INTELLECTUAL BENEVOLENCE

Beginning with this chapter, the book as a whole will now move in a more concrete direction. Whereas the first three chapters were concerned more abstractly with the virtues of intellectual dependability as a group and with the way in which these contribute as a group to the ideal of the intellectually dependable person, the chapters in the second half of this book are concerned with particular candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability. This chapter begins by examining a candidate virtue that is arguably foundational for all of the virtues of intellectual dependability—namely, intellectual benevolence.

The main purposes of the chapter are to illuminate the nature of intellectual benevolence and to examine its relationship to other traits and features of personality of interest to philosophers and psychologists. Section 1 is concerned with conceptualizing intellectual benevolence and addressing its relationship to similar virtues and opposing vices that have been or could be of interest to philosophers. Section 2 turns to the measurement of intellectual benevolence. There I describe an approach to measuring intellectual benevolence that Megan Haggard and I have recently developed, and I identify relationships between intellectual benevolence and demographic, behavioral, and personality features we have observed in our research. Together, the sections should provide a useful initial exploration of the nature of intellectual benevolence and its place in the life of the intellectually dependable person.

1. The Nature of Intellectual Benevolence

Responsibilist virtue epistemologists have tended to be united in holding the view that at the foundation of many if not all intellectual virtues is a virtuous motivation for epistemic goods. This foundational motivation structures other intellectual virtues and ultimately accounts for their value. While the other intellectual virtues have their own distinctive motivations and characteristic behaviors and psychology, these distinctive features are ultimately oriented toward fulfilling the basic, virtuous motivation for epistemic goods. If they were not, then the traits in question would not retain their status as intellectual virtues. As Heather Battaly summarizes the view, “responsibilists contend that all intellectual virtues require an underlying motivation for truth, understanding, or other epistemic goods. . . . This underlying motivation for epistemic goods—common to all of the intellectual virtues—is said to spawn motivations that are distinctive of each individual virtue” (2019: 118-19).

My proposal is here is that intellectual benevolence may be profitably understood as the other-regarding equivalent of this foundational motivation that responsibilist virtue epistemologists have had in view. It is a refined motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods as such for its own sake. This foundational motivation structures the other virtues of intellectual dependability and accounts for their value. While the other virtues of intellectual dependability have their own distinctive motivations and characteristic behaviors and psychology, these distinctive features are ultimately oriented toward fulfilling the basic virtuous motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods that constitutes intellectual benevolence. If they were not, then the traits would not retain their status as virtues of intellectual dependability.

Given this proposed relationship between intellectual benevolence and the virtuous motivation for epistemic goods that has been a focus for responsibilist virtue epistemologists, we may learn about the former by examining the accumulated scholarly wisdom regarding the latter. Here I wish to highlight four features of the virtuous motivation for epistemic goods that are also applicable to intellectual benevolence as I am conceiving of it here. After doing so and thereby arriving upon a more detailed conceptualization of intellectual benevolence, I discuss the relationship between intellectual benevolence and some similar virtues and opposing vices that have been or could be of interest to philosophers studying intellectual character.

* 1. Intellectual Benevolence and the Motivation for Epistemic Goods

The first feature of the virtuous motivation for epistemic goods I wish to note is the pluralism of the objects of this motivation. Typically, responsibilist virtue epistemologists have not insisted that this motivation is aimed at just one epistemic good, but have instead suggested that there may be multiple distinct epistemic goods to which it is sensitive. James Montmarquet, who is perhaps most restrictive regarding the objects of the foundational motivation for epistemic goods, which he calls “conscientiousness,” nonetheless includes at least attaining true belief and avoiding false belief among its objects (1992: 336). Linda Zagzebski conceptualizes this foundational motivation as aimed at what she calls “cognitive contact with reality,” which she intends to subsume at least attaining true belief, avoiding false belief, acquiring knowledge, and achieving understanding (1996: 167). Jason Baehr conceives of this foundational motivation as encompassing a positive psychological orientation toward epistemic goods, which include attaining familiar cognitive ends such as “truth, knowledge, evidence, rationality, and understanding” as well as fulfilling one’s epistemic obligations or duties, together with an aversion from a similarly diverse range of epistemic bads (2011: 93, 110). Robert Roberts and Jay Wood conceive of the motivation as a “love of knowledge”, where their conception of knowledge is defined so as to include “the richly intertwined bundle of understanding, acquaintance, and propositional knowledge” (2007: 153).

In a parallel way, my proposal here is that there is a plurality of epistemic goods which form the objects of intellectual benevolence. Intellectual benevolence is a motivation to promote the several different epistemic goods for others, including others’ having true beliefs, justified beliefs, and understanding. Nor is intellectual benevolence exclusively concerned with promoting the epistemic value of others’ propositional attitudes or complexes of propositional attitudes; it is also concerned with promoting epistemic value in the dynamic conduct of others’ inquiries. The intellectually benevolent person will be motivated to promote others’ use of investigative methods and forms of reasoning known to be reliable, their avoidance of investigative methods and forms of reasoning known to be unreliable, and their inquiring in accordance with intellectual virtue and not in accordance with intellectual vice. In this way, intellectual benevolence is a motivational orientation concerned with the holistic epistemic well-being of others.

Recognizing this first feature leads naturally to a discussion of the second. Namely, the virtuous motivation for epistemic goods central to responsibilist virtue epistemology, aimed as it is at a plurality of epistemic goods, does not aim at these haphazardly, but rather in a refined way in accordance with a mature conceptualization of epistemic value. In this way, the virtuous motivation for epistemic goods is partly cognitive, in that it involves judgments about what is of value in inquiry and about the relative weights of these values. The person who has a virtuous motivation for epistemic goods is motivated by them *as such*, and their motivation to attain them is refined in accordance with their understanding of the relative value of these goods in the life of inquiry. As Heather Battaly puts it, “responsibilits think that intellectual virtues require true, or at least justified, beliefs about what is (and is not) epistemically valuable. To put this point in Aristotelian terms: having an intellectual virtue requires having a true, or justified, ‘conception’ of the epistemic good” (2019: 118).

