CHAPTER TWO

The Virtues of Intellectual Dependability

Chapter One concluded by directing our attention toward a supposed subset of intellectual virtues distinctively concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries—a subset of virtues I called the “virtues of intellectual dependability”. I argued that if such virtues exist, they make a distinctive contribution toward the ideal of intellectual dependability, insofar as they are distinctively concerned with that with which this ideal itself is also distinctively concerned. The ideal of the intellectually dependable person, we saw, is the ideal of a person on whom others can depend as a fellow inquirer in their inquiries. As such, being an intellectually dependable person is distinctively a matter of functioning excellently in those contexts in which others depend on one to aid them in achieving epistemic goods in their inquiries. Since the virtues of intellectual dependability, if they exist, are distinctively concerned precisely with aiding others to achieve epistemic goods in their inquiries, these virtues, if they exist, are distinctively concerned with that with which the ideal of intellectual dependability itself is concerned.

The present chapter attends to the case for thinking that there indeed is a subclass of virtues of intellectual dependability within the broader category of intellectual virtues. I will argue that there is a group of several intellectual virtues each of which is focally concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries in ways that other intellectual virtues are not. The remainder of this book will be devoted to investigating the educational significance of this group of virtues, and to investigating the nature and measurement of several candidates for such traits.

I begin this chapter by identifying several initially attractive candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability, along with several initially attractive candidates for intellectual virtues that are not virtues of intellectual dependability. I demonstrate, further, that in the growing philosophical literature devoted to examining individual intellectual virtues, there has been very little attention given to candidates of the first type in contrast to candidates of the second type. In Section 2, I identify a view which, if correct, would justify this lack of attention to virtues of intellectual dependability. Indeed, the view would justify a complete lack of attention to such virtues, since according to the view there are no virtues of intellectual dependability; rather, all intellectual virtues are instead equally other-regarding. While I do not claim that this view in fact explains the inattention given to good candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability, I show how authors in the literature on intellectual virtues have tended to stress the way in which all intellectual virtues are other-regarding in a way that appears to equalize the intellectual virtues in this regard rather than singling out one subclass as distinctively other-regarding. I show how the work of these authors can be read as presenting a challenge for the view that there are virtues of intellectual dependability distinctively concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. In Section 3, I respond to this challenge, explaining in what sense I think the virtues of intellectual dependability are distinctively concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries, and defending this proposal against two salient objections. What emerges from the chapter, accordingly, is a defense of the idea that not all intellectual virtues are equally other-regarding, but instead there is a subclass of distinctively other-regarding intellectual virtues—the virtues of intellectual dependability—which has been especially neglected in contemporary treatments of intellectual virtues. A focused treatment of these virtues within an examination of the ideal of intellectual dependability is thereby justified.

1. Sparse Attention to Candidate Virtues of Intellectual Dependability

One of the major growth areas within contemporary virtue epistemology over the last decade has been the attention given to individual intellectual virtues. Book chapters and journal articles devoted to examining the nature and value of specific intellectual virtues appear to proliferate indefinitely. There is also detectable a growing interest in producing written materials devoted to these individual traits for educational purposes—an interest to which we will return in Chapter Three. Yet, as I wish to demonstrate in the present section, remarkably little attention within this growing body of literature has been devoted to intellectual virtues that are good candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability.

To fix our gaze on intellectual virtues that are good candidates for being virtues of intellectual dependability, I will briefly introduce each of the five traits that will be the focus of lengthier discussion in later chapters of this book. First, intellectual benevolence, like benevolence generally, is a refined motivation to promote others’ goods for its own sake. Yet, what makes it distinctively intellectual benevolence is that the goods with which it is concerned are distinctively epistemic goods. The intellectually benevolent person has a stable and refined motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. Next is intellectual transparency. This is a tendency to share one’s own perspective with other inquirers in order to enhance the quality of their inquiries. Sometimes this tendency is manifested in testifying to target propositions of inquiry, and sometimes by sharing evidence bearing on the other’s inquiry that doesn’t license such testimony. A third candidate trait is communicative clarity. This is a tendency concerned with eliminating or resolving sources of confusion in one’s communications to others. The clear communicator regulates their communications in these ways so that the recipients of their communications may better achieve epistemic goods. A fourth candidate virtue is sensitivity to one’s audience. The person characterized by this trait regulates their communications in light of the distinctive intellectual interests, needs, views, abilities, and tendencies of their audience in order to best advance the audience’s achievement of epistemic goods. A final candidate is epistemic guidance, a tendency to aid others in making good decisions in the dynamic conduct of their inquiries out of a motivation to promote their epistemic goods.

The five aforementioned traits all appear to be good candidates for being virtues of intellectual dependability—virtues distinctively concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. The paradigmatic manifestations that come to mind for these traits are all behaviors in which the trait’s possessor aims to promote some epistemic good in another’s inquiry. The clear communicator, for example, might carefully define terms so that recipients of their communication do not become confused, or the epistemic guide may flag another’s process of inquiry as having employed an unreliable method so as to offer a helpful corrective to this other. Indeed, the traits are all explicitly defined with reference to a common motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods, and they are not explicitly defined with reference to a motivation to promote epistemic goods in the possessor’s own inquiries. In these ways, these virtues appear to be focally concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries.

