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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9194r7cm>

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Publication Date

2022

DOI

10.1007/s10677-022-10328-2

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VIRTUOUS ARGUING WITH CONVICTION AND HUMILITY

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ABSTRACT. Can one enter into an argument with one's intellectual equals in good faith if one regards the matter in hand as already settled? Adopting such an attitude looks very much like taking a dogmatic stance, in that one is closing one's mind to counterarguments in advance. Dogmatism is, of course, an intellectual vice. Moreover, such dogmatism seems morally problematic, in that one is failing to treat one's adversary with due respect. While there is clearly something correct about this line of thinking—dogmatism, like all intellectual vice, is obviously to be avoided—it is also maintained that, properly understood, there need be nothing intellectually viceful about engaging in an argument where one regards the subject matter as settled. Related to this point, it is contended that someone who possesses the intellectual virtue of intellectual humility may well engage in arguments in just this fashion. The upshot is that one can consistently and properly argue with both conviction and intellectual humility.

1. THE CONCILIATORY INTUITION

What is involved in arguing in good faith? It is natural to suppose that one of the features of engaging in an argument in this fashion is that one does not regard the subject matter at hand as already settled. For even if one previously took the matter to be settled, now that there is someone making the case for the opposition, it seems that one should at least reconsider one's conviction in this regard, at least until one has heard what they have to say.¹ Moreover, if one does regard the matter as settled, then that appears to imply that the ensuing 'argument' is in a sense just a

performance on one's part, in that one is merely humouring the other participant, rather than being part of a genuine exchange of ideas aimed at resolution. Even worse, by closing one's mind to counterarguments in advance, it seems that one is manifesting the intellectual vice of dogmatism. Indeed, it is plausible that there is also a moral dimension to such dogmatism, in that behaving in this close-minded fashion involves a kind of disrespect of one's intellectual adversary.

The foregoing suggests that arguing in good faith entails regarding the subject matter in hand as open and therefore not settled, at least for the purposes of the argument (i.e., at least until one has heard what the other party has to say and consider its merits). Call this the *conciliatory intuition*. As we will see, such an intuition, at least unpacked appropriately, is commonly found in contemporary epistemology. Moreover, call the dialectical stance that the conciliatory intuition recommends that one adopt in the context of argument—whereby one genuinely doesn't treat the matter at hand as settled and so if necessary downgrades one's epistemic assessment of one's opinions in order to ensure this, at least temporarily—as the *conciliatory stance*.

There are some exceptions to the (putative) rule that one should adopt the conciliatory stance when engaging in argument, but if anything they further reinforce the rule, since they tend to concern cases where the 'argument' in hand is already somewhat artificial. For example, a teacher might well participate in a discussion with a pupil about matters that the teacher believes are settled but which the pupil is contesting. This might be a very effective way of helping the student to come to understand the subject matter in hand more clearly, and in the process see where their thinking is going awry. But while this is clearly a kind of arguing, and it is certainly done in good faith (e.g., there is no pretence involved), it is far from being a normal kind of argument. In particular, it would be natural to describe what is going on here as not an argument at all, strictly speaking, since only one party (the student) is actually arguing, with the other party (the teacher) merely playing the part of a disputant in order to assist the pupil in their intellectual journey.

Similar remarks would apply to other cases where there is a wide disparity of expertise between the two parties involved, such as 'arguments' between an experienced scientist and a sceptical novice, where the former is patiently explaining some arcane aspect of scientific thinking in the face of (confused) opposition from the latter. Such exchanges might look a lot like an argument, and we can of course loosely describe them as such, but it is very different from a normal argument, not least because, as with our teacher-pupil case, only one party is actually arguing, strictly speaking. Moreover, notice that in such cases where there is a divergence of expertise, it is relatively straightforward that the person with the clearly weaker epistemic position ought to adopt the conciliatory stance. The novice scientist ought to recognise that the mere fact that the expert scientist is disagreeing with them about this issue is a reason to downgrade their

confidence in the contested claim to a point where the matter is no longer settled from their point of view.

Our issue thus relates to a certain paradigmatic kind of argument, where we have two parties who are broadly intellectual equals and who are genuinely engaged in debate about a particular topic.² The conciliatory intuition is that, at least as regards arguments of this kind, there is something improper about entering into such an argument with the attitude that the issue at hand is already settled. In these cases, the conciliatory intuition thus licences the adoption of the conciliatory stance, or so the argument goes at any rate.

