are at least minimally reliable, their claim that p gives us some reason to believe that p is true. Richard Feldman has noted something similar with peer disagreement,

[L]earning what a peer thinks about evidential significance when one does not have a prior opinion does provide some evidence about the topic. But if the evidence about the other person would be epistemically significant in cases in which one did not have a view of one's own, it is hard to see why it has no impact when one does. (2010: 309)

Feldman's quote illustrates the arbitrariness of discounting the weight of peer opinion when and *only* when peers disagree. This point applies just as well to competent inferiors. Both peers and competent inferiors are reliable enough that their opinion bears some evidential significance. If we had no opinion on p, reliable testimony that p gives us some reason to believe p. But then consistency also demands that the same testimony provides reason to believe p when we already have an opinion. In order to avoid inconsistencies, superiors should consider the evidential significance of competent inferior opinion, whether or not superiors already have an opinion of their own.

I want to briefly discuss how one's views on the Principles of Uniqueness and Independence bear on inferior disagreement. The Principle of Uniqueness claims that given a body of evidence E, and a proposition P, there is one and only one maximally rational view to take toward P.⁸¹ Whether or not one is inclined to accept Uniqueness, the ramifications of inferior disagreement should remain the same. Suppose, for instance, that Uniqueness is correct. Further suppose that a superior disagrees with an inferior about p. Perhaps there is only one

⁸¹ See Christenson 2007 and Feldman 2007.

maximally rational attitude to hold toward p. Notwithstanding, if the inferior is competent, the superior has some reason to consider the inferior's opinion. After all, the inferior just might have that maximally rational opinion. Now suppose Uniqueness is incorrect. Once again, if a superior and a competent inferior disagree, the inferior has some reason to consider the inferior's opinion. Although both may have rational opinions, both may not; one person may be more rational than another. Given this, the superior has reason to take into account the inferior's opinion (Or so, I will argue).

Let us move on to the Independence Principle. Consider this formulation:

Independence: In evaluating the epistemic credentials of another person's belief about P, to determine how (if at all) to modify one's own belief about P, one should do so in a way that is independent of the reasoning behind one's own initial belief about P (Christenson: 2009: 758).

Those who accept this principle may be especially inclined to take inferior disagreement seriously. Let us suppose that a superior disagrees with a competent inferior. The superior knows this inferior is more likely to be correct about p than incorrect. She is also committed to bracketing her reasoning behind her belief that p. The superior would then have good reason to consider the inferior's opinion as evidence against her position. After all, she has come across reliable testimony that speaks against the truth of her belief. Without appealing to her own reasoning process, she ought to take the inferior's evidence as testimony against p.

However, if one rejects Independence, then she might be less inclined to carefully consider the opinion of a competent inferior. She might, for instance, make the following sort of argument: "S might disagree with me about p, but I am justified in dismissing this disagreement. After all, when considering whether p, I rejected premises which this inferior clearly accepts. Hence, there is no reason to take her seriously." This sort of argument, however, can be made

even if the disagreeing party was a peer. Problems raised by the Independence thesis are not exclusive to inferior disagreement.

5.2.3 Domains of Competence

When considering whether or not a disagreeing party is competent in some domain, we should categorize subject matters broadly and intuitively. For example, A is B's superior in math and B is A's superior in history. Subjects can be broken down further into subcategories; A may be B's superior in calculus, while the converse is true in geometry. This intuitive notion captures the most interesting cases of inferior disagreement: those in which most casual observers would judge B the inferior of A in S. For instance, it is interesting when we think a client has better judgment than his lawyer does; part of what makes this interesting is that most casual observers would consider lawyers superior to their clients in the domain of law.

In spite of strong intuitions about superiors and inferiors, precise subject boundaries are hard to define. Some might even argue such circumscription will be so difficult that the task is meaningless. Filling in enough details in the attorney case, for instance, might lead to the conclusion that the client is the superior of his lawyer in the domain of "suing middle class, teetotaler, retired engineers". Along these lines, some might argue that disagreements can always be circumscribed to exclude the person in the right from inferiority. And admittedly, in most cases we could probably finesse just such a peerage relationship. But this also seems like cheating. Something important occurs when casual observers would label one party the inferior, the other the superior, but nonetheless suspect that the said superior ought to respect the inferior's opinion. This is all that is needed to recognize an interesting class of inferior disagreement. Broad and intuitive criteria capture cases in which most would label A the superior, B the inferior, and yet judge that B's opinion bears epistemic weight for A.

Intuitive domains of competence can also explain personal assessments of our own superiority. We can sometimes judge that we are *generally* superior in some domain, even without enough evidence to judge our superiority on an individual question. An experienced medical doctor, for instance, might be justified in believing in his superiority over medical students, in the broad category “medicinal practice.” And he can make this judgment even though he cannot possibly know he is the superior of all medical students concerning all medical questions. This paper is concerned with the epistemically best response from someone like an experienced doctor who disagrees with someone like an inexperienced medical student. It concludes that superiors in analogous positions to the doctor often, but not always, have epistemic reason to take inferiors seriously.