Many other intellectual virtues do not appear to be equally good candidates for being virtues of intellectual dependability. Paradigmatic manifestations that come to mind of these traits don’t, or needn’t, involve aiming to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. The traits do not seem to require being defined in terms of motivations to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. I have in mind, for example, such candidate virtues as intellectual courage, intellectual cautiousness, intellectual thoroughness, intellectual autonomy, and open-mindedness. Intellectual courage, by way of illustration, is typically defined in terms of a disposition to overcome fears in the pursuit of epistemic goods (cf. King 2014). It might be exemplified, for example, where a person overcomes a fear of being embarrassed to ask a question that will enable them to gain knowledge. Open-mindedness, similarly, is typically defined in terms of a tendency to seriously engage with alternative perspectives on a topic of inquiry (cf. Baehr 2009). It may be exemplified, for example, when a person gives a fair hearing to each of several competing views on a focal topic of inquiry, so as to enhance their chances of getting to the truth. What is important to notice here is that, at least at first glance, these intellectual virtues do not appear to be focally concerned with promoting others’ epistemic goods in the way the traits identified two paragraphs above do. As such, the former traits are prima facie good candidates for being virtues of intellectual dependability distinctively concerned with promoting others’ epistemic goods.

It is noteworthy that in the growing philosophical literature devoted to examining individual intellectual virtues, the vast majority of virtues examined appear to fit in the second category above rather than the first. The vast majority are not good candidates for being virtues of intellectual dependability. For example, consider Robert Roberts’ and Jay Wood’s book *Intellectual Virtues* (2007), one of the earliest texts to offer a detailed treatment of several intellectual virtues. They include chapters devoted to eight virtues: love of knowledge, firmness, courage and caution, humility, autonomy, generosity, and practical wisdom. Of these, I would suggest that only intellectual generosity is a good candidate for being a virtue of intellectual dependability. Or consider Jason Baehr’s (2011) approach to classifying the intellectual virtues in terms of the inquiry-relevant challenge with which they are concerned. Baehr discusses groupings of virtues that are distinctively concerned with enabling their possessor to overcome challenges pertaining to initial motivation, sufficient and proper focusing, consistency in evaluation, intellectual integrity, mental flexibility, and endurance. In his recent pedagogically-oriented book, *Cultivating Good Minds* (2015), he continues to use a similar classificatory scheme, devoting attention to nine intellectual virtues: curiosity, intellectual autonomy, intellectual humility, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and intellectual tenacity. I would suggest that none of these is a good candidate for being a virtue of intellectual dependability. Indeed, we might worry that Baehr’s classificatory system, if insisted upon, would threaten to define virtues of intellectual dependability out of existence.

Another pedagogically-focused text is Philip Dow’s *Virtuous Minds* (2013). Dow examines seven intellectual virtues: intellectual courage, intellectual carefulness, intellectual tenacity, intellectual fair-mindedness, intellectual curiosity, intellectual honesty, and intellectual humility. Of these, I would suggest that only intellectual honesty is a good candidate for a virtue of intellectual dependability. In fact, however, it is not consistently treated as such by Dow, who sometimes writes as if this virtue as he understands it is primarily a matter of being adequately motivated to get to the truth for oneself, rather than a matter of sharing one’s cognitive position with others (cf. here Carr 2014). Or, finally, consider a recent scholarly collection on virtue epistemology edited by Heather Battaly (2019), which contains chapters devoted to the following twelve virtues: open-mindedness, curiosity and inquisitiveness, creativity, intellectual humility, epistemic autonomy, deference, skepticism, epistemic justice, epistemic courage, intellectual perseverance, and understanding. Of these, it would be a stretch to claim there is any that is focally concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. We find then in these cases little to no attention being given to good candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability.

Of course, some readers may wish to challenge my judgments regarding which of these intellectual virtues is or is not a good candidate for being a virtue of intellectual dependability. I will not insist at length on my proposed judgments here. I will simply note that even those who would make a higher estimate than I have of how many good candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability there are in these lists are still bound to make an estimate that represents a very low percentage of the total number of traits attended to.

The lack of attention given to good candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability that we find in these books containing several chapters on distinct individual virtues is not out of step with what is to be found in journal articles devoted to individual intellectual virtues or in books with fewer chapters devoted to intellectual virtues. The focus, whether in journal articles or in edited collections or monographs or even pedagogical resources, is overwhelmingly on intellectual virtues that are not good candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability. In fact, in some cases, we find extended treatments of intellectual virtues that we might have thought could be treated as virtues of intellectual dependability, but they are not treated in this way. This is true, for example, of the virtues of epistemic justice (Fricker 2007) and epistemic care (Dalmiya 2016). The former tend to be treated as dispositions governing how one interprets others’ communications, which may benefit others (e.g., by showing others appropriate respect), but they are not distinctively concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries any more than they are with promoting epistemic goods in one’s own inquiries. The latter is conceptualized as a virtue of being careful, which is being self-reflexive, “looping back to investigate whether we have investigated enough and adequately, and the readiness to change our conclusions (22),” which again is not distinctively concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries.[[1]](#endnote-1) Even in those rare instances in which a virtue is treated as distinctively concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries, as in the case of Roberts and Wood’s treatment of intellectual generosity, the trait is not presented as one of several traits distinctively concerned with this aim and as such uniquely contributing toward an ideal of intellectual dependability.

Thus, what we can take away from this section is that if there are virtues of intellectual dependability, then an extended treatment of them would make an important contribution to the growing enterprise of philosophical research on individual intellectual virtues. Such a treatment would help to fill a lacuna within this research area—one the importance of which mirrors the importance of the ideal of intellectual dependability itself. Insofar as this ideal is a valuable object of study, and insofar as the supposed virtues of intellectual dependability uniquely contribute toward this ideal but have not been given sustained attention within contemporary virtue epistemology, a work of virtue epistemology focused upon them would appear justified—if these virtues indeed exist.

1. The Virtues of Intellectual Dependability: A Challenge

It is natural to wonder why philosophers researching individual intellectual virtues have given so little attention to good candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability. Why is it that, despite the surging growth of interest in this area of scholarship, research has not expanded to include a larger number of extended treatments of good candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability? My primary purpose in this section is to identify a view which, if true, would justify this lack of attention. Indeed, if true, it would justify a complete lack of attention to virtues of intellectual dependability. For according to the view I will discuss, there are no virtues of intellectual dependability. This is because all intellectual virtues are equally concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries; there is no distinct subclass of intellectual virtues specially concerned with this task.