Robert Roberts and Jay Wood are especially clear in explicating this point. In their discussion of the foundational virtue of love of knowledge, they note that this virtue arises via the refinement of the sort of natural desire to know famously observed by Aristotle:

In the very young infant the appetitive orientation of which Aristotle writes is perhaps an indiscriminate penchant for sensory stimulation and the activities that promote it. But discriminations soon emerge, and the appetite becomes exploratory—the child wants to know things, to understand how things work. It is as though she is asking questions, thus focusing her desire for knowledge in very personally particular ways (*this* is what *I* want to know). And with further maturity, crucial distinctions come to guide the child’s epistemic activities. She wants true perceptions and beliefs, not false ones; she wants well-grounded beliefs, not vagrant, floating ones; she wants significant rather than trivial, relevant rather than irrelevant, knowledge; she wants deep rather than shallow understanding; and she wants knowledge that ennobles human life and promotes human well-being rather than knowledge that degrades and destroys; she wants to know important truths. (2007: 154-5)

For Roberts and Wood as well as for other virtue responsibilists, possessing the full virtue of the foundational motivation for epistemic goods requires developing this sort of mature and discriminating conception of epistemic value.

In a similar way, intellectual benevolence is also not a haphazard motivation to promote a plurality of epistemic goods for others, but rather a refined motivation to promote these epistemic goods in accordance with a mature conceptualization of epistemic value. Intellectual benevolence is partly cognitive, involving judgments about what is of value in inquiry and about the relative weights of these values. The intellectually benevolent person judges the objects of intellectual benevolence to be valuable, and they tend to judge the more epistemically valuable goods to be more valuable.

Of course, there continues to be some controversy among epistemologists regarding the exact number and nature of epistemic goods, their relation to one another, and their relative values, as noted in Chapter One. And I do not wish to conceptualize intellectual benevolence here in such a way as to require that in order to possess it one need be a professional epistemologist with completely formed views on all of these matters. Nor, for that matter, have responsibilist virtue epistemologists who conceptualize the foundational motivation for epistemic goods as involving a conception of epistemic value wished to restrict this virtue to formally trained epistemologists. As Battaly puts it in a footnote, “One need not be a theorist to have a conception of the epistemic good” (2019: 125, n.7).

One way to avoid this requirement is to focus in our conceptualization of intellectual benevolence (and likewise, the conceptualization of the motivation for epistemic goods) on less controversial cases of judgments regarding epistemic value and relative epistemic value. For example, even if different epistemologists will offer different accounts of *why* the various epistemic goods included in the plurality of epistemic goods referenced above have the value they do, they will tend to agree that they *are* of epistemic value. Thus, we can safely suggest that the intellectually benevolent person will judge it to be valuable that others acquire true beliefs, justified beliefs, and understanding, that they inquire using reliable and not unreliable methods and in accordance with intellectual virtue and not intellectual vice. Likewise, we can rely in our conceptualization of intellectual benevolence on comparatively uncontroversial judgments regarding relative epistemic value. The intellectually benevolent person can safely be expected to judge, for example, that a justified true belief is of greater value than an unjustified true belief other things being equal, and that it is of greater value to possess understanding of an entire domain of inquiry than to possess a few disparate items of knowledge within it, other things being equal. They can be expected to judge that it is better, other things being equal, to help someone acquire the skills and virtues necessary for acquiring understanding within a domain than to provide them with a true belief in that domain that they could get on their own with such skills and virtues. We might, then define intellectual benevolence in such a way that the cognitive component required for possessing the virtue can be satisfied when a person possesses this much of a mature, accurate conception of epistemic value. Yet, to recall a point borrowed from Baehr in Chapter Two, we can allow that a person can possess a virtue without possessing it in its fullness. Thus we could allow that while developing the sort of detailed and thorgough perspective on epistemic value that might be in reach for the professional epistemologist may not be necessary for possessing the virtue of intellectual benevolence, it may be relevant for possessing the virtue in its fullness.

There is also another way to avoid demanding too much in the cognitive requirement of intellectual benevolence (and the motivation for epistemic goods). For most mature adults and even for younger people, the comparatively uncontroversial judgments regarding epistemic value represented in the previous paragraph will be the ones that are epistemically justified from their own perspective. Accordingly, we might propose that being intellectually benevolent requires that one tend to judge to be valuable what one is epistemically justified in judging to be epistemically valuable, and that in cases where other things are equal, one tends to judge to be of greater value what one has reason to believe is of greater epistemic value. In this way, the virtue of intellectual benevolence will be guided by its possessor’s justified conception of what is valuable in the life of inquiry. This proposal parallels Baehr’s conception of the virtuous positive orientation towards epistemic goods as one in which “an intellectually virtuous person will love what she *has good reason to believe* is an epistemic good and hate what she *has good reason to believe* is an epistemic bad” (Battaly 2019: 119). While I myself prefer conceptualizing intellectual benevolence and character traits more generally in accordance with this second approach, I will not insist on it here. Although I will sometimes use language reflective of it below, I invite readers more attracted to the first approach to consider how to reformulate these expressions.

I have gone on now for several pages about what we might call the cognitive dimension of intellectual benevolence, proposing that this involves the benevolent person’s having a true or at least justified conception of what is epistemically valuable in others’ inquiries that can be reasonably expected of a maturely developed personality. What I now wish to note is that this cognitive dimension of intellectual benevolence must be complemented by an emotional dimension and a volitional dimension—which takes us to our third and fourth features of the responsibilists’ motivation for epistemic goods.

The responsibilist motivation for epistemic goods is often conceived as involving emotion dispositions. The person who has this virtuous motivation won’t just judge it to be valuable for them to acquire true beliefs, understanding, and the like, but their emotions will appropriately complement these judgments. They will tend to be pleased when they acquire understanding and displeased when they cannot. They will tend to excited by the prospect of learning and disappointed when experiencing confusion. They will tend to be happier about acquiring new skills and virtues for inquiry than they would be about acquiring some true beliefs luckily.