One can see this intuition vividly on display in the epistemological literature concerning a very specific kind of disagreement involving epistemic peers. This is a more narrow conception of disagreement because epistemic peerhood is a much more restrictive notion than people who are one's broadly intellectual equals, as it stipulates a parity of such factors as evidence and expertise on the subject matter in hand.³ It is quite common in this literature to appeal to the conciliatory intuition to motivate conciliatory proposals whereby one is under an intellectual obligation to downgrade one's commitment to the disputed claim when faced with a disagreement with an epistemic peer.⁴ If the conciliatory intuition is compelling in more general cases of disagreement with one's intellectual equals, then it is bound to be especially compelling in the specific case of epistemic peer disagreement, as this removes the possibility that one's intransigence in the face of disagreement is prompted by different (perhaps even subtly different) levels of evidence and/or expertise. Moreover, it is also even more plausible in this case that the mere fact that the other party disagrees with you counts as evidence against one's position, given that it is stipulated that they are epistemic peers.

With this last point in mind, in framing the issue that concerns us we could follow convention and focus our attention on epistemic peer disagreement, but I think this would be a mistake. This is because the conciliatory intuition is not confined to epistemic peer disagreement. For even if one reasonably holds that one is likely to be in a much better epistemic position than one's broadly intellectual equals with respect to the disputed issue, the conciliatory intuition still has teeth. For one thing, there's no way of knowing in advance of the argument that one's disputant isn't as epistemically well-placed as you are in this regard. Accordingly, shouldn't one at least treat the matter as only provisionally settled until one's epistemic superiority (on this issue, at least) is established? But even if it is reasonably clear that one is more knowledgeable, there is still a pull to the thought that one is arguing in bad faith if one continues to treat the matter as settled come what may, as if one is merely undertaking a kind of patronising performance. (Remember that we have ruled-out wide divergences of knowledge and expertise in advance, so this case is unlike the situations described above concerning the teacher and her pupil and the scientific expert

and the novice). So while the conciliatory intuition might be strongest in cases of epistemic peer disagreement, I don't think it is only operative in such cases, as its import extends to a wider set of argumentative scenarios. Accordingly, our focus will be broader than epistemic peer disagreement.

I will be unpacking the conciliatory intuition and in the process suggesting that it isn't quite right as it stands. For while there is clearly something intellectually improper about exhibiting the intellectual vice of dogmatism, there are ways of engaging in argument where one regards the matter as already settled that don't entail dogmatism of this kind (or so I will claim). As we will see, understanding why this is so is important to capturing the extent to which one can argue in an intellectually virtuous way that combines both conviction and intellectual humility.

2. SETTLED QUESTIONS

We should start by interrogating what is meant by treating an issue as settled. Obviously our concern is not someone who illegitimately takes a matter to be settled, such as someone who forms strong opinions on a whim. No doubt such an individual would also be inclined to dismiss opposing viewpoints out of hand too, regardless of the content of the disagreement and who they are disagreeing with, and hence be prone to dogmatism (though perhaps they might equally adopt the opposing viewpoint on a whim as well). Since this individual is already intellectually viceful, it is hardly controversial that such vice carries over to the argumentative case in the form of dogmatism.

With this in mind, let's focus our attention on agents who *reasonably* take the matter in hand to be settled. This plausibly requires regarding oneself as having knowledge of the contested issue, and not merely reasonable opinions that (one recognises) fall short of knowledge. In taking an issue to be settled, one must have a settled viewpoint about it, and thus firm beliefs, but that's unlikely if one deems one's epistemic situation as falling short of knowledge.

Interestingly, it seems that it is not just any kind of knowledge that will suffice in this regard, as it needs to be knowledge that is embedded within a wider understanding of the subject matter. Take a topic like the 2014 Russian annexation of the Crimean region of Ukraine, and consider a particular key claim that lies at the heart of this topic, such as whether such a territorial occupation is legitimate under international law. One might legitimately take oneself to know the answer to this question even while knowing little about the wider subject matter simply because, say, one heard the testimony of someone authoritative about these issues. But that would be a very different way of 'settling' the matter to studying the issues oneself—listening to various experts on

this topic, say, and researching relevant materials from history, politics and law—and coming to a verdict about them. One’s knowledge of the target proposition is now grounded in one’s wider understanding of the topic. Call this the difference between having *mere knowledge* of the target proposition and having a *deep knowledge* of that proposition.⁵

This difference in how one’s knowledge of the target proposition is grounded will ordinarily be manifest in any debate concerning it. For example, if one’s only reason for holding this proposition is that it was endorsed by an expert, then one will not be in a position to offer much support for it in discussion. Accordingly, if one is faced with an intellectual equal who is advancing the opposing claim, then it looks fairly plausible that one ought to at least temporarily downgrade one’s commitment while one finds out more about the merits of their position. After all, there is at least a good prospect that one is going to be offered considerations that will undermine one’s confidence in the target proposition (such as that other experts have testified to the opposing conclusion). To do otherwise seems like sticking to one’s guns merely for the sake of it, and that looks like mere dogmatism. The case for adopting the conciliatory stance thus looks credible in these types of scenarios.