I do not claim that this view in fact explains the inattention given to virtues of intellectual dependability. However, I will illustrate how some authors in the literature on intellectual virtues have tended to affirm the other-regarding nature of all intellectual virtues in a way that appears to equalize them in this respect, giving the impression that these authors may be sympathetic toward the view discussed here. I will show, moreover, how these authors’ comments could at least be taken to provide a challenge for those who would dispute the view here under discussion. My purpose in the next section will be to respond to this challenge.

My own take with respect to the question of why little attention has been given to good candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability is that there are multiple, non-exclusive potential sources of explanation for this, several of which are broadly sociological. Perhaps the most powerful source is simply the influence of traditional epistemology with its focus on the epistemic achievements of the individual inquirer (see Kvanvig 1991). Philosophers offering detailed accounts of individual intellectual virtues have often exhibited a concern to justify their project to traditional epistemologists (e.g., Baehr 2011, Roberts and Wood 2007, Zagzebski 1996). It may be that because of this orientation virtue epistemologists have tended to focus largely on intellectual virtues that are focally concerned with enhancing the quality of their possessor’s inquiries rather than the inquiries of the possessor’s fellow inquirers. Another potential source of explanation is the idea that virtues focally concerned with enhancing the quality of the possessor’s own inquiries are likely to be more commonly achieved than virtues of intellectual dependability (cf. Kawall 2002). Perhaps philosophers have simply been showing a preference to examine first those intellectual virtues most likely to touch the lives of the greatest number of people. And besides these potential sources there are likely several others.

It is clearer what has *not* led to this inattention than what has led to it. In particular, it is clear that virtue epistemologists have not failed to attend to virtues of intellectual dependability because they think intellectual virtues cannot be other-regarding. To the contrary, with the exception of Julia Driver (2003), most every philosopher who has recently addressed the question of whether intellectual virtues can be other-regarding has answered affirmatively. James Montmarquet, an early advocate for responsibilist virtue epistemology, maintained that one of the most important classes of intellectual virtues was the class of “virtues of impartiality,” a class “necessary to sustain an intellectual *community*,” which included such traits as “the willingness to exchange ideas with and learn from” others (1987: 484).Roberts and Wood, as we saw, often write as if they conceptualize intellectual generosity as an intellectual virtue focally concerned with promoting excellence in others’ inquiries. They say in summarizing their chapter on the trait, “We have seen that this virtue is a glad willingness to give intellectual goods . . . to others” (2007: 304). Jason Baehr straightforwardly maintains that “intellectual virtues can, as such, be oriented toward the epistemic good or well-being of *others*—they can be aimed at others’ acquisition or share in the epistemic goods” (2011: 216, emphasis original). Heather Battaly similarly writes that “Intellectual virtues can be other-regarding” (2014: 84). And Nathan King clearly conceptualizes intellectual virtues in such a way that they can have other-regarding expressions, describing intellectual virtues as “traits of excellent cognitive character involving a motivation for acquiring, maintaining, or *distributing* intellectual goods” (2014: 3504, emphasis added).

This widespread agreement that intellectual virtues can be other-regarding of course only makes more puzzling the inattention to virtues of intellectual dependability. If it is happily granted, or even stressed, that intellectual virtues can be other-regarding, why not attend to those intellectual virtues that are distinctively other-regarding? The view that is my focus here would provide a principled justification for not doing so—one not subject to the contingencies to which the sociological explanations referenced above are subject. According to this view, all intellectual virtues are equally other-regarding. As such, there are no virtues of intellectual dependability—no virtues distinctively concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. Such a view obviously poses a serious threat to devoting extended scholarly attention to virtues of intellectual dependability, regardless of the contingent interests of the audiences of this scholarship. And while it is not my claim here that this view has in fact been a primary source of the inattention given to good candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability, the proposal is not without some merit. For we can detect within the writings of several contributors to the literature on intellectual virtues a tendency to stress the other-regarding character of all intellectual virtues in a way that appears to equalize intellectual virtues with respect to their other-regarding character. Some of the comments these authors make in exhibiting this equalizing tendency, moreover, could be employed to construct a challenge for denying the view—a challenge to which I will respond in the next section.

A prime example of this equalizing tendency is detectable in Jason Baehr’s (2011) excellent discussion of the distinction between moral and intellectual virtues. Baehr defends the conclusion that the intellectual virtues are a subset of the moral virtues, while also contending that a person can possess an intellectual virtue without thereby possessing a moral virtue. As part of his discussion, Baehr engages with Jason Kawall’s (2002) work calling for virtue epistemologists to devote attention to what he calls “other-regarding epistemic virtues”—a call that has much in common with the call to examine virtues of intellectual dependability given here. Baehr cites approvingly Kawall’s point that intellectual character traits appropriately aimed at epistemic goods can be virtues whether the epistemic goods toward which they aim are the possessor’s own or someone else’s. But, where Baehr “take[s] some issue with Kawall’s otherwise very good treatment” of intellectual virtues is with Kawall’s proposal that there is “a self/others-regarding distinction among intellectual virtues themselves” (2011: Appendix, fn.25). In what he takes to be opposition to such a distinction, Baehr instead repeatedly claims that “all intellectual virtues have an others-regarding dimension” (218). For Baehr, any intellectual virtue possessed “in its fullness,” or “maximally or perfectly” will have an others-regarding dimension” (ibid).