5.3 Non-Peers

5.3.1 Evidence

If peers are those of similar cognitive ability that hold the same or similar evidence, then non-peers are those with asymmetries in one or both of these criteria. Such asymmetries vary. Appropriate responses to inferior disagreement; likewise vary, according to the type of non-peer relation. Delineating various types of non-peer relations can help us understand inferior disagreement and ideal superior response thereof. However, before analyzing non-peerage types, we should distinguish two conceptions of evidence. Some evidence is shareable and easily exchanged between epistemic parties. On the other hand, non-shareable evidence is various forms of subtle evidence not easily transferred from agent to agent; examples include unconscious beliefs, skilled interpretations, and personal memories.⁸² For instance, suppose that

⁸² The terms “shareable” and “non-shareable” are borrowed from Jennifer Lackey (2010).

Tony and his colleague Tim are looking for their next hire. Both have seen applicant Y's resume, read his personal statement, and have engaged Y in conversation. Tim and Tony share the same sharable evidence. However, Tony's mafia upbringing cultivated an uncanny ability to detect dishonesty, and this leads him to doubt Y's integrity. Tim wants to hire Y but Tony disagrees, insisting that Y is dishonest. When Tim asks why he believes this, Tony replies, "I can just tell."

Tony does indeed have evidence of Y's dishonesty: facial expressions and mannerisms expressed in the interview. And in some sense, Tim at least has access to the same evidence, after all, they both witnessed the same expressions. Nonetheless, these do not serve the same evidential role in Tim's belief forming process as in Tony's. The latter's special skill set enables him to interpret expressions in a way that merits evidential relevance, but this evidence is not sharable because of its dependence upon a non-transferable (or hard to transfer) interpretative skill.⁸³ These situations are common. Persons have skill sets and histories that vary, and accordingly, so do the epistemic worth of their evidence. In this way, disagreeing parties may hold the same sharable data but retain differing non-sharable evidence.

If peerage in the actual world supervened on non-sharable evidence equality, we might never identify peers. It is rare, if not impossible, for two persons to have backgrounds and

⁸³ In some situations, a skill set enables one to notice or acquire evidence that another cannot, although the disagreeing party could appreciate the evidence with training. Richard Fumerton (2010) discusses this sort of example when he explains his experience with the famous Monty Hall puzzle. "[I]t is not as if there is available to me evidence that wasn't available to those who disagree with me. Rather, there is a process which I now understand involving the appreciation of available evidence, a process that I have gone through and that I have good reason to believe (based on analogy) they have not gone through" (emphasis in the original) (p. 5). It is likely that given enough time, Fumerton could instruct his disagreeing party about the probability particulars of Monty Hall in order for his interlocutor to gain a full appreciation of the situation. If such instruction were successful, they would be able to share once non-sharable evidence. Perhaps something similar could occur in the above mafia case. Notwithstanding, what is relevant to a given disagreement is the shareability status at the time of the occurring dispute. For more insights related to evidence sharing and evidential compensability, see Feldman's discussion of "comparable" evidence (2009).

personalities so similar that their reasons for a belief include only sharable evidence.⁸⁴

Accordingly, when considering non-ideal peer disagreement, peerage should be based on sharable evidence alone. And since it is helpful to contrast inferior and peer disagreement, these two peerage varieties should be defined according to the same conception of evidence. The best solution is to establish peer and inferior relationships based on sharable evidence.

5.3.2 Cognitive Ability

Cognitive ability encompasses natural skills, experiences, and physical readiness. Natural skills are raw intellectual talents and experiences the practices that develop them. Physical readiness concerns the agent's physiological condition. For some, caffeine improves readiness while alcohol diminishes it. Extreme emotional states can also affect readiness, for instance, intellectual abilities are sometimes impaired after a death in the family, divorce, or job loss.

5.3.3 Superiority Relations

With that background information in place, we can define three categories of non-peer relations: strict superiority, weak evidential superiority, and weak cognitive superiority.⁸⁵ (The reader familiar with game theory may prefer to replace "superiority" with "dominance." I choose

⁸⁴ It might also be helpful to consider the situation in terms of what Feldman (2006) has called "full disclosure." Full disclosure occurs when disagreeing parties have openly exchanged all evidence that it is reasonable for persons to have exchanged. In Feldman's own words, "The other stage I will refer to as "full disclosure." In this stage...the other person has come to a competing conclusion after examining the same information. There are, of course, intermediate situations in which the various pieces of evidence and the arguments are partially shared. Indeed, almost any realistic disagreement is somewhere between isolation and full disclosure" (p. 419). Moreover, unsharable evidence is similar to what Feldman has called "private evidence." He argues (2006) that, "If evidence includes private sensory experiences, then two people will never have exactly the same evidence, even if the differences may be only minimal. Perhaps there is also what we might call "intellectual evidence" resulting from the strong impression that the observable evidence supports one's conclusion. This is what others have called "intuitions" (p. 423). Similar to both non-sharable and private evidence is what van Inwagen (1996) has called "incommunicable insight" (p.152). The overreaching point is that we sometimes have reasons for belief accessible to ourselves but inaccessible to others.

⁸⁵ I would like to thank Daniel Rubio for suggesting that I use these models.

to use the term “superior,” because that fits with the terminology of peers in terms of “inferiors” and “superiors.”)⁸⁶

Strict Superiority: Superior A is strictly superior to inferior B just in case A is relatively superior in respect to both evidence and cognitive ability. (See Model 1).