What this kind of case illustrates, I take it, is that there can be a way of knowing a proposition, and thus ‘settling’ a matter, that nonetheless treats the verdict as being in a sense provisional, pending further evidence. That is, one recognises, at least if one is rational, that the epistemic basis for that knowledge is such that it is unlikely to withstand critical scrutiny. I suspect that many of our opinions (the ones that at least rise to the standard of knowledge anyway) are like this, in that they amount to something more resembling mere knowledge rather than deep knowledge. They are not acquired on a whim, but rather enjoy a fairly good degree of epistemic support—e.g., we’ve heard clever people assert them, they sound plausible, they fit with other things that we know, and so on. They thus amount to knowledge (or, at least, we can reasonably suppose that they do). Nonetheless, one is aware (or ought to be aware) that these opinions are unlikely to resist much in the way of argumentative opposition, and hence in the face of disagreement it is usually reasonable to adopt the conciliatory stance. There is thus a weak sense of ‘settling’ a question whereby it doesn’t really amount to much from a dynamic point of view, as it is only really provisionally settled. In particular, it doesn’t mean that the issue is settled in a strong sense that would preclude adopting the conciliatory stance in the face of an argumentative challenge.⁶

Many cases of epistemic peer disagreement are likely to be subject to similar considerations, at least where one’s knowledge of the target proposition is mere knowledge rather than deep knowledge. With that proviso in play, if one really holds that one’s adversary is an epistemic peer in this regard, then the mere fact that they disagree will ordinarily entail that one is

in possession of a defeater for what one previously took oneself to know. Accordingly, it is no surprise that one ought in these conditions to adopt a conciliatory stance as a response. Notice, however, that this doesn't entail that one should always adopt the conciliatory stance in response to epistemic peer disagreement, which is the stronger claim that's usually in play in the epistemic peer disagreement literature. For what seems to be doing at least part of the work here is the fact that it is only mere knowledge that is at issue.⁷

The more interesting cases for our purposes are thus the ones where the subject has deep knowledge of the target proposition, of the kind that is embedded within a wider understanding of the subject matter. Imagine that one has done one's homework about the 2014 Crimean annexation, and so has a robust grasp of the issues involved. One would now quite reasonably take one's belief in the target proposition concerning the legitimacy of the occupation in international law to be settled in a much stronger sense than if one only had mere knowledge of this claim. We can express this point in terms of one's reasonable expectations when engaging in debate with an adversary with roughly equal intellectual credentials. As we've seen with the case where one's mere knowledge is simply based on expert testimony, one would reasonably expect one's conviction to be undermined by the debate. In contrast, if one has deep knowledge of the subject matter, then one would reasonably expect entirely the opposite, in that it is now reasonable to suppose that one's conviction in this regard is not going to change in response to engaging in debate with one's intellectual equals (who are unlikely to have a *greater* understanding of the issues than you do).

There is thus a much stronger sense of the matter being settled available, where the kind of knowledge in play is such that one can now, it seems, reasonably enter debates with an assurance that one's conviction will not be changed by engaging in an argument about it. This seems to be the attitude of treating a subject matter as settled that was problematic above when we considered the conciliatory intuition, in that it is not just that the matter is provisionally settled pending further argument (which is compatible with adopting the conciliatory stance in response to an argumentative challenge), but that one treats the matter as settled *even if subjected to further argument* (which obviously is not compatible with adopting the conciliatory stance). It was precisely this kind of attitude that was thought to be generating the charges of dogmatism and arguing in bad faith above, in that one doesn't seem to be respecting the rules of argumentative engagement whereby (*inter alia*) one undertakes, at least provisionally, to treat the issue in hand to be one that can be settled by this argument.

Notice, however, that this assurance that the matter is settled in this case is entirely rational, given how we have described the situation. One is in an excellent epistemic position with regard to the target proposition. With that in mind, why would it follow that entering into a debate with this attitude entails that one is exhibiting the intellectual vice of dogmatism? Relatedly, why

should it entail that one is otherwise engaging in this debate in bad faith? After all, in all likelihood one will be entirely explicit about why one holds the views that one does, and hence that one regards them as being defensible against objections, at least in the context of this debate.

