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James S. Spiegel

Taylor University, USA

Abstract

Among those who regard open-mindedness as a virtue, there is dispute over whether the trait is essentially an attitude toward particular beliefs or toward oneself as a believer. I defend William Hare's account of open-mindedness as a first-order attitude toward one's beliefs and critique Peter Gardner's view of open-mindedness as a non-committal posture and Jonathan Adler's claim that open-mindedness is a second-order recognition of one's fallibility as a knower. While I reject Adler's account of open-mindedness as a meta-attitude, I affirm his intuition that there is a closely related second-order intellectual virtue pertaining to the attitude we take toward ourselves as knowers. However, this trait is intellectual humility not open-mindedness. I explain why both of these traits are intellectual virtues and how they properly build off one another in the virtuous mind.

Keywords

belief, fallibility, humility, knowledge, open-minded, virtue

With the rise of virtue epistemology in recent years, scholars have been increasingly interested in those intellectual traits that are conducive to the acquisition of knowledge, that is, which make a person a good knower.¹ One trait that has received much less attention than it deserves is open-mindedness. Though typically regarded by virtue epistemologists as an important intellectual virtue, some reject it as such, usually because they see it as incompatible with having firm convictions. Among those who regard open-mindedness as a virtue, there is dispute over whether the trait is essentially an attitude toward particular beliefs or toward oneself as a believer. In what follows I will address both of these debates, as I clarify just what open-mindedness is, discuss how it is related to the meta-attitude of intellectual humility, and show how both traits are virtues.

Accounts of open-mindedness

Scholarly discussions of open-mindedness in the last few decades have taken place largely within the context of educational theory, as opposed to virtue ethics or epistemology. This

Corresponding author:

James S. Spiegel, Taylor University, 236 West Reade Avenue, Upland, Indiana 46989-1001, USA

Email: jmspiegel@taylor.edu

is understandable, of course, since education is not just about passing information on to others but also involves training students to adopt certain attitudes and dispositions toward particular issues and the quest for knowledge generally. Our view of what it means to be open-minded will impact the way we teach, both as we attempt to endow our students with this trait and as we strive to display the trait ourselves as educators. But, of course, open-mindedness is relevant well beyond the domain of formal education. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a sphere of human interaction where this trait is not relevant.

Hare's first-order attitude view

So just what is it to be open-minded? Many would maintain that open-mindedness is an intellectual quality displayed by someone who recognizes that her belief could be wrong, so her mind is subject to change. William Hare, the leading proponent of this view, maintains that herein lies the essence of the trait: 'To be open-minded is . . . to be critically receptive to alternative possibilities, to be willing to think again despite having formulated a view, and to be concerned to defuse any factors that constrain one's thinking in predetermined ways' (Hare, 2003a: 4–5). So, he contends, 'the test of open-mindedness is . . . whether or not we are prepared to entertain doubts about our views' (Hare, 1987: 99). Thus, Hare maintains, there is no inconsistency between having convictions, perhaps even very strongly held ones, and being open-minded. It is one's *attitude* toward one's beliefs, not the beliefs themselves, that renders one's mind open or closed. The closed-minded person refuses even to consider the possibility that her view is false, and this attitude is demonstrated behaviorally in her refusal to consider countervailing evidence and arguments. The open-minded person, in contrast, recognizes the possibility, however remote, that her present view is false, and this attitude is displayed in the form of a willingness to seriously reconsider her views.

But just what does it mean to be willing to reconsider one's views? Hare identifies both negative and positive features of this epistemic disposition. Negatively, it involves 'the absence of a dogmatic and rigid stance that dismisses reflection and inquiry' because one feels completely certain about one's belief. Positively, it requires 'sincere commitment to the pursuit of truth' and 'serious consideration of alternative ideas' (Hare, 2009: 37–8). The willingness to reconsider is not a matter of mere perfunctory listening to contrary opinions but a genuine readiness to revise or even abandon one's views in light of new objections or counter-evidence.

Hare is careful to distinguish this sense of open-mindedness from some other notions. Open-mindedness about an issue is not synonymous with absolute neutrality. Neither is the trait to be confused with an attitude of permissiveness regarding what other people believe. As Hare notes, 'a person who is quite closed-minded may not care what others believe and as a result may be quite permissive. Again, a teacher may be permissive, but merely go along mindlessly with fashionable trends. Such a teacher may be empty-headed but not open-minded' (Hare, 1983: 38). Nor should open-mindedness be confused with a willingness to compromise one's views. Open-mindedness is not about being willing to make concessions in order to reach an agreement. While this may be an admirable intellectual and/or moral trait, it is distinct from open-mindedness, which is perfectly compatible with stalwart devotion to one's convictions.