Baehr’s view that any intellectual virtue possessed in its fullness has an others-regarding dimension holds the key to his defense of the two conclusions with which he is concerned. He takes moral virtues to be by definition virtues that are other-regarding. For this reason, it follows that intellectual virtues are a subset of the moral virtues, given that in their fullness they have other-regarding dimensions. On the other hand, Baehr’s reasoning in defense of the conclusion that not every token of an intellectual virtue is a token of a moral virtue also appeals to this idea about fullness. The reason why not every token intellectual virtue is a moral virtue is “because, to possess an intellectual virtue V, one need not possess the full or complete range of motivational states proper to V, including any others-regarding motives” (2011: 218). One can possess intellectual virtues less than fully, and when this happens one may thereby possess intellectual virtues without possessing moral virtues.

Now, nowhere in this discussion does Baehr come right out and explicitly affirm that all intellectual virtues are equally other-regarding. Yet, the way in which his comments about the other-regarding dimensions of intellectual virtues are applied without distinction across the entire domain of intellectual virtues yields a highly equalizing impression. It gives the impression that the intellectual virtues are on par with respect to their other-regarding character. All are such that it is in their fullness and only in their fullness that they are other-regarding. All are such that possessing them does not require possessing the full range of motivation states proper to them, including any other-regarding motives. All can be directed toward promoting others’ epistemic goods, but needn’t be. All can be possessed without the possessor thereby possessing a moral virtue. Thus there is no justification for drawing a distinction among categories of intellectual virtues on the basis of the way or extent to which they are others-regarding, as Kawall had proposed.

Similarly equalizing characterizations of the other-regarding dimensions of intellectual virtues can be found elsewhere. For example, Heather Battaly (2014), in her shorter discussion of the distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, discusses the equalizing aspects of Baehr’s view we have just noted and leaves them unchallenged despite challenging other aspects of Baehr’s views. According to her reconstruction of Baehr’s view,

Baehr contends that since all intellectual virtues *can* aim at goods for others, they are a subset of the moral virtues. However, he also argues that intellectual virtues *need not* aim at goods for others. One can possess intellectual virtues when one aims at knowledge or truth for oneself. (186)

The slippage from “all intellectual virtues” in the first sentence to “intellectual virtues” in the second and third sentences is interesting. Are we to read these latter sentences as suggesting that *no* intellectual virtues need aim at goods for others, and that one can possess just any intellectual virtue without aiming at epistemic goods for others? Affirmative answers would pose a threat to the existence of the virtues of intellectual dependability, if part of what makes them distinctively other-regarding is—as suggested in the previous section—that they do require a motivation to promote epistemic goods for others. Yet, regardless of the correct answers to these interpretive questions, it is clear that comments about the other-regarding character of intellectual virtues are again being made without distinguishing how this other-regarding character might differ across categories of intellectual virtues. In explaining but not objecting to this view while objecting to other aspects of Baehr’s view, Battaly might be read as giving the impression that she does not object to this tendency to equalize the other-regarding dimensions of intellectual virtues.

A third example comes from Nathan King. As we saw above, King characterizes the intellectual virtues, as a group, as “traits of excellent cognitive character involving a motivation for acquiring, maintaining, or distributing intellectual goods” (2014: 3504). While King doesn’t explicitly address the question of whether there are some virtues distinctively concerned with acquiring intellectual goods, others distinctively concerned with maintaining them, and others distinctively concerned with distributing them, his discussion may give readers the impression that he does not think this is the case. When it comes to the particular virtue of intellectual perseverance that is the focus of his essay, King certainly doesn’t emphasize any one of these motivations as more important than any of the others. For A to possess intellectually virtuous perseverance is for A to be “disposed to continue in A’s intellectual endeavors for an appropriate amount of time, with serious effort, in the pursuit of intellectual goods, and despite the presence of obstacles to A’s *acquiring, maintaining, or disseminating these goods*” (3507, emphasis added). Indeed, King claims explicitly that “it would be a mistake to think that the pursuit of as-yet-undiscovered truth is *necessary* for the exercise of intellectually virtuous perseverance”. Instead, in some cases “perseverance is expressed in the *maintenance*, or *dissemination* of already achieved epistemic goods” (3514, emaphsis original).

In each of these cases, it is tempting to form the impression that the author thinks that all intellectual virtues are equally other-regarding. At the very least, the authors do not express approval for the view that there is a distinction to be made between intellectual virtues that are distinctively other-regarding and intellectual virtues that are not, in contexts in which such an expression might have been expected. Moreover, a strategy can be detected from within these writings for defending the view that all intellectual virtues are equally other-regarding, whether the authors would themselves advance this strategy or not. The strategy is to illustrate how even paradigmatic cases of intellectual virtues that are not good candidates for being virtues of intellectual dependability have other-regarding dimensions when possessed in their fullness. Baehr, for example, argues that such virtues as curiosity and intellectual integrity are like this, while King argues that perseverance is like this. This fact that even good candidates for intellectual virtues that are not virtues of intellectual dependability have other-regarding dimensions poses a challenge for the view that there are virtues of intellectual dependability. If all intellectual virtues in their fullness do have other-regarding dimensions, then there can be no simple distinction between intellectual virtues that are other-regarding and intellectual virtues that are not. So, if there is to be a distinction between intellectual virtues on the basis of their other-regarding character, then the distinction must be drawn in some other way. The challenge is to identify what this other way would be. The challenge is to explain in what respect virtues of intellectual dependability are distinctively other-regarding, where this way in which they are distinctively other-regarding is sufficiently robust to justify giving special attention to them within a treatment of the ideal of intellectual dependability. In what robust way, then, are the virtues of intellectual dependability distinctively concerned with promoting epistemic goods in others’ inquiries?