And yet there does seem to be a sense in which approaching this debate in a manner where one rationally expects to be unpersuaded involves engaging in the argument in bad faith. Isn't one now behaving more like an expert or teacher with regard to one's disputant, even though one doesn't occupy anything like either role, and hence merely acting as if one is engaged in genuine debate? Moreover, wouldn't someone genuinely non-dogmatic be such as to downgrade their conviction in what they believe, no matter it's epistemic status, in response to disagreement of this kind?

3. OPEN-MINDEDNESS AND INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE

How should we unpack the non-dogmatic motivation for the conciliatory stance? One natural thought in this regard is to appeal to the notion of open-mindedness. Isn't sticking to one's guns in the context of argumentative challenge, even if one has deep knowledge of the subject matter in hand, dogmatic in the sense of being closed-minded? While superficially plausible, I don't think this rationale quite explains what is going on here.

The first point to note is that on the face of it at least being open-minded simply requires one to take objections seriously—to listen to them, to be willing to reflect on them, to offer counter-reasons, and so on. But one can do all that without at any point downgrading one's conviction in the truth of one's opinions. (Of course, one could argue that genuine reflection on counterarguments always involves some degree of downgrading on one's part, at least unless the reflection is just a performance. We'll come back to this point). Moreover, being open-minded only seems to demand that one should consider an objection once. You demonstrate your open-mindedness by taking an objection seriously, but once you've done that, you're done—you're not closed-minded for refusing to consider it again. Accordingly, if one can reasonably take it that one has already considered objections to the view (such as in previous argumentative exchanges, or even just via one's own reflection on the matter), then one ought to be entitled, consistent with being open-minded anyway, to treating the matter as settled even with regard to new argumentative challenges. So we are back to the charge of dogmatism.

A final point about open-mindedness that is relevant here is that it doesn't seem to matter why one is motivated to be open-minded. Someone who is open to objections but does so purely for purely strategic reasons—because it's their job, or because they think it makes them look

reasonable, or because they think it helps them win arguments, and so on—is still being open-minded. Relatedly, there doesn't seem to be anything built-into the notion of being open-minded that entails a particular way in which one responds to counterarguments. All that matters is that one considers them, but not how one behaves to one's adversary when one is considering them. Accordingly, one can consistently be open-minded in dealing with objections in a way that is dismissive, arrogant, condescending, and so on.⁸ And yet we would regard behaviour of this kind as not arguing in good faith in the relevant respects. Moreover, such behaviour seems to present not just a moral failing on one's part, but also specifically an intellectual failing, as it reveals that one is insufficiently concerned with getting to the truth of the matter (and more concerned about other factors, such as revealing one's intellectual superiority).

The upshot is that one can be open-minded and yet also engage in debate in ways that seem problematic in just the kind of dogmatic manner that we have highlighted as a concern, which means that there is more involved in avoiding such dogmatism than merely being open-minded. One way of expressing our concern about open-mindedness is that it doesn't seem to be an intellectual virtue, as these do bring with them a corresponding motivational state of caring for the truth.⁹ One cannot be intellectually virtuous for merely strategic reasons. Relatedly, it matters how one is intellectually virtuous, as showing contempt for one's dialectical adversary simply because they are one's adversary would be indicative of lacking the right motivational states required for intellectual virtue. This suggests that it is important to capturing what we are interested in here that it concerns a lack of intellectual virtue specifically—i.e., that one is exhibiting an intellectual vice in approaching an argument with a closed mind. As we have seen, one can be open-minded and yet behave in dogmatic ways in argument (such as behaving dismissively towards one's opponent), but that's because being open-minded isn't an intellectual virtue, as it doesn't necessarily involve being motivated by a desire for the truth.¹⁰ If, instead, we focus on the intellectual virtues, and thus explicitly bring in the relevant motivational component, then we can capture what is wrong with this dogmatic behaviour, as it is indicative of a lack of intellectual virtue.

The intellectual virtue that seems most relevant here is that of intellectual humility. Isn't that what is lacking when one engages with an argument while treating the subject matter as strongly settled in the manner set out above? Since intellectual humility, like all intellectual virtues, incorporates the motivational component of a desire for the truth, we can capture the 'bad faith' element that we are concerned with in terms of the lack of this motivation. So, for example, treating the matter as settled and therefore just going through the motions of arguing with the other person is intellectual bad faith, and so contrary to the intellectual virtue of intellectual humility, as one's way of responding to the adversary is not appropriately truth-directed. More

generally, it is important how one treats one's adversary—that one is not dismissive and so forth—as that would again reveal a lack of intellectual humility. That is, if one is concerned with the truth, then one should be open to counter arguments and respectful of those offering them (and not just the first time they are offered either).