Model 1: Strict Superiority.

	A	B
Ev	8	6
Ca	8	6

Weak Evidential Superiority: Superior A has weak evidential superiority over inferior B, just in case: (1) A is relatively superior in respect to evidence, and (2) A is equal to B in respect to cognitive ability. (See Model 2).

Model 2: Weak Evidential Superiority.

	A	B
Ev	8	6
Ca	8	8

Weak Cognitive Superiority: Superior A has weak cognitive superiority over inferior B just in case: (1) A is relatively superior in respect to cognitive ability, and (2) A is equal to B in respect to evidence. (See Model 3).

Model 3: Weak Cognitive Superiority.

	A	B
Ev	8	8
Ca	8	6

⁸⁶There are many possible peer and non-peer dominance relations not discussed. The three chosen models are meant to capture situations that are both interesting and conceptually clear.

For simplicity, we can think of evidence and cognitive abilities on a ten-point scale: one represents complete incompetence, five minimal competence, and ten perfect competence.

5.4 Defeating Disagreements

Defining competence and categories of dominance relations helps us see how inferior disagreement can have epistemic significance for superiors. In certain cases, superiors have epistemic reason to respond to inferior disagreement by lowering belief credence, reevaluating evidence, or both. This occurs with all three superiority relations. Each is discussed in turn.

5.4.1 Weak Evidential Superiority

Suppose A is B's weak evidential superior as shown in Model 4.

Model 4

	A	B
Ev	8	7
Ca	8	8

A is evidentially superior to B, however, both are competent. Suppose that A and B disagree about p. In some cases, B's disagreement legitimizes credence revision and evidence reevaluation in spite of A's superiority. But at least one contingency must hold: A cannot justifiably account for the disagreement via her disagreeing party's evidential inferiority. Subjectively, superiors have epistemic grounds to consider inferiors seriously if, from their perspective, their own superiority cannot explain the dispute. Objectively, superiors have epistemic grounds to consider inferiors seriously if, in actuality, the superior's superiority does not explain the dispute. Sometimes superiors cannot subjectively account for disagreements in terms of their own superiority, even though this is possible objectively. For instance, from a

God's eye viewpoint, A's superior evidential position might explain why he disagrees with B.

Nonetheless, it is possible that from A's evidential perspective, he cannot justifiably come to the same conclusion. Kelly (2010) has discussed something similar with peer disagreement:

One should give some weight to one's peer's opinion even when from the God's eye point of view one has evaluated the evidence correctly and he has not. But why? Exactly because one does not occupy the God's eye point of view with respect to the question of who has evaluated the evidence correctly and who has not (p. 57).

Because none of us is omniscient, we sometimes have superior justification without our own awareness. But in other cases, we do have enough information to conclude that our own superiority can account for a disagreement with an inferior. Fumerton (2010) has touched on these cases, cases in which we might justifiably dismiss disagreements because we can see where our interlocutor went wrong. We might even recognize that if she could see things from our full perspective, the disagreement would vanish:

I've been told that our next department meeting will be this Friday at 3:00 p.m., and on the basis of this information take myself to have good reason to believe that the meeting will be at 3:00. Diane believes that the meeting is scheduled for Thursday at 7:00 a.m. (something about which she is vociferously complaining). But I also have evidence that another of my colleagues has played a practical joke on Diane and has deliberately misinformed her as to the time of the meeting. Diane and I disagree...But I have evidence that she lacks, and my additional evidence allows me to see the way in which Diane's evidence is, in a sense, defective...Diane herself would regard her evidence as defeated should she acquire the additional information that I possess. (p. 5)

Fumerton's example illustrates a case in which an evidential superior can justifiably dismiss an inferior simply because evidential asymmetries are both apparent and explanatory. In Fumerton's example, the superior recognizes that the evidence his inferior lacks accounts for their disagreement. Similar situations occur in many other instances. Suppose two philosophy professors, Smith and Jones, disagree about whether to admit graduate applicant G. Smith has all

the same evidence as Jones, but in addition, Smith has read a recommendation letter that reveals damaging information about G. Smith can dismiss Jones's disagreement, for he has reason to believe that his own evidential superiority accounts for their dispute. If Jones read the additional letter, Smith believes Jones would likely change her opinion. That being said, weak evidential dominants are not always as fortunate as Smith. Sometimes evidential superiors are unable to account for the relevant disagreement via their own superiority. If they cannot account for this, they ought to lower belief credence and reevaluate evidence in response to inferior disagreement.

See RECRUIT DISPUTE.

RECRUIT DISPUTE: Dixon and Spade are hockey recruiters for Port Chester University. Both have closely followed the Colombia Comets; in particular, athletes Conner and Warren. Dixon and Spade have equal cognitive abilities; however, Dixon has viewed all eight games, but Spade only seven. Dixon is Spade's weak evidential dominant, in accordance with Model 4 (above). Port Chester can only afford one full scholarship. Dixon thinks it should go to Conner but Spade favors Warren.