Hare regards the intellectual virtue of open-mindedness as an Aristotelian mean between vicious extremes. On the one hand, we should aim to avoid automatic dismissal of all views that conflict with our own. On the other hand, we should not be so willing to embrace new ideas that we have no real convictions. Dogma and gullibility are equally deadly to the life of the mind, and the virtuous thinker will steadfastly resist tendencies in either direction. Hare employs Bertrand Russell's phrase 'critical receptiveness' to capture the essence of this conception of open-mindedness (Russell, 1950: 37–9). In Hare's words, 'critical receptiveness involves a readiness to consider new ideas together with a commitment to accept only those that pass scrutiny' (Hare, 2003b: 79).

So understood, why is open-mindedness a valuable intellectual trait? There are those who would call this into question. So what are the benefits of being open-minded? Hare cites numerous benefits (Hare, 2006), including the following. For one thing, the quest for truth and understanding requires open-mindedness. The failure to be open-minded prevents the acquisition of knowledge; the closed-minded person can never learn. Second, an open-minded approach gives us the best chance at rooting out false beliefs and coming to conclusions that are warranted. Third, in contexts of public discussion and debate, open-mindedness keeps communication going, even when the issues at stake are highly divisive and controversial. In this way, open-mindedness fosters attitudes of respect and tolerance. Fourth, being open-minded, in Hare's words, 'makes a person someone whose views are worth taking seriously' (Hare, 2006: 13). This is because we will have proved ourselves properly sensitive to evidence and good reasons, which any genuine pursuer of truth should respect. Finally, open-mindedness is a powerful pedagogical tool. Teachers who display a willingness to consider new ideas and points of view welcome students to do the same. This inspires learning and encourages students to develop and express their own ideas.

So for Hare, open-mindedness is not merely one intellectual virtue among many. Rather, it is a trait that is crucial to the pursuit of truth, the transmission of knowledge, and human flourishing generally.

Gardner's non-committal posture view

One of Hare's chief critics is Peter Gardner, who has challenged Hare's view on both a theoretical and practical level. He is not just dubious about the central role Hare believes open-mindedness plays in the life of the mind. Gardner believes Hare's view has an inimical effect on the educational enterprise, particularly in its apparent undermining of the concept of truth. Gardner worries that training children to be open-minded will discourage them from developing strong convictions concerning issues about which firm beliefs are important, such as the wrongness of rape and slavery. Related to this is another worry, specifically that the open-minded person will not be properly discerning regarding alternative views on issues. Gardner asks 'if we encourage open-mindedness, might we not encourage the idea that all views are worthy of being seriously entertained?' (Gardner, 1996: 273). This would surely be an undesirable state of affairs, where students considered the claims of Holocaust deniers, flat-earthers, and alleged alien abductees to be as respectable as the standard views on these issues. Openness to such claims is not indicative of a rational mind but of credulity, and taking them seriously only interferes with the quest for truth.

It is this matter of truth that is Gardner's most fundamental concern when it comes to open-mindedness. He claims that Hare's view prevents one from reaching actual conclusions on issues. To hold a belief on an issue entails the further belief that those who disagree are mistaken. So, for example, 'it prevents one from judging that the atheist and theist cannot both be right or that the flat-earthier and the round-earthier cannot both be correct.' Thus, Gardner concludes, Hare's conception of open-mindedness 'could encourage relativism' (Gardner, 1996: 274–5).

Rather than scuttle the notion of open-mindedness altogether, Gardner proposes an alternative perspective that may be called the *non-committal posture view*, where open-mindedness is conceived as the lack of a firm conviction on an issue. Gardner claims that 'to be open-minded about an issue is to have entertained thoughts about that issue but not to be committed to or to hold a particular view about it' (Gardner, 1993: 39). To illustrate, Gardner says, 'I am open-minded . . . about whether soft drugs should be legalized, about whether Britain should become a republic, and about whether the salmon season in England should be extended. I have thought about these things, I have even listened to some of the arguments about them, but I have no views, certainly no firm views, for or against' (Gardner, 1993: 39).