Responsibilist virtue epistemologists tend to conceptualize the intellectual virtues, like the moral virtues, as including dispositions of cognition, emotion, and volition. Consistent with this conception, they will include a role for emotion dispositions in the foundational motivation for epistemic goods. Jason Baehr, for example, includes these within his conception of the positive psychological orientation toward epistemic goods and negative psychological orientation toward epistemic bads definitive of this foundational motivation. The positive orientation toward epistemic goods will include “what one loves, desires, or identifies with,” while the negative orientation toward epistemic bads will include “what one ‘hates,’ is repelled by, repudiates, and so on” (2011: 96). He notes approvingly Thomas Hurka’s conception of “loving” the good as involving “being positively oriented toward it in one’s desires, actions, or *feelings*” (ibid, emphasis added). Roberts and Wood, similarly, conceive of the love of knowledge as a *concern* for epistemic goods, which is partly emotive in nature. They note that the virtuously intellectually motivated person “will feel emotional discomfort when his desire for [epistemic goods] is frustrated” (2007: 156). The foundational motivation for epistemic goods is therefore partly emotive.

A parallel emotional orientation will characterize the intellectually benevolent person. Their judgments regarding what is of absolute and comparative value in others’ inquiries will be complemented by fitting emotions. They will tend to be glad when learning about others’ acquisitions of true belief, understanding, and intellectual virtue, and disappointed when learning of others’ false beliefs, misunderstandings, and intellectual vice. They will be excited by the prospect of promoting epistemic goods in others, and worried by the prospect of causing others epistemic harm. They will be happier about leading others to acquire a justified true belief than an unjustified true belief, and happier still about helping others to achieve broad understanding. More generally, they will tend to experience positive emotions directed toward others’ acquisition or maintenance of epistemic goods and they will tend to experience negative emotions directed toward others’ failure to acquire or maintain epistemic goods, and the intensity of their emotions will tend to co-vary with the value of the objects of these emotions.

Likewise, both the responsibilists’ motivation for epistemic goods and the virtue of intellectual benevolence include volitional components. Indeed, it is in virtue of these components that the traits are thought of primarily as motivations. The responsibilists’ virtuous motivation for epistemic goods requires motivation for the epistemic goods that are judged to be valuable, and comparatively stronger motivation for the epistemic goods that are judged more valuable. The person who is virtuously motivated by epistemic goods tends to seek them, tries to get them, wants to have them. They want them for their own sake—at least, they want them for the sake of the value they contribute to the life of inquiry, independently from what further value they might have (cf. Baehr 2011: 99). They may also seek these goods for the sake of other values to which they are conducive. Roberts and Wood go so far as to claim that “in the epistemically virtuous person the disposition of caring about the intellectual goods will derive in part from a disposition of caring about other goods such as justice, human well-being, and friendship” (2007: 158). Yet, the intellectually virtuous motivation to acquire epistemic goods must not be structured by a more ultimate motivation which is itself vicious. Baehr illustrates this point in his discussion of a fictional scientist who “does extremely careful and thorough research over the course of his career, but whose work is motivated primarily by a desire to win a Nobel Prize and all the professional accolades that come therewith” (2011: 105). Baehr claims that “the scientist’s character traits cannot be considered intellectual virtues . . . Indeed, if the motives in question were the dominant ones in the scientist’s life as a whole, we might reasonably think of him as rather defective qua person” (106).

Again, the same applies in the case of intellectual benevolence. Intellectual benevolence, which I initially glossed as a foundational motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods, must most certainly include a volitional component. The intellectually benevolent person is motivated to promote for others those goods they judge to be valuable in the life of inquiry, and is more strongly motivated to promote those goods they judge to be of greater value in this life. They want to help, to give, to guide others in ways that will lead to their acquisition or maintenance of these goods. They tend to seek ways to benefit others’ inquiries. They do this because they are motivated to promote excellence in others’ inquiries for its own sake. They may also wish to promote goods in others inquiries for the sake of other goods to which they are conducive. Yet, their motivation to promote goods in others’ inquiries must not be structured by a more ultimate motivation which is itself vicious.

The final point of comparison I wish to make between the virtue of intellectual benevolence and the responsibilists’ motivation for epistemic goods is the point anticipated at the outset of this section regarding the way in which the motivation for epistemic goods structures other intellectual virtues. As Jason Baehr puts this point, intellectual virtues structured by this motivation have a “two-tiered psychological structure”:

At a basic or fundamental level, all intellectual virtues involve, as we have seen, a positive orientation toward epistemic goods. . . . However, each intellectual virtue also has its own *characteristic psychology*. That is, each virtue involves certain attitudes, feelings, motives, beliefs, actions, and other psychological qualities that make it the virtue it is and on the basis of which it can be distinguished from other intellectual virtues. . . . Finally, on the present model, the characteristic psychology of each individual virtue is ‘rooted in’ or ‘flows from’ the more fundamental positive orientation toward epistemic goods. (2011: 103)

Or, to recall Battaly’s language from the outset of the chapter, the psychological features distinctive of the various individual virtues is “spawned” from the foundational motivation for epistemic goods.

In parallel fashion, I propose that intellectual benevolence is a foundational, refined motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods that structures the virtues of intellectual dependability. These virtues, as argued in Chapter Two, are distinctively concerned with promoting others’ epistemic goods in that they require for their possession the motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods. Indeed, they are possessed “out of” this motivation in the sense that this motivation structures these virtues. The psychological orientations distinctive of these virtues are ultimately oriented toward fulfilling this foundational motivation. What we are learning in this chapter is that this foundational motivation which structures these virtues is the virtue of intellectual benevolence. While this virtue can be thought of as primarily a *motivation* to promote others’ epistemic goods, a full conceptualization of it requires reference to its cognitive and affective elements in addition to its volitional elements. It is as much a robust multi-track disposition as the other virtues of intellectual dependability that it structures.