We can suppose that Dixon cannot account for the disagreement via Spade's missed game.⁸⁷ In other words, unlike with Jones and Smith, nothing stands out in Dixon's extra evidence that can explain the disagreement. In the game that Spade missed, Warren did not make any major mistakes and Conner did not play better than usual. Because Dixon cannot account for the disagreement through his own superiority, he ought to reevaluate his evidence and lower his credence that Conner is the better recruit. Even though Dixon has more evidence overall, this evidence might be irrelevant. It would be epistemically irresponsible for Dixon to dismiss the disagreement. After all, for all Dixon knows Spade's disagreement could be based on one of the

⁸⁷ We can imagine a case where this fails to hold. For instance, suppose that Warren played terribly in the game that Spade missed. In a case like this, Dixon might judge that Spade's missed game explains their disagreement. Subsequently, Dixon could justifiably dismiss the evidential weight of Spade's disagreement based on his evidential inferiority. But if nothing exceptional occurred in the missed game, such dismissal would be epistemically premature. Dixon does not have enough reason to judge that the missed game accounts for the relevant disagreement.

many games both he and Spade had viewed with equal circumspect. In all situations such as these, situations in which an evidential dominant is unsure his dominance explains the relevant disagreement, superiors have epistemic reason to take inferior opinion seriously.

5.4.2 Weak Cognitive Superiority

The epistemic demands of weakly cognitive dominants are analogous to those of weakly evidential dominants. Consider the following dominance model:

Model 5 (as in Model 3, this is a case of weak cognitive dominance)

	A	B
Ev	8	8
Ca	8	6

Suppose cognitive superior A disagrees with inferior B. As with evidential dominance, B's disagreement sometimes legitimizes A lowering her credence and reevaluating evidence, but once again, an important contingency must hold: A cannot justifiably account for the disagreement via her own cognitive superiority. Like instances of evidential dominance, cognitively dominant superiors can sometimes account for the relevant disagreement in terms of their adversary's inferiority and can then justifiably dismiss inferior opinion. For instance, suppose two English majors, Amanda and Benjie, disagree about whether a sentence demands the use of "that" or "which." Both are competent grammarians, however, Amanda is Benjie's superior and can immediately recognize that Benjie makes a common restrictive clause error. Because Amanda can account for the disagreement via her own superiority, she can justifiably dismiss the epistemic weight of her inferior's disagreement. Sometimes, however, disagreements fit Model 5, yet cognitive inequalities are not explanatory. See SMART STUDENT.

SMART STUDENT: Professor Patterson composes a model essay for an introductory course. Patterson is superior to his students in both writing and grammatical skill. After class, one smart student taps him on the shoulder, and says “By the way, page two has an error; you used a comma instead of a semi-colon.” Patterson doubts the student’s claim. After all, he had just read the paper several times, leaving convinced of its grammatical perfection.

How should Patterson respond to his student’s criticism? Immediately dismissing the opinion seems too quick. For even after triple checking, grammatical errors are easily overlooked. Moreover, recognizing the error falls within the student’s capability. Patterson’s belief in his own fallibility, combined with his belief in his student’s competence, suggests that the epistemically appropriate action is for Patterson to reduce belief credence and reassess evidence. Unlike Amanda, Patterson cannot identify where or if his inferior has gone wrong. Because he cannot justifiably account for his student’s differing opinion via an appeal to his own superiority, Patterson cannot justifiably dismiss its epistemic import.

To fully understand the epistemic lessons from SMART STUDENT, it is important to distinguish the reasonableness of Patterson’s original belief from the reasonableness of his reaction. Maybe the student was wrong and Patterson’s original belief was reasonable, but this does not make Patterson’s *reaction* reasonable. For instance, when discussing an example with important similarities to SMART STUDENT, Frances (2014) has noted the ambiguity of the question, “Is S rational”?, he asks, “The statement ‘Bub is being rational’ is ambiguous: is it saying that Bub’s retained belief J is rational or is it saying that Bub’s retaining of that belief was rational?”

To apply Frances's point, it may be the case that Patterson's retained belief about the comma usage is rational.⁸⁸ Notwithstanding, Patterson's *retaining* of the belief might be irrational, simply because Patterson's own perspective gives him no reason to dismiss his student's opinion. Because Patterson has no reason to think his own superiority explains his student's objection, credence reduction is appropriate. Notwithstanding, it does seem reasonable that Patterson should downgrade *less* than he would in response to peer disagreement: colleagues who pointed out the error should cause greater doubt than his student does. But unlike credence adjustment, *evidence reevaluation* should be equally rigorous in response to this inferior disagreement as it would be in response to peer disagreement. In both cases, reconsidering consists of double-checking the purported error. Double-checking is double-checking, regardless of who motivated the subject to seek reassurance.

5.4.3 Strict Superiority

Finally, let us consider disagreement from a strictly dominant superior's perspective, as in Model 6.

Model 6

	A	B
Ev	8	5
Ca	8	5

Similar to what was said before, superior A is free to disregard B's disagreement if she can account for it through either her cognitive or evidential dominance. However, cases will

⁸⁸Frances was looking at cases that suggested the retention of the belief, not simply refusing to lower credence, was irrational. But it is easy to see the same principles applied where retaining belief is rational but refusing to lower credence irrational. Additionally, Frances was also concerned with whether, all things considered, an agent's belief remains rational in response to new information. He wanted to distinguish the rationality of an agent's belief all things considered from the rationality of an agent's response to new information.

remain in which strictly superior parties cannot justifiably account for disagreements via their own superiority.