That's the general idea at any rate, though it requires some unpacking. In particular, as we will see, there are different conceptions of intellectual humility, and not all of them serve the required purpose. Indeed, I will be suggesting that once intellectual humility is properly understood we will have a way of thinking about treating a matter as settled in advance of argumentative debate that is entirely compatible with being intellectually humble, and thus being intellectually virtuous.

4. INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

There is one way of thinking about intellectual humility that would straightforwardly licence adopting the conciliatory stance. This is a conception of intellectual humility that requires that one has a downgraded intellectual assessment of oneself (just as humility more generally, on this view, requires a downgraded assessment of oneself).¹¹ Intellectual humility thus involves a kind of intellectual self-abasement. With this conception in mind, there is bound to be something problematic about treating one's apparently deep knowledge of a subject matter as licensing one in sticking to one's guns in the face of dialectical opposition. Indeed, if one is intellectually humble in this sense, then one should be wary of regarding oneself as having much in the way of deep knowledge, as that would be counter to one's intellectual abasement as an intellectually humble person. More generally, one certainly shouldn't regard oneself as being in an intellectually superior position relative to anyone else, even in the localised sense that is restricted to this particular subject matter.

The problem, however, is that this conception of intellectual humility is simply not tenable, as it requires that the virtuous person makes inaccurate judgements about their intellectual abilities. Such a requirement is problematic enough when one considers non-intellectual virtues (such as humility more generally), but it is especially dubious when one is concerned with the intellectual virtues, as these are motivated by a desire for the truth. Accordingly, how could an intellectual virtue demand inaccurate judgements on the part of the agent? Moreover, notice that it is not enough to say that the intellectually humble person should merely act as if she has a downgraded conception of her intellectual standing, as that would introduce the bad faith concern that the appeal to intellectual virtues was meant to avoid. Being intellectually humble would now be

essentially a performative notion that is disconnected from the subject's actual self-conception, and that is simply not credible either, particularly given the essential truth-directed motivational component of the intellectual virtues. Finally, notice that this account of intellectual humility is arguably too strong for our purposes anyway, as it would lead to a blanket form of intellectual downgrading, when what we are after is a rationale for something more specific: an intellectual downgrading of one's conviction, at least temporarily, in response to being part of an argumentative context.

With these difficulties facing the 'self-abasement' account of intellectual humility in mind, the dominant conception of intellectual humility in the literature doesn't demand an inaccurate intellectual self-conception, but rather merely that one embraces one's intellectual limitations (i.e., one's fallibility and so forth). The thought is that someone who lacks intellectual humility will tend to overestimate their intellectual standing, but that the intellectually humble person, by keeping in mind their intellectual limitations, will avoid this pitfall. Put another way, an accurate intellectual self-conception, properly understood, is one that involves a recognition of one's inherent fallibility as an inquirer, and hence leads to intellectual humility rather than to intellectual arrogance.¹²

On the face of it at least, this account of intellectual humility can be put into service to support adopting the conciliatory stance. As noted above, even when one has deep knowledge of the matter in hand, and so one can reasonably conclude that one's interlocuter is unlikely to be in a better epistemic position in this regard, there is still the concern that one doesn't know this in advance. Someone who is alert to their inherent fallibility should thus be such as to take all objections seriously, at least until they are shown to be ineffective, and that requires them to at least temporarily downgrade their conviction as a result. We thus seem to have a direct route from a plausible conception of intellectual humility to a way of underwriting the requirement that one should adopt the conciliatory stance in these cases.

On closer reflection, however, this rationale for adopting the conciliatory stance doesn't add up. Whereas the previous account of intellectual humility was too strong in this regard, in that it led to a blanket kind of intellectual downgrading rather than one that was specific to engaging in arguments of this kind, this account seems too weak. For what would prevent someone exhibiting intellectual humility in this sense and yet not downgrading their conviction in response to argument? Suppose instead that, aware of one's inherent fallibility, but also recognising that one has deep knowledge of the subject matter in hand, one resolves to take all objections seriously and properly reflect on them, but not to downgrade one's conviction in the target proposition until those objections have been shown to have merit. Wouldn't that be compatible with being intellectually humble in this sense? Moreover, the kind of reflection on display wouldn't be merely performative, as since it is guided by a desire for the truth it would represent a genuine willingness

to consider the views of others, albeit one that can, it seems, co-exist with retaining one's strong conviction in the target proposition. This account of intellectual humility thus doesn't seem to require adopting the conciliatory stance after all.