A closely related point about the relationship between intellectual benevolence and the other virtues of intellectual dependability can be made if we borrow Daniel Russell’s (2009) conception of the cardinality of the virtues. On Russell’s conception, there is a natural structuring of the virtues according to which some virtues are more cardinal than others, while the less cardinal virtues can often be thought of as specializations of the more cardinal virtues. Russell’s key example is the more cardinal virtue of generosity and the less cardinal virtue of magnificence. Whereas generosity is constituted by a virtuous tendency to use one’s resources to benefit others quite generally, magnificence is a narrower, more specialized virtuous tendency to promote public goods through large-scale expenditure. Russell’s explanation for why generosity is more cardinal than magnificence is that the reasons characteristic of magnificence “ascend” to the reasons characteristic of generosity. If a magnificent person were asked why they took their characteristic reasons for acting magnificently—say, because people in their position ought to support their communities—are reasons in the first place, they will end up citing the reasons characteristic of generosity—that it is good to benefit others with one’s resources when one can. In a similar way, I will suggest that the other virtues of intellectual dependability that will be the focus of Chapters Five through Eight are less cardinal than intellectual benevolence and are specializations of it. The reasons characteristic of these virtues will ascend to those characteristic of intellectual benevolence, and these virtues can be thought of as intellectual benevolence specialized to some narrower domains of activity.

On the basis of the foregoing comparison between intellectual benevolence and the responsibilists’ motivation for epistemic goods, we can offer the following summary account of the nature of intellectual benevolence. Intellectual benevolence is a multi-track, positive orientation towards others’ epistemic goods and negative orientation toward others’ epistemic bads. These orientations each involve dispositions of cognition, emotion, and motivation sensitive to what is of absolute and comparative value in others’ inquiries. The intellectually benevolent person tends to make justified judgments about what is good and bad in others’ inquiries and about which goods and bads in others’ inquiries are better or worse than others. They tend to experience positive emotions directed towards what they judge to be good in others’ inquiries, negative emotions toward what they judge to be bad in others’ inquiries, and the intensity of these emotions tends to co-vary with the perceived values of their objects. Finally, the intellectually benevolent person is motivated to promote what they judge to be good in others’ inquiries, motivated to prevent what they judge to be bad in others’ inquiries, and the intensity of these motivations tends to co-vary with the perceived value of their objects. Thus, intellectual benevolence is a refined holistic concern with others’ intellectual well-being.

By conceptualizing intellectual benevolence in this way, I have left several significant questions about its nature unanswered. In particular, there are some live debates among epistemologists of intellectual character that I have not taken a stand on here. For example, I have not addressed whether virtues such as intellectual benevolence must be acquired in such a way that their possessors are responsible for possessing them—a point of contention between personalist and responsibilist virtue epistemologists. Nor have I addressed whether virtues such as intellectual benevolence can be possessed apart from reliable success in achieving their aims—a point over which responsibilists have differed from one another. My abstaining from entering into such debates is intentional. For, I wish to offer a basic account of intellectual benevolence that may be refined in directions attractive to parties on either side of these debates. I would encourage adherents of each of these perspectives to consider how the basic characterization of intellectual benevolence offered here can be filled in from their own preferred perspectives on these issues.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1.2 Intellectual Benevolence and Similar Virtues

Having offered an account of the basic nature of intellectual benevolence, I now wish to further illuminate this virtue by considering its relationship to several other traits—both virtues to which it is similar and vices to which it is opposed. I begin with a virtue that Roberts and Wood call “truthfulness”. They describe this trait as “a love of the intellectual goods as they may be lodged in other people by way of one’s own communication.” The truthful person has “a concern that what one tells the other be true, not just in some legalistic sense of being a true proposition, but that what one is communicating actually become a true belief or correct understanding lodged in the other person” (2007: 165). Truthfulness is conceptualized by Roberts and Wood as the other-regarding component of the broader virtue they call “love of knowledge” described earlier in this chapter.

So understood, truthfulness is closely related to intellectual benevolence. Yet, they are not quite the same trait. Notably, truthfulness appears to be exclusively concerned with governing a person’s communicative acts. Perhaps even more narrowly, it may be that it is concerned only with cases in which a person offers testimony to a target proposition or set of propositions of another’s inquiry, or at least to cases in which one “tells” another something. In either case, it is certainly narrower in focus than intellectual benevolence as conceived above. The latter governs not just what a person tells others, but the whole range of communicative acts one engages in with others aimed at advancing their epistemic goods, including the questions one asks and the instructions one gives. Indeed, more broadly, intellectual benevolence concerns a person’s orientation toward others’ epistemic goods quite generally, and not only toward epistemic goods toward which their own communicative acts may be conducive. The intellectually benevolent person is cognitively, affectively, and volitionally oriented toward others’ epistemic goods whether these goods are promoted by their own acts of communication or not, and likewise cognitively, affectively, and volitionally oriented away from others’ epistemic bads whether these bads may be prevented by their own communicative acts or not.

It is natural to think that, if truthfulness is a virtue, it is a virtue that is itself structured by the more fundamental virtue of intellectual benevolence. As Roberts and Wood describe truthfulness, it seems clear enough that the virtuously truthful person must possess truthfulness out of the foundational motivation for others’ epistemic goods characteristic of intellectual benevolence. The virtuously truthful person’s truthfulness is motivated by their intellectual benevolence. Truthfulness is among the two-tiered psychologically structured virtues that takes as its definitive ultimate motive the motive of intellectual benevolence and takes as its definitive proximate motive the characteristic motive of truthfulness—to communicate truthfully.

While Roberts and Wood’s truthfulness is not the same as intellectual benevolence, their discussion of truthfulness as the other-regarding dimension of the love of knowledge raises a difficult question for us here. Namely, is intellectual benevolence best thought of in the way Roberts and Wood have thought of truthfulness as the other-regarding dimension of a broader positive orientation toward epistemic goods? Perhaps Roberts and Wood would take my comments about the differences between intellectual benevolence and truthfulness as a friendly corrective to their comments about the other-regarding dimension of the love of knowledge. Perhaps they would propose that intellectual benevolence is part of this broader virtue. If so, would they be right?