1. The Distinctiveness of Virtues of Intellectual Dependability

The work of the present chapter has led to a crescendo in which they key question which has arisen is whether there is a way to mark off the virtues of intellectual dependability as distinctively other-regarding in comparison to other intellectual virtues. In this section I face this question head on. I begin by developing a proposal for how to differentiate the virtues of intellectual dependability from other intellectual virtues with respect to their other-regarding character and explaining how this way of differentiating them provides a justification for giving them focused attention within an examination of the ideal of intellectual dependability. I then respond to two objections to my approach to differentiating these virtues from others on the basis of their other-regarding character.

3.1 The Virtues of Intellectual Dependability Require Other-Regarding Motives

My proposal is that what sets the virtues of intellectual dependability apart from other intellectual virtues is that they require other-regarding motivations for their possession. More specifically, possessing any virtue of intellectual dependability will require a motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. Indeed, it will require a motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries for its own sake. To be clear, the proposal is that such a motivation is required for the *mere* possession of these virtues—not just for their full or complete or perfect possession, as may be the case with other intellectual virtues, following Baehr’s proposal discussed in the previous section. To possess the virtues of intellectual benevolence or intellectual transparency or communicative clarity *simpliciter* requires a motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries.

This motivational requirement is not a feature alien to the virtues of intellectual dependability; it is not an independent quality of those who possess these virtues. Rather it is partly constitutive of these virtues. It shapes them. Those who possess these virtues have the tendencies characteristic of these traits *out of* a motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries (cf. here Baehr 2011: 103, Montmarquet 1987: 484, Zagzebski 1996: 269). The clear communicator, for example, is disposed to resolve sources of confusion in their communications out ofa motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods.

Now, if the virtues of intellectual dependability do, as I’m proposing, distinctively require for their possession motivations to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries, and if moreover they must be possessed out of such a motivation, then there is a sense in which these traits are conceptually central to the ideal of intellectual dependability—more central than are other intellectual virtues. For that with which the ideal of intellectual dependability is distinctively concerned—promoting others’ epistemic goods—is also that with which these intellectual virtues are distinctively concerned.

To flesh out this idea a bit, we might contrast the ideal of the intellectually dependable person with other relevant epistemic ideals, such as the ideal autonomous inquirer or the ideal dependent inquirer. Just as the ideal of the intellectually dependable person can be defined with reference to excellent functioning when one is depended upon by fellow inquirers, the ideal autonomous inquirer and the ideal dependent inquirer can be defined with reference to excellent functioning in fulfilling a particular role in inquiry. For the ideal dependent inquirer, that role is the role of inquiring when one is dependent in one’s inquiry on fellow inquirers. The ideal dependent inquirer is the inquirer who tends to function excellently as an inquirer when depending in their inquiries on fellow inquirers. For the ideal autonomous inquirer, the relevant role is that of inquiring when one is neither depended upon by fellow inquirers nor dependent upon them. The autonomous inquirer is, in terms of the work of inquiry, functioning alone. The ideal autonomous inquirer is the inquirer who tends to function excellently as an inquirer when neither depended upon by nor dependent upon fellow inquirers.

Now it should be clear that these ideals are not identical to one another. Fulfilling one of them is not the same thing as fulfilling others of them. One might tend to perform very well as an inquirer when depending on others in one’s inquiries, but not tend to perform very well when inquiring by oneself or when being depended upon by fellow inquirers in their inquiries. This is so despite the fact that there may be much overlap between the ideals. For example, much of what may make a person better as an autonomous inquirer may also make them better as a dependent inquirer or as a dependable member of the community of inquiry. Despite such overlap, it is plausible that in the case of each ideal there will be intellectual motivations and intellectual character traits distinctive of the ideal. For example, we might think that the intellectual motivations characteristic of the ideal dependent inquirer include the motivation to enhance the quality of one’s inquiries via dependence on others. Such a person seeks to get as much out of others’ contributions to their inquiries as they can. Out of such a motivation, we might expect a person to adopt such tendencies as the tendency to interpret others’ communications charitably, to empathetically reconstruct others’ total perspectives, and to trust others’ conscientious attempts at inquiry. These character traits, when suitably regulated by the appropriate motivation, are themselves virtues distinctive of the ideal dependent inquirer; they are virtues most proper or fitting of this ideal. Notably, philosophers interested in the excellent functioning of dependent inquirers have indeed given some attention to such features of dependent inquirers—considerably more than they have given to features that distinctively contribute toward the excellence of those who are depended upon. We saw earlier that the virtues of epistemic justice and epistemic care have been conceived of in this way, and virtues of trust (e.g., Zagzebski 2012), charity (King and Garcia 2015), empathy (Linker 2011), and deference (Ahlstrom-Vij 2018) have been as well, as has the virtuous handling of others’ testimony more generally (Robertson 2015).

When we turn to the ideal of the intellectually dependable person, it is plausible that their distinctive intellectual motivation is the other-regarding motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. For, if being ideally intellectual dependable requires any motivations at all not required by the other epistemic ideals, it is this motivation. And it is indeed plausible, as already suggested briefly in Chapter One, that being ideally intellectually dependable does require such a motivation. Such a motivation would, for example, regulate in a valuable way those behaviors characteristically exhibited by those who are intellectually dependable, such as sharing one’s perspective or flagging valuable or disvaluable features of the dependent inquirer’s inquiry. These behaviors would be engaged in out of a motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods, rather than, for example, a motivation to win arguments, make oneself appear dialectically superior, or sway others to one’s own manner of thinking independently of promoting what is good for them epistemically. As these cases illustrate, regulating one’s conduct when depended upon in accordance with a motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods enhances one’s intellectual dependability beyond what is achieved when such conduct is regulated by rival motivations.

Moreover, such a motivation would not only shape tendencies to display such behaviors individually, but would unite any tendencies a person had to display such behaviors into a coherent whole. The person in whom any dispositions to engage in behaviors characteristic of the intellectually dependable person are each regulated by the motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries possesses a unified and therefore more stable set of dispositions than does the person in whom such dispositions are possessed in a piecemeal fashion. This person has a coherent and integrated psyche insofar as their dispositions toward dependent inquirers is concerned. Given its value in shaping a person’s dispositions toward dependent inquirers both individually and collectively, the motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods appears to be required by the ideal of intellectual dependability—and so distinctively required by it.