This proposal also has some independent problems, including ones that are relevant here. In particular, it isn't clear why on this view an intellectually humble person should treat others, and their viewpoints, with intellectual respect. After all, owning one's intellectual limitations can be entirely compatible with recognising that one is intellectually superior, at least as regards certain subject matters, to those around one who are one's broadly intellectual equals (especially where one has deep knowledge of those subject matters). If that's right, then surely one can own one's intellectual limitations while also treating others and their opinions with disdain. But as we've noted, that kind of behaviour seems highly problematic, even from a purely intellectual point of view. Indeed, it seems indicative of intellectual vice.¹³

Now one could argue that the motivational component of intellectual virtue would kick-in to prevent this from happening, as someone whose intellectual humility reflects their genuine concern for the truth would not be disdainful of others in this way. The problem, however, is that this account of intellectual humility puts the focus for this intellectual virtue squarely on one's own intellectual capacities, since one is meant to be responsive to one's own fallibility. A concern for the truth could thus be reflected in an accurate conception of one's own intellectual superiority and, as a result, also reflected in a disdain of the intellectual inferiority of others (their views are intellectually lacking, after all). In short, the self-directed nature of this way of thinking about intellectual humility means that it is compatible with a concern for the truth that doesn't extend to an intellectual respect *for others* at all.

The overarching problem with this conception of intellectual humility is thus that its focus is very much on the subject herself, and what she should judge about her intellectual standing. In this sense it is essentially akin to the account of intellectual humility that we rejected earlier, whereby being intellectually humble involved having a debased, and thus inaccurate, intellectual self-conception. The alternative is to treat this intellectual virtue as being focussed more on others rather than on oneself and one's own intellectual standing. This is the so-called *non-egotist* conception of intellectual humility, which is meant to capture the fact that the intellectually humble person is someone who exhibits certain kinds of other-regarding traits representative of one who cares about the truth, such as listening carefully to other people's opinions, being willing to reflect on objections to one's view, engaging with others respectfully in argument, and so on.¹⁴ Such a conception of intellectual humility involves being aware of one's intellectual limitations, but extends beyond it. For example, one cannot be intellectually humble in this sense and yet be disdainful towards others in debate.

Interestingly, however, this conception of intellectual humility doesn't require adopting the conciliatory stance either. For just as one can own one's intellectual limitations but do so in a way that retains conviction in one's opinions, so one also can be appropriately intellectually respectful of others and their arguments and retain one's convictions. Moreover, in cases where one has deep knowledge of the target proposition, adopting a non-conciliatory stance, albeit in an intellectually humble fashion, would ordinarily be warranted. Indeed, it is even clearer that this is the case on the non-egotist conception of intellectual humility, as it explains why one should be respectful of the opinions of one's adversary even when it turns out that one is in an intellectually superior position with regard to the subject matter in hand (and even if one has encountered the objections before), something that doesn't follow at all on the owning one's intellectual limitations model. Notice too that this is not a mere performance on the part of the intellectually humble person on this conception—it's not as if they are merely pretending to engage in argument (as a teacher might with a pupil, say, to take an example we looked at above). That is, they are genuinely open to having their minds changed by this interchange, as they recognise that their inherent intellectual limitations means that they could be wrong about these objections lacking force, so they should be alert to this possibility. Crucially, however, one can do all that, and thereby manifest intellectual humility, without adopting the conciliatory stance.

We have thus seen that the requirement that one should adopt the conciliatory stance in the argumentative contexts that concern us can only plausibly flow from the idea that this is what the intellectual virtue of humility demands. But the only account of intellectual humility that licenses the conciliatory stance (i.e., the one that demands intellectual self-abasement) is independently implausible as a proposal about intellectual virtue. In contrast, on either of the more standard accounts of intellectual humility—and especially on the non-egotist account that I favour—the requirement that one should adopt the conciliatory stance simply doesn't follow. In particular, in cases where one has deep knowledge of the target proposition, then it can be legitimate to maintain one's conviction, just so long as one does so in a manner that is in keeping with the manifestation of intellectual humility.