I find this to be a difficult question to answer, and I am not sure that much of consequence stands or falls with the answer. Regardless of how the question is answered, I think it is important to be able to maintain two points. First, it is important to maintain that intellectual benevolence is a virtue and that the self-regarding motivation to acquire epistemic goods that responsibilists have had in view is a virtue, and that there are other intellectual virtues that can be possessed out of each of these. If we do not accept these claims, then we will not be able to maintain the view articulated in Chapter Two and reiterated above regarding the relationship between the self-regarding and other-regarding motivations for epistemic goods and the possession of other intellectual virtues. Second, it is important to allow that intellectual benevolence and the virtuous self-regarding motivation for epistemic goods may typically derive from different sources in human personality. For example, the self-regarding motivation for epistemic goods may derive from the motivation for competence or mastery, and may be driven primarily by aspects of personality pertaining to conscientiousness. This is suggested by the close relationships between love of learning and mastery orientation (see, e.g., Peterson and Seligman 2004: 166-7) and between mastery orientation and conscientiousness (see McCabe et al 2013) in psychological research. By contrast, intellectual benevolence may derive from more general prosocial motives, and may be driven by aspects of personality pertaining to agreeableness. This is suggested by psychological research on knowledge-sharing, which has been found to be driven primarily by prosocial intentions (Rhee and Choi 2017), which are in turn most strongly linked with the basic personality construct of agreeableness (Habashi et al 2016). If we think of the virtuous self-regarding and other-regarding motivations for epistemic goods as perfections of some kind of natural virtue or inclination, as Roberts and Wood have expressed sympathy for doing (cf. 2007: 153-4, 164-5), then we may need to recognize that the pathways toward achieving them may be quite different and fairly independent from one another. This seems to me to push in the direction of treating the virtues as two separate virtues. Yet, I can also see that in a mature personality these traits may become integrated as ways in which the person is oriented in favor of epistemic goods, despite their having arisen via different developmental pathways. So, while I won’t take a firm stand here on whether intellectual benevolence is best conceived of as part of a broader positive orientation toward epistemic goods, I do suggest that it is best viewed as a virtue that can develop relatively independently from the virtuous self-regarding motivation for epistemic goods (and vice versa), that it can generate other intellectual virtues such as the virtues of intellectual dependability independently from its relationship to the self-regarding motivation for intellectual goods (and vice versa), and that it is a virtue in its own right whether or not it is part of a larger virtue in tandem with the virtuous self-regarding motivation for epistemic goods (and vice versa).

A second similar intellectual virtue with which intellectual benevolence can be compared is intellectual generosity. Generosity in general and intellectual generosity in particular have received only a small amount of attention in recent philosophical literature. As Christian Miller observes in a recent article on generosity, “I would have expected a lot of interest by analytic philosophers in this character trait. Not so. As far as I can tell, there have only been three articles in mainstream philosophy journals going back at least to the 1970s on generosity” (2018: 216). Yet the small literature on generosity and intellectual generosity can enable us to differentiate between it and intellectual benevolence in at least three ways.

First, it is commonly maintained that acts characteristic of generosity are not morally required, but are supererogatory, going beyond the call of duty. Perhaps acting generously is an imperfect duty in the Kantian sense, with it being morally required of people that they behave generously on some occasions, but no particular acts of generosity are morally required. Miller proposes along these lines that for an act to be generous, the actor must not believe that the act is morally required. He writes, “An action is generous for an agent to perform only if, subjec-tively, the agent takes the action to be morally optional” (2018: 228). While Miller is concerned primarily with generosity *simpliciter*, presumably he would say the same about intellectual generosity. Intellectual generosity is a tendency that involves promoting others’ epistemic goods in circumstances where doing so is not (believed to be) morally required.

If it is true of intellectual generosity that its characteristic acts are supererogatory, or are believed to be supererogatory, then this will allow us to identify one difference between intellectual generosity and intellectual benevolence. For, intellectual benevolence by contrast is concerned more broadly with promoting others’ epistemic goods or preventing their epistemic bads, regardless of whether doing so is morally required or is supererogatory. There may indeed be ways of promoting others’ epistemic goods or preventing their epistemic bads that are morally required. For example, it may be a moral requirement of a certain kind of epistemic justice that a teacher gives their students equal opportunity to develop their minds. Treating them otherwise would be a violation of fairness. If so, then giving one’s students equal opportunity to develop their minds could be motivated by intellectual benevolence, but not by generosity. Similarly, it has long been maintained that to lie or to otherwise deliberately mislead others, whether in certain particular circumstances or in general, is a grievous moral wrong (cf. Williams 2002, ch.5). If so, then it may be morally required that one not lie and that one not deliberately deceive in such cases. Doing what it takes to refrain from lying or deliberately deceiving in such cases, then, would not be a manifestation of intellectual generosity, but could be a manifestation of intellectual benevolence. So this is one way in which intellectual benevolence and generosity appear to come apart: intellectual benevolence is concerned more broadly with any case in which one has opportunity to promote another’s epistemic goods or prevent their epistemic bads, whereas intellectual generosity is concerned more narrowly with cases in which one can promote others’ epistemic goods in a supererogatory fashion.

A second potential difference between intellectual generosity and intellectual benevolence is that characteristic acts of generosity involve giving in order to promote another’s good. Indeed, as Roberts and Wood note, “Paradigmatically, generosity is a disposition to give *property*” (2007: 293). In conceiving of intellectual generosity, we might not wish to confine it to cases in which property is redistributed. For, it is awkward to conceive of epistemic goods such as knowledge or true belief as property that is redistributed—after all, when they are given away, they are also retained by the giver. Moreover, we may wish to allow that what can be given in cases of intellectually generous acts can be quite varied, including not only knowledge, but time, commentary, questions, and so on. Yet, even if we conceive of intellectual generosity as characteristically manifested in these various ways, it remains that it is characteristically manifested in acts of giving. Generosity has to do with making use of one’s resources in order to benefit others. As Roberts and Wood put it, “Generosity is a disposition to give valuable things—material goods, time, attention, energy, concessions, credit, the benefit of a doubt, knowledge—to other persons” (286).

Yet, intellectual benevolence can be manifested in cases in which one decides not to give or not to employ one’s resources. For example, imagine a wealthy donor who has long supported a media outlet, and who becomes increasingly concerned that the media outlet is producing material that is causing the public epistemic harm. If reforming the media outlet’s practices seems sufficiently out of reach, the donor might decide out of a concern for the epistemic well-being of the public to withdraw their support of the organization. Doing so could be an act of intellectual benevolence. Yet, it does not appear to be an act of intellectual generosity if generosity is characteristically manifested in giving or making use of one’s resources. In this case, the donor aims to improve others’ epistemic well-being by refraining from giving, by refraining from using their resources. Or, to take a slightly more homey case, consider the social media user who, out of a concern that sharing a link may do their friends more epistemic harm than good, refrains from sharing it. Here again the act may be characteristic of intellectual benevolence, but not of intellectual generosity if intellectual generosity requires acts of giving.