Whereas the motivation distinctive of the ideal of intellectual dependability is the motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries, the intellectual virtues distinctive of this ideal are the virtues of intellectual dependability—virtues such as intellectual transparency, communicative clarity, and epistemic guidance. Just as intellectual virtues such as interpretive charity or epistemic trust are plausibly distinctive of the ideal of the dependent inquirer, these virtues of intellectual dependability are distinctive of the intellectually dependable person. They are the intellectual virtues most proper or fitting of the intellectually dependable person. We might think of the virtues of intellectual dependability as those intellectual virtues which, in addition to the virtues most proper or fitting of the ideals of the autonomous inquirer and the dependent inquirer, are required in order for a person to reach the ideal of intellectual dependability. Possessing these virtues isn’t necessary for reaching the ideals of autonomous inquiry or dependent inquiry, but it is necessary for reaching the ideal of intellectual dependability. The virtues of intellectual dependability are distinctive of this ideal.

An attractive story about what makes particular subsets of intellectual virtues distinctive of particular epistemic ideals is that these virtues are those that must be possessed out of the motivations distinctive of the respective ideal. At least this is a tempting story in the case of the virtues distinctive of the ideals of intellectual dependence and intellectual dependability. Traits such as interpretive charity and epistemic trust are virtues only insofar as they are possessed out of the motivations distinctive of ideal intellectual dependence. Likewise, traits such as communicative clarity and audience sensitivity are virtues only insofar as they are possessed out of the motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. Whereas virtues not distinctive of these ideals may or may not be possessed out of the motivations distinctive of these ideals, the virtues distinctive of the ideals must be possessed out of these motivations. For example, whereas intellectual perseverance, at least in its complete or perfect form, may be possessed at least in part out of a motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries, communicative clarity cannot be possessed *simpliciter* without being possessed out of this motivation. In this way it and the other virtues of intellectual dependability are distinctive of intellectual dependability.

Given that the virtues of intellectual dependability are in this way distinctive of the ideal of intellectual dependability, they have a certain conceptual priority for purposes of investigating the ideal. If we wish to understand this ideal, we do well to attend to those features distinctive of it—to what sets it apart from other relevant ideals. What sets this ideal apart from other relevant ideals such as the ideal dependent inquirer or the ideal autonomous inquirer are the virtues distinctive of it as compared with these others. Investigating these virtues is therefore justified within an effort to understand the ideal. This is especially the case given that the virtues shared in common between this ideal and others have received the lion’s share of attention within contemporary philosophical research on intellectual virtues. Thus, if the virtues of intellectual dependability really are distinctive of the ideal of intellectual dependability—if they really must be possessed out of the motivation that is distinctive of this ideal—then extended treatment of them within an examination of this ideal is justified.

* 1. Objections

I’ve proposed that the virtues of intellectual dependability are distinctively other-regarding in the sense that they require for their possession the motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods for its own sake. In this section, I respond to two objections to this proposal.

According to the first objection, the so-called virtues of intellectual dependability, when correctly understood, turn out to be no different from other intellectual virtues in terms of their motivational requirements. Just like intellectual perseverance or curiosity, these virtues can be possessed *simpliciter* despite an absence of other-regarding motivations, and it is only in order to be possessed fully or completely that their possession requires other-regarding motivations. Like other intellectual virtues, these virtues have both self-regarding and other-regarding dimensions. Possession of their self-regarding dimensions suffices for possession of the traits; it is only full or perfect possession of the traits that requires possession of their other-regarding dimensions. So, the proposed approach to differentiating virtues of intellectual dependability from other virtues on the basis of their other-regarding character, despite its promise, fails.

Let’s see how the objection would work with some examples. According to the objection, communicative clarity is not as we might have thought exclusively a tendency to regulate one’s communications with others; it is also a tendency to regulate one’s communications to oneself. Likewise, intellectual transparency is equally a matter of sharing one’s cognitive perspective with oneself as it is a matter of sharing one’s cognitive perspective with others. And audience sensitivity is a matter of being sensitive to one’s own intellectual needs, interests, views, and abilities just as it is a matter of being sensitive to these features of others. According to the objection, when a person has the relevant self-regarding tendencies and motivations of any of these traits, this suffices for possession of the virtues, just as in cases of other intellectual virtues.

There may be a grain of truth to the objection, but I think it is largely mistaken. The grain of truth is that behaviors characteristic of the virtues of intellectual dependability can be displayed toward oneself with salutary effects. For various reasons people may face temptations to be less than honest with themselves or to block themselves off from accessing parts of their own cognitive perspective. In such cases, it may be salutary for their own inquiries if they behave in accordance with something like intellectual transparency toward themselves—if they are, as we might put it, intellectually self-transparent. Similarly, it is often important for purposes of regulating one’s own inquiries that one attends to various features of one’s inquiries, including the methods one has used, the views toward which one is inclined, and the abilities one has or doesn’t have. We might even grant that, in a sense, the way one communicates with oneself in thought should be guided by one’s sensitivity toward such features. In such a case, it seems like what is being recommended is along the lines of a sensitivity toward oneself as one’s audience. And similar things might be said about the value of communicating clearly with oneself.