Note too that while our focus has covered a much broader range of argumentative scenarios than simply instances of epistemic peer disagreement, what we've argued here equally applies to those instances as well. Such cases are usually described such that the knowledge in question is not deep knowledge but only mere knowledge that was quickly and unreflectively acquired (such as one's initial calculation of one's split of the restaurant bill), but there's no essential reason why they couldn't concern deep knowledge, and insofar as they do then the considerations we have looked at would equally apply. Since the conciliatory intuition is arguably at its strongest in these scenarios, however, then it follows that the fact that adopting the

conciliatory stance is not required even here is especially significant.¹⁵

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS: ARGUING WITH CONVICTION AND HUMILITY

I noted at the outset that I didn't think we should take the conciliatory intuition entirely at face-value, and we can now see why. For while it is true that in general one should approach arguments with one's broadly intellectual equals with an open mind, it is not the case that all such arguments require one to adopt the conciliatory stance and thereby treat the target proposition as open (and so unknown). In particular, where one has deep knowledge of a subject matter, then it can be legitimate to maintain one's conviction in the target proposition even when engaging in an argument about this proposition with a broadly intellectual equal. What the conciliatory intuition gets right is the thought that there are some important ways in which an argument of this kind should be conducted, whereby one takes the opponent's viewpoint seriously, one is willing to seriously reflect on the possibility that one is wrong, and so on. This engagement should be genuine, and not merely performative. As we have seen, we can capture this thought by appealing to the idea of intellectual virtue and showing how, in particular, an intellectually humble person might engage in argument in just these ways. Crucially, however, exhibiting such intellectual virtue is entirely compatible with one retaining one's conviction in the target proposition. It follows that a failure to adopt the conciliatory stance does not entail that one is exhibiting an intellectual vice, much less that one is contravening a moral rule by treating one's interlocuter disrespectfully. One can thus consistently, in the right circumstances, engage in argument in good faith while retaining one's convictions. In short, having conviction and being intellectually humble can be compatible with one another.^{16,17}