Thus far we have observed potential differences between intellectual generosity and intellectual benevolence that involve ways in which the former is more narrowly focused than the latter. But, in addition to being more narrowly focused, it may also be that intellectual generosity requires a more refined specialization of skill in the area of its operation than does intellectual benevolence. Intellectual benevolence, as conceptualized above, involves a basic orientation of a person toward others’ epistemic goods and bads. It is a foundational, positive attraction toward others’ epistemic goods in one’s judgments, affections, and volitions and negative aversion away from others’ epistemic bads in one’s judgments, affections, and volitions. Generosity, by contrast, is commonly thought to require more specialized skill. As Roberts and Wood put it, “The giver must aim to make his gifts into real benefits by considering appropriate beneficiaries, gifts, times of giving, and so forth” (2007: 286). Generosity, in a phrase, requires skill in giving.

Putting these differences together enables us to discern a pattern in the relationships between intellectual benevolence, on the one hand, and truthfulness and intellectual generosity, on the other. The latter virtues are each more narrowly focused on a smaller domain of intellectual activities than the former, and they each involve greater specialization of skill within these areas than intellectual benevolence requires in its broader domain of activities. They are, in this way, specializations of intellectual benevolence—refinements of it within particular domains—of the sort we envisioned earlier when discussing Russell’s conception of the cardinality of the virtues. Each of the latter virtues can be possessed out of intellectual benevolence; each is a way that we might expect intellectual benevolence to develop in particular directions. This pattern of relationship is just what we should have expected, if intellectual benevolence is to stand to these other distinctively other-regarding intellectual virtues in much the way that the foundational motivation for epistemic goods is thought to stand to other intellectual virtues that have been the focus of responsibilist virtue epistemology.

* 1. Intellectual Benevolence and Opposing Vices

Having noted the relationship of intellectual benevolence to the similar virtues of truthfulness and intellectual generosity, I now turn to contrast intellectual benevolence with some opposing vices. I begin with what is perhaps the most naturally opposing vice—a vice that Jason Baehr (2010) has called “epistemic malevolence”. As Baehr himself observes, benevolence and malevolence in general tend to be contrasted with each other. His interest is to investigate whether there is a sensible conception of the vice of epistemic malevolence that parallels the vice of malevolence *simpliciter* or moral malevolence.

Baehr defines malevolence as a disposition to oppose the good, and so defines epistemic malevolence as a disposition to oppose the epistemic good. While he wishes to allow that there are impersonal forms of malevolence and epistemic malevolence that involve opposition to impersonal goods, he also notes that there are personal versions of each that involve opposition to others’ share in goods, including epistemic goods. Personal epistemic malevolence, then, is a dispositional “opposition to another person’s share in knowledge or to her epistemic well-being as such” (2010: 204). More carefully, personal epistemic malevolence is a disposition to oppose what one should be aware of as another’s epistemic goods, whether one in fact takes these to be the other’s epistemic goods or not (201). The epistemically malevolent person makes what they do or should regard as others’ epistemic goods out to be their enemy.

Such an orientation toward others’ epistemic goods is, as expected, as strongly contrasted with intellectual benevolence as possible. This is especially so if we imagine the fullest sort of personal epistemic malevolence. This sort of malevolence would involve a unified aversion to all others’ epistemic goods and attraction to all others’ epistemic bads in one’s judgments, affections, and volitions. Where the benevolent person judges that it is good to promote what they have reason to believe is someone else’s good, tends to be pleased by the promotion of such goods, and is motivated to promote these goods, the epistemically malevolent person judges of such goods that they are not to be promoted, tends to be displeased by them, and is motivated to obstruct them. The fully personally epistemically malevolent person has a psychologically integrated orientation to oppose what the intellectually benevolent person has a psychologically integrated orientation to promote.

While the contrast between intellectual benevolence and epistemic malevolence could hardly be starker, intellectual benevolence also contrasts more subtly with several other intellectual vices. Some of these distinctively involve deficient motivations toward others’ epistemic goods, some of them distinctively involve defective motivations toward others’ epistemic goods, and some can be manifested either in deficient motivations for others’ epistemic goods or in defective motivations for them.

Often, people are deficiently motivated toward others’ goods because they are too strongly motivated by their own goods. They are egoistic or self-focused to a greater or lesser extent, treating their own interests as more valuable or more important than others’ interests for purposes of deciding what to do. Distinctively epistemic orientations of this kind can be imagined. At the extreme is the person who places no value on others’ epistemic goods, but who does value their own epistemic goods. Such a person may not be epistemically malevolent, positively oriented toward others’ epistemic bads and opposed to their goods, but neither will they be positively oriented toward others’ epistemic goods and opposed to others’ epistemic bads. Roberts and Wood describe the vices of haughtiness and selfish ambition along these lines. Whereas haughtiness is “a disposition to treat others as hardly worthy of one’s attention or respect”, “selfish ambition is a disposition to advance one’s own long-term interests to the exclusion or detriment of others’ interests” (2007: 237).

There are of course less extreme self-focused orientations. A person may value others’ epistemic goods and be motivated to promote them to some extent, yet be so much more strongly motivated to promote their own epistemic goods that they end up being willing to do others epistemic harm out of selfish concern. Relatedly, a person may be motivated to be epistemically superior to others, even if they are not opposed to others’ epistemic goods as such. Alessandra Tanesini sometimes describes arrogance in this way, writing that “arrogant individuals want to be superior to other people” (2018: 214).