NO EXCUSES: A professional philosopher, Quinn, writes a paper on moral excuses. So far, she has devised the following scheme: excuses are justified in situations X and Y, but not T and Z, for reasons R. She has asked several colleagues about her theory; many agreed and many disagreed. Having considered all these opinions, she is finally ready to publish. But she first shows the paper to her sister, a non-philosopher, Schneider, who insists moral excuses are justified in situations X alone for reasons R.

Despite Quinn's superiority, it seems she has reason to take Schneider's opinion seriously. As shown in Model 6, we are assuming Schneider's competence. This may be controversial, but philosophical analysis involves, in part, coming up with reasons that explain various phenomena. Many non-philosophers are competent in this respect. This does not mean that they are likely to form true beliefs about what *actually* explains some phenomenon; even the best philosophers can fail to meet that standard. But nevertheless, non-philosophers might still form true beliefs that X *can* explain phenomenon Y. Non-philosophers can be reliable in this sense even if less so than philosophers. So not only might Schneider's opinion be reliable enough to carry epistemic significance, her disagreement is arguably *more* powerful than peer disagreement. Quinn's peers have similar perspectives because they have had similar educational backgrounds and work in similar environments. In short, their insight brings nothing new. But Schneider's perspective is unlike Quinn's usual associates and can bring to light factors Quinn overlooked. Here is another way to look at things: Schneider's background makes it likely that she possesses some non-sharable evidence that Quinn lacks.

We come to beliefs in part because of evidence; in part because of cognitive abilities, but also in part because of psychological particularities. Two individuals that viewed the same event might offer radically different descriptions of the occurrence, yet both may be equally accurate;

someone wishing for the most complete picture will do well to consider each account. Parts of the varying stories may be mutually exclusive, other parts compatible. Explaining the differences between contrasting perspectives is difficult because complete reasons for belief are usually inaccessible. Ernest Sosa (2010) has made this point effectively: “Our basis for believing generally fails to be fully formed and operative in one fell swoop . . . A belief forms in us over time through the subtle influence of diverse sources”¹⁰ (p. 294). As Sosa suggests, it is hard to say exactly why one holds the beliefs one does, but we can reasonably assume personal perspective affects belief.⁸⁹ Regarding the disagreement between Quinn and Schneider, the former should make epistemic revisions in response to the latter because: (1) Schneider is competent, and (2) Schneider’s insight is unlike Quinn’s and her peers. This unique insight can mean Schneider has reasons for her contrasting belief that Quinn cannot fully comprehend. In order to take account of these reasons, Quinn should both adjust credence and reevaluate evidence in response to her sister’s disagreement:

Credence revision: Quinn should lower her confidence that her theory best explains moral excuses, and do so even more than she would in response to a peer.

Evidential reevaluation: Quinn should reevaluate the reasons for her theoretical stance; her efforts should be greater than similar efforts motivated by peer disagreement.

5.5 Objections

5.5.1 Owing to Inferiority

Some might agree that Quinn should consider Schneider’s opinion seriously, but nonetheless argue that this has nothing to do with her inferiority. In other words, it is not *in*

⁸⁹ Sosa (2010) also aptly notes, “Disagreement with an epistemic peer may be explained by appealing to the environmental and social factors that lead to the belief” (p. 294). His point could easily be expanded to non-peer disagreement.

virtue of Schneider's inferiority that Quinn should take Schneider seriously. For example, one might think it is in virtue of Quinn's creativity and non-conformity that Schneider has reason to take her opinion seriously. There is a sense in which this is correct, it is plausible to suppose these qualities play an important role in my example. However, recall that we are thinking of the inferior/superior divide as contextualized to a subject matter. It might be the case that an individual who is considered "superior" according to common standards is less creative than an individual considered "inferior." A first year philosophy major, for instance, may be more creative than her philosophy professor. I do not think this is enough to say the student is a superior philosopher. I do think it is enough to give the professor reason to take the opinion of the student seriously, which is precisely my point. Although many people would consider the philosophy professor the superior, she has reason to take the philosophical opinion of her inferior (the student) seriously.

Now, of course there is a way we might construe the above case so that the student is not inferior after all. I do not think it is wrong to do that, but I think it misses something important. Most people consider a philosophy professor the superior of her student in the domain of philosophy. Nonetheless, the student's opinion is epistemically relevant for the professor. So hence, there are cases where under one's intuitive understanding of the superior/inferior relation, superiors have reason to take their inferior seriously.

Another point to consider is that if it were not for Schneider's inferiority, she would lack the relevant insight. If Schneider had attended graduate school and worked in academia, her valuable perspective would likely be lost. Schneider's opinion is noteworthy because her education and cognitive abilities contribute to a psychological perspective with less expertise yet notable insight. In other words, the epistemic value of the disagreeing party's opinion specially

connects to her inferiority. For even if we were to say it is ultimately creativity and non-conformity that contributes to Schneider's difference of opinion, it is likely that her life outside of academia contributed to these character traits. And since the status of "non-academic" is what leads many people to consider Schneider an inferior, these qualities are specially related to aspects of her inferiority.