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NOTES

- ¹ Obviously, not all arguments are of the ‘*p* versus not-*p*’ form, though since this a paradigmatic form of argument, it should be harmless to focus on this case for the sake of simplicity.
- ² Of course, there might be more than two parties involved, but for the sake of simplicity I will confine myself to the more straightforward case of dyadic arguments. Note too that I am taking it as given that both parties are *genuinely* committed to their respective positions. Playing devil’s advocate, or otherwise presenting oneself as holding a position that one does not in fact endorse (as I think is true of certain kinds of conspiracy theorist, for example), would thus not be covered by what I have in mind. For discussion of some of the epistemological ramifications of the latter kind of ‘bad faith’ arguing, see Pritchard (2018*a*).
- ³ Exactly how epistemic peerhood should be understood is itself a controversial topic, though we can set this issue to one side for our purposes, as it is largely orthogonal to our concerns (as we will see). For more on the notion of epistemic peerhood, see Kelly (2005), Conee (2009), and Matheson (2015).
- ⁴ For some prominent defences of (versions of) conciliatory positions in the epistemology of peer disagreement of this kind, see Christensen (2007), Elga (2007), and Feldman (2007).
- ⁵ If one wishes, one can characterize this distinction in terms of mere knowledge *versus* knowledge that rises to the level of understanding. I hesitate to do so only because that brings in a whole set of further issues concerning the relationship between knowledge and understanding that I think are largely orthogonal to this debate. For more on the relationship between knowledge and understanding, see Grimm (2006; 2014), Pritchard (2009*b*; 2014), Pritchard, Millar & Haddock (2010, ch. 4), Greco (2013), and Hills (2016).
- ⁶ I think this phenomenon at least in part explains why a certain kind of agent is afraid of open debate—e.g., they try to stifle such discussions in schools, universities, and so forth. This is because they recognize that their views are highly dependent upon appeals to authority (and thus a certain kind of ‘expert’ testimony), rather than being grounded in a wider understanding of the subject matter. (Think, for example, of certain religious groups in this regard).
- ⁷ The usual cases that are the focus of the epistemological peer disagreement clearly concern mere knowledge, as they describe scenarios where one comes to know something (one’s share of the restaurant bill, who is currently in the quad, and so on) quite quickly in the usual kind of way, without giving the issue much thought (prior to the challenge posed by one’s disputant at any rate).
- ⁸ One of the anonymous reviewers for this journal pushed back on this claim, contending that it is part of being open-minded that one engages with one’s interlocutor in a respectful fashion. Relatedly, the reviewer also contended that it is part of what is involved in being open-minded that one is motivated by a concern for the truth rather than by merely strategic concerns. I must confess that I don’t share these intuitions. As I explain, all that seems essential to open-mindedness is that one is willing to consider counterarguments. What might be underlying the reviewer’s very different intuitions in this regard, however, is thinking of what an *exemplary* form of open-mindedness would involve. It’s certainly plausible that an exemplary open-mindedness would entail the additional features that the reviewer noted, but of course this wouldn’t show that the same is true of open-mindedness in general. (Note too that an exemplary open-mindedness is likely to be of a kind that would be manifested by an intellectually virtuous subject anyway, and hence would be better understood in terms of a corresponding intellectual virtue like intellectual humility. On this point, see also endnote 10).
- ⁹ This is a standard feature of the intellectual virtues, at least on a broadly Aristotelian conception. For some recent discussions of the intellectual virtues in this vein, see Zagzebski (1996), Roberts & Wood (2007), and Baehr (2011*a*). See also Battaly (2014). For specific discussion of how to understand the motivational component of intellectual virtue, see Pritchard (2021*b*).
- ¹⁰ Of course, one can argue that being open-minded *in a certain kind of way* is an intellectual virtue (just as one might argue, for example, that there is a kind of curiosity that is intellectually virtuous, even if the trait of being curious is not in general an intellectual virtue, as it is sometimes viceful, such as when it is exhibited in excess). As noted in endnote 8, an exemplary form of open-mindedness might well be a manifestation of intellectual virtue. But the point remains that the general intellectual trait of being open-minded is not an intellectual virtue. For some recent discussions of open-mindedness, see Riggs (2010), Baehr (2011*b*), and Battaly (2018).
- ¹¹ For example, Driver (1989) argues that ignorance of certain propositions is vital for the development of some virtues. Being aware that one is modest, for instance, can be a barrier to sustaining one’s modesty. Similarly, being humble—and hence being intellectually humble, specifically—might require one to have false beliefs about oneself. See also Brennan (2007) for a related proposal about the virtues (though here it is not inaccuracy as such that’s at issue but rather a kind of inconsistency, in that virtue sometimes demands that one holds oneself to higher standards than one would ever hold others too).
- ¹² See, especially, the hugely influential limitations-owning account of intellectual humility offered by Whitcomb *et al* (2016). See also Hazlett (2012), Barrett & Church (2016), and Church (2016) for discussion of related views.
- ¹³ One could argue that the vice in play here is of a moral rather than intellectual kind—it’s the moral vice of an absence of kindness, say. While that might be part of the story of what is going on here—the intellectual and non-intellectual virtues are closely entwined, after all—as we will see below, I think there is a specifically intellectual failing on display, one that is best accounted for by having the right conception of intellectual humility in hand.

¹⁴ For some key defences of non-egotistic defences of the intellectual virtues, including intellectual humility, see Roberts & Wood (2003; 2007), Priest (2017), Pritchard (2018*b*; 2019), and Tanesini (2018). Note that in their influential defence of the ‘owning one’s limitations’ account of intellectual humility, Whitcomb *et al* (2016) effectively ignore this proposal since they mischaracterize it as the (ego-centric) view that one should be disposed to have a “low concern for one’s own intellectual status and entitlements.” (6) But this is at most a consequence of the view, rather than being the view itself. What is key to the position is rather that it is grounded in an intellectual concern for others, something that Whitcomb *et al* (2016) completely miss.

¹⁵ For further discussion of the rejection of the conciliatory stance requirement in the context of epistemic peer disagreements specifically, see Pritchard (2018*b*; 2019).

¹⁶ I think this point is especially important in educational contexts where we are aiming to cultivate intellectually virtuous inquirers who both have the courage of their convictions but who are also intellectually humble. See Pritchard (2020) for further discussion in this regard. Although it would take me too far afield to explore this issue here, I think our conclusion also bears on the more general question of the nature of inquiry, and in particular whether properly conducted inquiry demands knowledge-precluding doubt, as many suppose—see, for example, Friedman (2019) for an influential statement of this position. Just as the intellectually virtuous agent can in certain conditions properly engage in argumentative contexts where the target proposition is known (and so there is no knowledge-precluding doubt), so I think it is also coherent that an intellectually virtuous agent can participate in properly conducted inquiries about questions where the answer is known. See Pritchard (2021*a*).

¹⁷ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the ‘Ethics of Argumentation’ lecture series in February 2021. I am grateful to the audience for their questions. Special thanks to the organizers, Andrew Aberdein and Katharina Stevens. Thanks also to Harvey Siegel and to two anonymous reviewers for *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*.