We should expect the intellectually benevolent person to be quite different. Plausibly, the fully intellectually benevolent person will reject a sort of epistemic egoism according to which their epistemic goods are more valuable than others’ just because they are theirs. Indeed, as a person who values and is motivated to promote others’ epistemic goods, the fully intellectually benevolent person may be slightly more strongly motivated to promote others’ epistemic goods than their own. They may manifest the epistemic equivalent of what I have elsewhere called “others-centeredness,” a tendency to put others’ interests ahead of one’s own (Byerly 2019). Ultimately, the justification for doing this would likely be that they both value others’ epistemic goods equally to their own, and they value the goods of epistemic cooperation that are promoted in greater measure when they promote others’ epistemic goods than when they promote their own. I don’t wish to claim that to be intellectually benevolent, a person must be epistemically others-centered in this way. But, I do suggest that intellectual benevolence will incline a person more in this direction than in the contrary direction characteristic of self-focused vices such as arrogance.

An interesting feature of intellectual arrogance, shared with some other intellectual vices, is that while it can manifest characteristically in a deficient motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods, it can also manifest a motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods that is defective. Out of a desire to maintain their epistemic superiority over others, a person may seek to make others pervasively dependent upon themselves for epistemic goods. This may involve a motivation to give others true beliefs or knowledge, and so to provide them with certain epistemic benefits. But it also involves a motivation to do others epistemic harm in making them dependent upon oneself for these goods, rather than fostering their autonomy to achieve these goods for themselves.

The intellectual vice that Roberts and Wood call “vanity” can in this same way manifest either in a deficient motivation for others’ epistemic goods or in a defective motivation for them. Vanity, as they conceive of it, is an excessive desire to be well-regarded on account of one’s intellectual accomplishments (2007: 237). Out of such a desire, one may very well aim to do epistemic harm to others, or to prevent their epistemic goods, or to outdo them epistemically, so as to come off looking epistemically superior and therefore accumulating greater epistemic appreciation. Equally, however, such a desire may lead one to try to continually position oneself as others’ epistemic benefactor, so as to always come off looking like one is in a position of epistemic superiority.

By contrast, the intellectually benevolent person is not characterized by a motivation to be epistemically superior to others or by an excessive motivation to be well-regarded in virtue of their own intellectual accomplishments. Rather, as suggested above, they value and appreciate others’ epistemic goods, perhaps as much as they do their own. They won’t be inclined to do others down in order to preserve their superiority or the positive attention of others, but will be inclined to do others epistemic good for its own sake, perhaps as strongly or more strongly than they are inclined to do themselves epistemic good. Moreover, they will have a mature and discriminating conception of the diversity of epistemic values and a motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods in a way that is sensitive to this conception. They will not promote others’ true beliefs or knowledge in order to sacrifice the more important good of developing others’ autonomy. So, whether these flexible vices involve a deficient motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods or a defective motivation to promote them, they will contrast with intellectual benevolence.

Finally, there are vices that distinctively involve defective motivations to promote others’ epistemic goods. These are vices that characteristically incorporate a motivation to promote some epistemic goods of others, but out of a vicious motive. One example of such a vice is the character trait of “social vigilantism” discussed by psychologists Saucier and Webster (2010). The social vigilante is conceived of as someone who thinks their views are superior to others’ views, and who desires to impress their views on others. The desire is ostensibly aimed at securing epistemic benefits for others, since in coming to see things the way the vigilante does, they will—so the vigilante thinks—come to be holding more accurate views. Social vigilantes “feel responsible to impress and propagate their beliefs onto others for the betterment of society” (Saucier and Webster 2010: 19). Social vigilantism of this sort has been found to be correlated with narcissism and dogmatism.

At first glance, it may not seem that there is a strong tension between social vigilantism and intellectual benevolence. After all, if the social vigilante really believes that their beliefs are epistemically superior to others’ beliefs and aims to impress these epistemically better beliefs on others, we might be tempted to think they are just being benevolent, even if misguided. The idea that social vigilantism and intellectual benevolence may not be so far apart is also suggested by the fact that we might expect highly intellectually benevolent people to respond positively to some of the items used to measure social vigilantism, such as “Those people who are more intelligent and informed have a responsibility to educate the people around them who are less intelligent and informed” (Saucier and Webster 2010: 22, Table 1). Yet, I think that when we think more carefully about the profile of judgements, affections, and volitions of the social vigilante, we will see that there is indeed a significant contrast between them and the intellectually benevolent person.

Compare first the affective profiles of a social vigilante and an intellectually benevolent person. We saw above that the intellectually benevolent person will tend to experience positive emotions such as joy or gladness when others attain epistemic goods. Will the social vigilante? It isn’t clear that they will. What is more likely is that they will experience positive emotions when others change their views to match the vigilante’s views. This suspicion is confirmed when we look at the items used to measure social vigilantism. No item taps a tendency to experience positive emotions directed toward others’ attainment of epistemic goods. However, there is an item tapping positive emotional experience induced through exercising epistemic authority over others: “I like to imagine myself in a position of authority so that I could make the important decisions around here” (Saucier and Webster 2010: 22, Table 1).

We may expect similar patterns in vigilante’s profiles of judgment and volition. Rather than judging it good for others to attain epistemic goods, they will characteristically judge it good for others to share their own views; and rather than being motivated to promote others attaining knowledge or understanding, they will be characteristically motivated to bring it about that others agree with them. These differences with the intellectually benevolent person are again borne out by the items used to measure the construct. For example, there is an item, “If everyone saw things the way that I do, the world would be a better place,” which taps the vigilante’s judgment profile; there is no comparable item suggesting that the vigilante would judge the world a better place if others attained more epistemic goods independently of the vigilante’s role in producing them. In parallel fashion, the questionnaire includes the items “I need to win any argument about how people should live”, “I feel as if it is my duty to enlighten other people”, and “I feel a social obligation to voice my opinion” (ibid). These tap a motivation to influence others’ views with one’s own. But there are not comparable items tapping a motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods independently of doing so by impressing upon them one’s own views.

Observing these significant differences between social vigilantism and intellectual benevolence leads me to a more general conclusion. While there are some vices, such as epistemic malevolence or haughtiness, that are so strongly opposed to intellectual benevolence that it is hard to imagine their possessors mistakenly thinking of themselves as intellectually benevolent people, other vices such as social vigilantism are different. The social vigilante, and perhaps also people who possess a variety of arrogance or vanity that leads them to promote some epistemic goods for others, may be deluded into thinking that they are behaving benevolently. These vices may be especially difficult for their possessors to detect; they maybe “stealthy,” to borrow a term from Quassim Cassam (2019). Yet, there remain significant differences between the cognitive, affective, and volitional profiles of the intellectually benevolent person and those who possess these vices. The better we can sort between these profiles, the better we will be able to sort those who possess these vices from the intellectually benevolent.