5.5.2 Peer Relations

Another objection concerns categorizing peer relations. Some might say that SMART STUDENT and NO EXCUSES suggest that inferior opinion is relevant according to broadly defined superiority relations. But we should define things more narrowly. And when we do, all of the previous examples are instances of peer disagreement, not inferior disagreement. For instance, one might argue that in SMART STUDENT, the student is the professor's peer in recognizing semi-colon mistakes on papers written by the professor. Because we are all prone to overlook our own mistakes, the professor's usual competence level should be adjusted down to match his student. Similarly, when the other examples are properly circumscribed, the party in the right is most aptly labeled the superior.

We can call the above the "particularizing peerhood" objection, for its main force comes from the suggestion that we should particularize judgments of peerhood to particular questions. Many difficulties arise with such conception. First, particularizing peerhood would lead us to dismiss both interesting cases of what we would intuitively call peer disagreement and cases we would intuitively judge as inferior disagreement. Concerning the former, particularized peerage would result in very few cases of peer disagreement at all. Two persons are rarely of equal abilities regarding an individual question, for one party's history or cognitive skills will have advantages over the other. Although some peer disagreement may remain, the set would be

significantly smaller than intuitions suggest. Minor evidential or cognitive advantages would nearly always result in considering one party the superior over the other.

In addition to unreasonably limiting the scope of peerhood, particularizing peerage would lead us to forgo many commonsense judgments of superior/inferior relationships. For instance, we would lose ground to call history professors the superiors of their students in the domain of history. If superiority relations must be defined according to individual questions, it would make no sense to say something like, “History professors are in a better epistemic position regarding history than their students are.” After all, it is surely possible that some students happen to be superior to their professor regarding some particular historical inquiry. We would then have to define peer relations in terms of each individual history question, rather than the in terms of the much more general domain of what we might call “historical studies.”

It seems that particularizing peerhood throws away too much. Every day categories of superiority relations help us navigate the practical world. In order to increase justified beliefs, we seek expert testimony and avoid advice from amateurs. Laypersons, for instance, cannot know if every lawyer is their superior in every legal nuance. Nonetheless, non-lawyers seek advice from lawyers because the latter are the general superior in law. If there were no general superiors, there would be no reason for non-lawyers to seek professional legal advice. But it seems that there is such reason, which explains why we should understand superiority relations in terms of subject matter rather than individual questions.

It is through the lens of such general peerhood categories that we ought to look at SMART STUDENT and NO EXCUSES. These examples show that even in cases where disagreeing parties are aptly categorized inferior, their opinion might be epistemically relevant. We can even place the chosen examples aside. What matters is that it is conceptually possible for

superiors and inferiors to disagree when the superior's opinion is mistaken. If this much is possible, you can disagree that the given examples are inferior disagreements while still agree with the more important claim: at times, superior parties have epistemic cause to adjust credence and reevaluate evidence in response to inferior disagreement.

5.5.3 Epistemic Pushovers

Those sympathetic-to-steadfast sentiments might argue that what was said so far glorifies epistemic pushovers. If we are required to lower belief credence when probed by inferiors, we might never hold any beliefs at all. However, this is a misguided suggestion. Nothing said thus far requires epistemic superiors cower to inferior opinion, because generally taking inferiors seriously does not require taking them *as seriously* as peers. Indeed, most of the time inferior disagreement should be taken *less seriously*. This was the case in NO EXCUSES and RECRUIT DISPUTE. Professor Patterson ought to have taken his student's opinion seriously, but less seriously than a peer. Similarly, Coach Dixon had reason to take Spade's opinion seriously; although, his consideration might had been greater if Spade were his evidential equal. Admittedly, in some special cases, contextual considerations can merit taking inferior opinion as seriously as or even more seriously than peer opinion (NO EXCUSES). However, such instances are the exception, not the rule. Furthermore, all disagreements discussed thus far were between superiors and competent inferiors. But when disagreeing interlocutors are more likely to get things wrong than right, when inferiors are incompetent, inferior disagreement is not defeating and superiors are anything but pushovers. In these cases superiors can indeed simply dismiss the inferior's opinion.

5.6 Defeating Agreement

5.6.1 The Problem of Inferior Agreement

Although inferior disagreement sometimes gives reason to lower credence or reevaluate evidence, many times it does not. When we disagree with those who are incompetent, those more likely to get things wrong than right, we have no reason to doubt our belief nor to reexamine evidence. Since incompetent inferiors are unreliable, their disagreement, if anything, might justifiably *boost* our belief credence. Conversely, agreement from incompetent inferiors can be epistemically worrisome. In *The Critic as Artist*, Oscar Wilde's (2000) Gilbert exclaims, "Ah! Don't say that you agree with me. When people agree with me I always feel I must be wrong" (p. 292). Gilbert may take things too far, but most of us have felt similar sentiments. The uneasy feeling when someone who we believe to be our inferior enthusiastically asserts his agreement, we find ourselves thinking, "Oh, no, if that person thinks I am right, then surely I have gone wrong!"

Suppose that A believes p. P falls under domain S, and A is competent in S. A then learns that B agrees; he also believes p. The problem for A is that B is incompetent. In the past, he has consistently arrived at false beliefs about S. It seems that B's unreliable record renders his agreement positive evidence against p and that A might lower his credence in response. This is reasonable. If an agreeing party is incompetent, his agreement can be considered higher order evidence, evidence about one's competence in interpreting evidence.⁹⁰ Agreement from incompetent inferiors is higher order evidence that our belief-forming process is less than optimal, that somehow or someway we have gone wrong in our assessment. This gives us reason to lower our belief credence and reevaluate our evidence.