Yet, even insofar as there is this grain of truth to the current objection, it does not suffice to threaten the proposed account of the difference between virtues of intellectual dependability and other virtues. Suppose we go so far as to grant that the virtues of intellectual dependability do have self-regarding dimensions. I propose that it remains plausible despite this concession to maintain that possessing these virtues requires possessing their other-regarding dimensions. For, the person who communicates clearly only with themselves is not thereby a clear communicator. Nor does a person have the virtue of being sensitive to their audience if the only audience toward whom they are sensitive is an audience of one. Nor is a person transparent who is only self-transparent. We might put it this way: the fact that one tends to communicate clearly to oneself or shares one’s perspective with oneself or displays sensitivity toward one’s own inquiry-relevant features does not imply that one is the sort of person who tends to communicate clearly, share one’s perspective, or display sensitivity to one’s audience. Whether one is a clear communicator, a transparent sharer of one’s perspective, or is sensitive toward one’s audience is too much a matter of how one regulates one’s conduct toward people other than oneself.

This response by itself would be sufficient to defend the present proposal against this first objection. Yet, I think we may be able to go even further in responding to this objection. For we needn’t grant that the virtues of intellectual dependability have self-regarding dimensions in the first place, at least not in the ideal inquirer. In the ideal inquirer, those self-regarding functions the objection highlights as appropriate for the virtues of intellectual dependability seem either unnecessary or more appropriately achieved via other virtues. For example, the function of being self-transparent seems unnecessary within the ideal inquirer, insofar as this function appears to assume a kind of divided self within the inquirer. Even the function of communicating clearly with oneself appears to assume such a division between a giver and recipient of communication within the self, when presumably within the ideal inquirer there is simply a thinker. Of course part of what makes this thinker an ideal inquirer is that their thinking is *clear* thinking, but such clear thinking is plausibly a matter of other intellectual virtues, such as thoroughness or cautiousness. Similarly, insofar as careful attention to one’s own inquiry-relevant features is appropriate in the ideal inquirer, this again seems to be an appropriate “job,” so to speak, of other intellectual virtues, such as intellectual humility (Whitcomb et al 2017) or vigilance (Roberts and West 2015). Thus, while the virtues of intellectual dependability might be directed toward the self of an unideal inquirer with salutary effects, their possession by the ideal inquirer appears to be entirely a matter of possessing their other-regarding dimensions.

Despite some truth to this first objection, then, the virtues of intellectual dependabilityare not just like all other intellectual virtues in that they can be possessed (albeit imperfectly) when their self-regarding dimensions are possessed and only fully possessed when their other-regarding dimensions are possessed. Within the ideal inquirer, they have no self-regarding dimensions; and, even in cases where tendencies characteristic of these virtues can be directed toward oneself with salutary effects, possessing these self-regarding tendencies does not suffice for possessing the virtues of intellectual dependability. Possessing the virtues of intellectual dependability distinctively requires possessing the motivation distinctive of intellectual dependability—the motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries.

A second objection to this proposal for distinguishing the virtues of intellectual dependability from other virtues doesn’t focus on their similarity to other intellectual virtues, but instead focuses on ways these traits might be possessed without being possessed out of the proposed motivation to benefit others’ inquiries. The basic idea is that the tendencies characteristic of the clear communicator or the communicator who is sensitive to their audience and so on can be possessed out of motivations other than the motivation to benefit others’ inquiries, and when they are the relevant traits are still possessed. Thus, possessing these tendencies out of the motivation to benefit others’ inquiries is not necessary for possessing the traits, as the proposal would have it.

Let us again attend to how the proposal would work with some specific examples. Take communicative clarity and audience sensitivity, since we’ve already begun commenting on them. We’ve seen that being a clear communicator is in part a matter of tending to regulate one’s communications in such a way as to enable one’s audience to resolve sources of confusion within these communications. A clear communicator, for example, might make relevant distinctions, define key terms, and organize their communications such that they are easy to follow. The idea of the present objection is that such tendencies needn’t be had out of a motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods. Instead, for example, a person might manifest such tendencies out of an aim to win people to their side in debates, or out of an aim to influence others’ views or behaviors, each of which may be independent of a motivation to benefit these others in their inquiries. Here we might even think of the skilled sophist or con-artist. If they wish to influence others effectively in the way they desire, they’ll need to communicate in a way that doesn’t render their audiences too confused to follow them. Indeed, more broadly, we might imagine the objector maintaining that clear communication is a skill that can be possessed out of a variety of motivations, not just the motivation to benefit others’ inquiries.

Similar comments are in store for audience sensitivity. Again, a sophist or con-artist is likely to be much more effective if they regulate their communications with their audiences in light of their understanding of distinctive features of their audiences. Knowing, for example, which objections might occur to an audience and which might not, or how the audience treats various sources of evidence, and regulating one’s communications to this audience in light of this knowledge is of benefit not only for those who aim to benefit their audience’s inquiries, but for those who aim to manipulate their audiences. Thus, being sensitive to one’s audience does not require the proposed motivation to benefit others’ inquiries.

As with the first objection, I think there’s a grain of truth to this objection, but again it fails to show that the virtues of intellectual dependability cannot be distinguished in terms of the characteristic motivation to benefit others’ inquiries. The grain of truth is that actions and tendencies overlapping significantly with the actions and tendencies characteristic of those who possess the virtues of intellectual dependability can be undertaken by people who are not motivated to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. As the examples illustrate, a person can employ clarifying definitions or selectively attend to objections on the basis of knowledge of their audience, or even tend to engage in such behaviors, out of motivations other than the motivation to benefit others’ inquiries. In fact, I go still further (so, perhaps there’s something more than a *grain* of truth to the objection): it may even be perfectly acceptable to grant that a person who has such tendencies possesses a trait of communicative clarity or audience sensitivity. We might appropriately describe such a person as a clear communicator or as someone who is sensitive to their audience.