One final intellectual vice that can be contrasted with intellectual benevolence I will call epistemic subservience. As I am conceiving of it, it is the mirror opposite of the kind of selfish ambition and haughtiness described by Roberts and Wood. Rather than being consumed by their own epistemic goods to the neglect of others’ epistemic goods, the epistemically subservient person tends to become consumed with others’ epistemic goods to the neglect of their own. They are so strongly motivated to promote others’ epistemic goods that they neglect their own self-development. They habitually enter into patterns of self-destructive behavior out of a concern to secure epistemic benefits for others. They are not epistemically others-centered in the potentially virtuous sense described above, but excessively concerned for others’ epistemic goods to a neglect of their own goods.

As in the case of social vigilantism, here again we may at first glance think that there is a good bit in common between the intellectually benevolent person and the epistemically subservient person. It would seem that they are both likely to judge others’ epistemic goods to be valuable, to take pleasure in others’ attaining epistemic goods, and to be motivated to promote others’ epistemic goods. Yet, again, I contend that when we look closely, we will see that the cognitive, affective, and volitional profile of the epistemically subservient person will diverge from that of the intellectually benevolent person.

Begin again with the affective profile. The intellectually benevolent person is positively affectively oriented toward others’ epistemic goods and negatively affectively oriented toward others’ epistemic bads. How about the epistemically subservient person? I suggest that, like the vigilante, what they will distinctively take pleasure in is their promoting of others’ epistemic goods, rather than the attaining of these goods *per se*. Their personality is such that they, like the vigilante, have developed a need that promoting others’ epistemic goods can satisfy. Their need is different from that of the vigilante. They don’t need others to conform to their views for the need to be satisfied. Yet, they do need to benefit others for the need to be satisfied. They may even need to expend themselves in the service of furthering others’ epistemic goods to feel at ease. This affective profile is not part of the affective profile of the intellectually benevolent person, who is affectively oriented toward others’ epistemic goods for their own sake, regardless of whether the attainment of these goods requires expending themselves to the point of self-harm.

Similar comments apply to the cognitive and volitional profile of the epistemically subservient. The subservient person is likely to judge it valuable for them to be involved in promoting others’ epistemic goods, perhaps especially where doing so threatens their own well-being to some extent. They are likely to be motivated to hide in the shadows while others benefit from their intellectual labor. They are motivated to abandon their own good in pursuit of promoting others’ epistemic goods. These are not the same as the cognitive and volitional profiles of the intellectually benevolent person. The latter judges the attainment of others’ epistemic goods to be valuable—perhaps as valuable as their own, though not moreso. They judge this attainment to be valuable independently from whether it is promoted by their own activity, and independently from whether this activity is extremely self-sacrificial. Likewise, they are motivated to promote others’ epistemic goods for its own sake, and not for the sake of endangering their well-being in service to others. There may be many cases where promoting others’ epistemic goods does little to threaten a person’s own well-being. It can be expected that in such cases the intellectually benevolent will be motivated to promote the other’s epistemic goods; this can’t be comparably expected from the epistemically subservient.

Intellectual benevolence contrasts with a range of opposing vices, all of which differ significantly from it in their cognitive, affective, and volitional profiles. Some intellectual vices are opposed to intellectual benevolence because they involve deficient motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods. These include haughtiness and some forms of intellectual arrogance or selfish ambition. Other intellectual vices involve a motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods that is in some way defective. These include some forms of intellectual arrogance, as well as social vigilantism and what I have called epistemic subservience. In contrast with these vices, the virtue of intellectual benevolence is an integrated psychological orientation favoring others’ epistemic goods and disfavoring their epistemic bads that is neither deficient nor defective.

1. Measuring Intellectual Benevolence

References

Baehr, Jason. 2010. “Epistemic Malevolence.” 41, 1: 189-213.

Baehr, Jason. 2011. *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Battaly, Heather. 2019. “A Third Kind of Intellectual Virtue: Personalism.” In *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Heather Battaly, 115-27. New York: Routledge.

Byerly, T. Ryan. 2019. *Putting Others First: The Christian Ideal of Others-Centeredness.* New York: Routledge.

Cassam, Quassim. 2019. *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Habashi, Meara, William Graziano, and Ann Hoover. 2016. “Searching for the Prosocial Personality: A Big Five Approach to Linking Personality and Prosocial Behavior.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 42, 9: 1177-92.

McCabe, K. O., N. W. Van Yperen, A. J. Elliot, and M. Verbraak. 2013. “Big Five Personality Profiles of Context-specific Achievement Goals.” *Journal of Research in Personality* 47: 698-707.

Miller, Christian. 2018. “Generosity: A Preliminary Account of a Surprisingly Neglected Virtue.” *Metaphilosophy* 49, 3: 216-45.

Montmarquet, James. 1992. “Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility.” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 29, 4: 331-41.

Peterson, Christopher and Martin Seligman. 2004. *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rhee, Y. W., & Choi, J. N. 2017. “Knowledge Management Behavior and Individual Creativity: Goal Orientations as Antecedents and In-group Social Status as Moderating Contingency.” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 38, 6: 813–832.

Roberts, Robert and Jay Wood. 2007. *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Russell, Daniel. 2009. *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Saucier, DA and RJ Webster. 2010. “Social Vigilantism: Measuring Individual Differences in Belief Superiority and Resistance to Persuasion.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36, 1: 19-32.

Tanesini, Alessandra. 2018. “Arrogance, Anger and Debate.” *Symposion: Theoretical and Applied Inquiries in Philosophy and Social Sciences* 5, 2: 213-27.

Williams, Bernard. 2002. *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zagzebski, Linda. 1996. *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

1. For a helpful, brief survey of these and other dividing lines among epistemologists of intellectual character, see (Battaly 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)