⁹⁰ See Kelly (2005) and (2010) and Feldman (2009), among others.

When considering incompetent inferiors, however, we must draw certain boundaries, lest we end up similar to Wilde's Gilbert and take every such instance as defeating evidence. This would be a mistake, because upon reflection, not every case of inferior agreement is higher-order evidence or any evidence at all. If an inferior's incompetence is *arbitrary*, inferior agreement speaks neither for nor against the superior's relevant belief or belief forming process. On the other hand, incompetent inferiors who *consistently* generate false beliefs might offer defeating evidence. We can refer to the latter as epistemic maliciousness, the former epistemic inadequacy, and explain their differences probabilistically. Suppose someone is presented with two propositions, p1, which is true, and p2, which is false. Given only these choices, epistemically inadequate agents are just as likely to believe p1 as p2; inadequate inferiors track neither truth nor falsity. Their opinion is completely arbitrary. On the other hand, epistemically malicious agents are more likely to believe p2 (the false belief) than p1 (the true belief). Unlike the epistemically inadequate, the epistemically malicious do not have arbitrary opinions: malicious opinion tracks falsity.

5.6.2 Inadequate Inferiors

Inadequate inferiors can be divided into two classes that circumscribe two different ways in which disagreeing parties might be arbitrarily wrong. Some inadequate inferiors are exhausting personalities who talk just to talk, and occasionally say something true. In other terms, these inadequate inferiors spew bullshit. According to Harry Frankfurt (2005), the essence of bullshit is a "lack of connection to a concern with truth... [an] indifference to how things really are..." (p.33). When bullshitters say something false it is not because they try to deceive but that they are disinterested in truth. Bullshitters sometimes speak the truth, but they can be just as likely to speak falsely. If an epistemic superior believes p and a bullshitting inferior claims

not-p, the superior has little reason to adjust credence either one way or the other. As Frankfurt (2005) reminds us, “The bullshitter is faking things. But this does not mean that he necessarily gets them wrong” (p. 48). For all the superior knows, the inferior bullshitter could be right, but he could just as easily be wrong.

Ignorant inadequates, unlike bullshitting inadequates, do have a concern for truth. However, their terrible ignorance of the relevant subject makes any opinion a wild guess. For instance, suppose you ask your friend about the medical severity of your scratchy throat. However, your friend is not only your inferior but incompetent.⁹¹ Because he is not a medical doctor, but a meta-ethicist, his confidence in your health should offer no assurance. However, neither is his confidence reason for concern; it is simply uninformative. What ignorant and bullshitting inadequates have in common is opinions so arbitrary they are irrelevant.

At times it may be unclear whether an inadequate inferior is a bullshitter or simply ignorant. Consider political pundits, the ones often featured on afternoon US cable television shows. These pundits are often asked to predict political events. While extremely confident in their assertions, many such pundits have terrible track records. I tend to think that most are not lying or bullshitting, rather, they honestly believe what they say, but are simply incompetent. Regardless of whether these pundits are ignorant or bullshitting, what they have in common, and what is common to all inadequates, is that their opinion is analogous to flipping a coin, shaking a magic eight-ball, or consulting a psychic. My magic eight-ball’s testimony that p gives no epistemic reason to so believe, but neither does it give reason for disbelief. Likewise, agreement from inadequate inferiors gives us no reason for nor against belief.

⁹¹ We are supposing you are competent.

Everything said about agreeing inadequates, *mutatis mutandis*, applies to disagreement. The arbitrariness of inadequate inferiors' opinion means that neither their agreement nor disagreement justifies credence revision or evidential reassessment. We cannot, however, say the same about malicious inferiors.

5.6.3 Malicious Inferiors

Malicious inferiors track not truth but falsity. This falsity tracking might prove epistemically helpful when correctly identified. If A is aware of B's record of falsity tracking, A can take B's opinion that p as evidence that not-p. On the other hand, B's opinion is misleading if A mistakenly considers B competent. In such epistemically dangerous situations, A may consider B's opinion evidence for p when he ought to consider it the opposite. In this way, malicious agents contribute to the acquisition of false beliefs or unjustified credence revision.

Systematic and consistently misleading testimony of malicious inferiors is often due to bias or false higher order beliefs. Because of such mistakes and biases, malicious inferiors can be even less reliable than the ignorant. Consider someone who rejects evolutionary theory and accepts creationism; this creationist may be more likely to make false claims about human development than someone who has hardly reflected on the matter at all, for the ignorant might entertain the truth of claims that the creationist necessarily rejects. Because of his open-mindedness, the person completely ignorant of scientific theories might hold a few true beliefs via sheer chance. Hence, the creationist claim that p can speak more strongly against p's truth than the claim of someone more ignorant but less biased: biases can generate reliability records worse than chance.