What would not be correct, however, is to claim that such a person possesses the *virtue* of communicative clarity or the *virtue* of audience sensitivity. Following other recent virtue epistemologists (e.g., Battaly 2017, King 2014), I distinguish between possessing the *traits* of communicative clarity or audience sensitivity or intellectual transparency and so on from possessing the *virtues* of communicative clarity or audience sensitivity or intellectual transparency and so on. As suggested in the previous sub-section, it makes a difference which motivations regulate a person’s dispositions for inquiry. A disposition to regulate one’s communications in light of one’s understanding of one’s audience out of a motivation to persuade that audience is a very different thing from a disposition to regulate one’s communications in light of one’s understanding of one’s audience out of a motivation to promote that audience’s epistemic goods. Indeed, the difference here is precisely the sort of difference to make a difference for whether or not the trait in view is a virtue (cf. Hursthouse 1999:11). A disposition of the former sort is not one we admire, whereas a disposition of the latter sort is; it is people with dispositions of the latter sort rather than the former sort that we want to depend on. It is by virtue of possessing dispositions of the latter sort and not the former sort that a person reaches closer to the ideal of being an intellectually dependable person.

The motivations that regulate a person’s dispositions for inquiry not only make a difference for the abstract question of whether or not their traits are virtues; these motivations also make a difference for which behaviors a person will tend to exhibit across contexts. Compare for example a person in whom the tendency to resolve sources of confusion in their communications is regulated by a motivation to win arguments with a person in whom the tendency to resolve sources of confusion in their communications is regulated by a motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods. Imagine these people are in a situation in which they do not have firm views about a topic under discussion. The latter individual will still be disposed to resolve sources of confusion in communicating whatever unresolved perspective they have on the topic so as to improve their audience’s epistemic position. If the former individual’s disposition regulates their communications at all, it will only be because they have elected to defend a side on the issue which they don’t in fact endorse. These individuals will clearly be behaving quite differently. Indeed, more generally, we should expect that the former individual will engage in clarifying behaviors only when doing so suits their purposes of winning arguments, whereas the latter will do so when doing so suits their purpose of promoting others’ epistemic goods. In any circumstances in which engaging in clarifying behaviors would serve one of these purposes but not the other, or in which clarifying behaviors of a certain kind serve one purpose but not the other, we should expect these individuals to exhibit different behaviors. And a similar story can be told about the differences in behavior we might expect to be displayed by those who possess non-virtuous versions of the other traits of intellectual dependability versus those who possess the other virtues of intellectual dependability.

Of course, there are motivations other than those I have surveyed out of which a person might exhibit behaviors overlapping with those characteristic of the virtues of intellectual dependability. I can’t hope to examine all such motivations here in detail. Yet it would appear that the argumentative strategies employed here can be repurposed to other cases of this kind, including cases involving less clearly problematic motivations. For example, we might imagine that some people develop skills in exhibiting clarifying behaviors or sensitivity to their audiences out of a motivation to solicit the best possible feedback about their ideas. They aren’t motivated viciously to manipulate others; they are genuinely motivated to achieve epistemic goods for themselves, and out of this motivation they tend to present their ideas clearly and with sensitivity to their audiences, so that their audiences might better help them refine their ideas. While I think it would be a mistake to count the kinds of traits exhibited by such a person as vices, I also think it is reasonable to think that they fail to hit the mark of the intellectual virtues of clarity or audience sensitivity if they do not include the other-regarding motivation to promote others’ epistemic goods for their own sake. For, a person who aims to refine their ideas through receiving feedback from others but doesn’t aim as part of this process to promote others’ understanding of these ideas is missing a step in the process. There is a kind of irrationality in aiming for others to provide you with feedback on your ideas without aiming for others to first adequately understand those ideas. Moreover, if you aim for others to understand those ideas but only as a means to the end of refining your own ideas, you seem to be treating your epistemic goods as more important than others’ epistemic goods just because they are yours—to be committing a kind of epistemic egoism (cf. Zagzebski 2012: ch.3). You are failing to exhibit a sensitivity to salient epistemic values that it is reasonable to think is a hallmark of epistemic virtues governing the kind of conduct in which you are engaging. While you may possess a trait of clarity or audience sensitivity, it isn’t the intellectual virtue of clarity or audience sensitivity. Moreover, as with the other traits identified above, your traits will differ from the virtues in their cross-situational manifestations. Specifically, you will tend to engage in clarifying or audience sensitive behaviors when doing so seems a reasonable route to refining your ideas, but not in a variety of other circumstances in which doing so would do more to promote others’ epistemic goods than your own. Tending to exhibit these kinds of behaviors across the wide array of contexts in which doing so will benefit others’ epistemic well-being is characteristic of the virtuous versions of these traits.

Neither of the present objections, then, threatens the proposal of this chapter that the virtues of intellectual dependability can be distinguished in terms of the requirement that in order to be possessed they must be possessed out of a motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. This account of the virtues of intellectual dependability provides a way to distinguish these virtues as distinctive to the ideal of intellectual dependability, and thereby provides justification for awarding them focused attention within an examination of this ideal. The present objections do, however, highlight for us something that we must keep in mind in the next chapter. In the next chapter we turn to the topic of whether it is appropriate to educate for the virtues of intellectual dependability. We must keep in mind as part of that discussion that there are traits that are similar in certain respects to the virtues of intellectual dependability but that are not these virtues. The aim of that chapter will not merely be to show that it is appropriate to educate for self-directed versions of the virtues of intellectual dependability or traits of intellectual dependability that are not motivated by benefiting others’ inquiries. Instead, the aim must be to argue that it is appropriate to educate for these virtues that require for their possession the motivation to promote epistemic goods in others’ inquiries. To the business of defending this argument I now turn.

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1. To be clear, my claim here is not that these authors have somehow mis-analyzed their target virtues, but rather that one might have thought that, in addition to the versions or types of epistemic justice and epistemic care on which these authors legitimately focus, there is also room for theorizing about other types of epistemic justice or epistemic care that are good candidates for virtues of intellectual dependability. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)