We can reach similar conclusions about malicious agents who have systematic biases against certain races, classes, or ideologies. Prejudice begets malicious inadequacy. Imagine

superior A disagrees with inferior B over the merit of initiative I. Moreover, B is a Klansman. A could learn more from this disagreement than he could from inadequate inferiors. Because B's prejudice leads him to consistently support initiatives A opposes and oppose initiatives A supports, when A learns of B's dissent, A should be reassured that he is taking the correct stance. A might justifiably think to himself, "I am glad that Klansman disagrees. I must be on the right side of things." On the other hand, A would learn little from inadequate inferiors. For instance, disagreement from low-information voters with arbitrary political positions would speak neither for nor against the merit of A's stance on I. ⁹²

Rather than a magic eight ball or a coin flip, eliciting agreement from malicious epistemic agents is like consulting the satirical newspaper *The Onion* for information on current events.⁹³ Suppose you believe that rabid zebras killed two zookeepers, but you are unsure where you heard the story. You then pick up *The Onion* and find that very zebra story on the front page. This provides reason to doubt your original belief: *The Onion* reporting story X is evidence of not-X. Since satirical news publications consistently and as a matter of practice publish false stories, an article on event E in such publication is evidence E never happened. In the same way, we must be wary of agreement from inferiors whose epistemic merits are comparable to *The Onion*.

Reading the satirical report on killer-zebras is higher-order evidence that your belief-forming process has gone awry; this gives reason to adjust credence and reassess evidence. Likewise, agreeing inferiors who have a consistent record of inaccuracy can give us reason to

⁹² "Low-information voter" is a term used to refer to those who know very little about politics but nonetheless consistently vote in public elections. The term was first used by political scientist Sam Popkin (1994) in, *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*.

⁹³ Cf., *The Civilian* (New Zealand), *The Daily Mash* (United Kingdom), *Frank* (Canada), *The pin* (Netherlands), and *Titanic* (Germany), among others.

doubt and reevaluate. If an evolutionary theorist learns that a creationist agrees with his latest hypothesis, he might have reason for worry. This applies to many similar instances when we know agreeing parties are biased or misinformed. If I find out that my latest moral theory receives widespread support from the morally depraved, I would be wise to reevaluate.

5.7 Epistemic Opportunity Costs

If we were only concerned with disagreement in a world with unlimited time and resources, it would make little difference whether disagreeing parties are peers, superiors, or inferiors. At least it would make little difference for evidence reevaluation. In this timeless world, we should reinvestigate every belief held with less than absolute certainty for there would be nothing to lose pursuing not-p possibilities ad infinitum. But in the actual world, disagreements are between those with limited time, money, and intellectual energy. This scarcity of epistemic resources gives superiors strong reason to consider epistemic opportunity cost, defined as follows:⁹⁴

Epistemic Opportunity Cost: epistemic goods sacrificed while pursuing other epistemic goods.

Reconsidering any belief is senseless unless the epistemic benefit of holding the true belief is greater than the epistemic cost of reconsideration. Sometimes acquiring a true belief is just too costly: resources are better used on other epistemic activities. For instance, suppose A and B disagree about the proper amount for a tip. A is sure it is \$47; but B, her competent epistemic inferior, disagrees arguing it should be \$48. Recognizing the reasonable possibility that B is right, this would often be enough to motivate A to recalculate. However, suppose that as

⁹⁴ For more interesting discussion on epistemic opportunity costs and related issues, see Baehr (2012, p. 9-10), Morton (2006), and Riggs (2010).

soon as A completed her calculation, she began reading the *Treaty of Versailles*. Hence A should lower her belief credence that the proper tip amount is \$47, but pass on reconsideration because recalculating would cut into her historical scholarship. Things also work the other way around. Sometimes we have little faith in our disagreeing party's competence, but consideration costs are cheap enough to make epistemic sense. B may believe it is unlikely that his epistemic inferior, C, is correct. But when the cost is low, reconsidering might still be worthwhile. B can be confident that the sun is shining; nonetheless, he may glance out the window when C disagrees. Reconsideration costs are so low he has nothing to lose.

5.8 Conclusion

The epistemology of disagreement literature has been overwhelmingly focused on peer disagreement. This is not without cause. Intuitively, disagreement from those of similar epistemic merit is especially puzzling; it seems hard to admit that others are just as qualified as we are and simultaneously ignore their dissenting viewpoints. Nevertheless, instances of inferior disagreement have an epistemic significance of their own.

Dismissing disagreement from epistemic inferiors might seem *prima facie* justified, but this is incomplete and misleading. Disagreement from inferiors who are competent does have epistemic import. And sometimes even an incompetent inferior's opinion is epistemically significant. Disagreement from malicious inferiors that make systematic mistakes may justify credence boosting. Likewise agreement from these malicious inferiors might justify credence reduction. On the other hand, inadequate inferiors have an arbitrary track record and so their agreement or disagreement is irrelevant. Assessing the appropriate epistemic response when you suspect you disagree with an inferior requires asking first: "Is the inferior competent?" If yes, we should prepare to lower credence or reevaluate evidence. If no, we must determine whether the

disagreeing party is malicious or inadequate. Agreement from malicious inferiors should reduce confidence, and disagreement should have the opposite effect. But if an inferior is merely inadequate, we can dismiss the opinion without further evaluation.

**Acknowledgements: I would like to thank an anonymous referee, Sven Bernecker, Simon Huttegger, Margaret Gilbert, Casey Perin, Daniel Rubio, Martin Schwab, and several conference audiences for helpful comments on previous drafts of this paper*

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