According to Gardner, then, open-mindedness and belief commitment are mutually exclusive. This view has some ironic implications, given Gardner's concerns about education and the quest for truth. If we train students to be open-minded in his sense of the term, there could be no real discovery or enlightenment in learning, at least as ordinarily understood. Open-minded students would be possible only insofar as we managed to make them Pyrrhonic skeptics, affirming the equal likelihood of all alternative truth claims. This might work with such issues as drug policy, political theory, and the fishing calendar, but not so much with questions about, say, the moral justifiability of rape or slavery. If having firm convictions about even these issues makes one closed-minded, then surely open-mindedness is an undesirable educational ideal.

These are just the problematic practical implications of Gardner's view. His definition of open-mindedness is also seriously flawed. In short, we just have no reason to accept Gardner's conception of open-mindedness as always involving a non-committal posture. In ordinary discourse we acknowledge that people with convictions about all sorts of issues may nonetheless be open-minded:

- 'She subscribes to Keynesian economics but is open to reconsidering her views based on the outcomes of the government's current policies.'
- 'He's confident that electric-powered vehicles will never be as affordable as gas-powered vehicles. But he's an open-minded person and is willing to be proven wrong.'
- 'I don't think she's the right woman for you, but I'll keep an open mind.'

Such remarks reveal that open-mindedness does not always consist in the lack of commitment to a view on an issue. In cases like these, open-mindedness involves a willingness to subject one's view to further review and scrutiny. While Gardner might be correct in suggesting that *some* forms of open-mindedness involve a non-committal posture, his claim that this is true in *all* cases of open-mindedness is surely mistaken.

Gardner's criticisms of Hare's account repeatedly demonstrate a basic confusion between truth and belief. That there is some actual truth about an issue, whether regarding the shape

of the earth or the ethics of drug legalization, is perfectly consistent with the presence of disagreement and conflicts of belief over that issue. One need not be a relativist about truth to recognize this. To be open-minded in Hare's sense of the term is simply to recognize that, for all one knows, one might be mistaken about the issue, that new evidence might come to light that reveals some alternative perspective to be correct after all. Moreover, Hare's view does not entail that the open-minded person must take all perspectives seriously. To be foreclosed against flat earth theory, alien abductions, or Holocaust denial is not lack of open-mindedness but simply a sign of intellectual discretion and common sense.

Adler's second-order attitude view

Jonathan Adler is critical of both Gardner's and Hare's views. His dissatisfaction stems from his belief that both of their views assume that open-mindedness is only possible where one has less than full assurance of the truth of one's belief. According to Adler, this is implausible because it 'fails to fit the facts'. 'Few of our beliefs are held as degrees of belief, since . . . it would introduce too much complexity for coherent thought' (Adler, 2004: 129). Furthermore, he claims, where one has only a high degree of belief about some proposition, one cannot be fully committed to it. And it is precisely the problem of reconciling open-mindedness with 'full belief' that must be solved in order to achieve a satisfactory account of open-mindedness.

Adler conceives of a 'full belief' as one for which one has conclusive reasons and, thus, as a belief held without qualification. Adler contends that most of our beliefs are full beliefs for a variety of reasons, most significantly because of the practical problems that attend partial beliefs. Only full beliefs 'naturally flow toward action and provide backing for assertion.' While partial beliefs can be the basis for action, this is not the rule. 'Partial beliefs are cumbersome and their implications too difficult for regular, everyday use' (Adler, 2002: 238). Furthermore, Adler points out that there is a certain 'transparency' of attitude toward the content of our beliefs that demonstrates their full, unqualified nature. Typically, we simply assert 'X is the case' rather than '*I believe X is the case.*' The fact that in ordinary discourse we usually make the simpler assertion indicates that most of our beliefs are full beliefs.

Adler's conviction that most beliefs are full beliefs is naturally inhospitable to Hare's first-order attitude account of open-mindedness. If a full belief is one for which the believer has conclusive reasons, then a willingness to reconsider one's belief is tantamount to moving from 'full' to 'partial' belief. In that case, to adopt an open mind is essentially an epistemic downgrade, in terms of justificatory confidence, not to mention a practical nuisance, in terms of benefits lost and burdens incurred because of the loss of that confidence. So Adler appears caught between the rock of denying that full belief is a genuinely desirable epistemic aim and the hard place of denying that open-mindedness is an intellectual virtue.

So what is Adler's way out of this dilemma? How can a reconciliation of open-mindedness with full or 'all-or-nothing' beliefs be achieved? Adler proposes that the answer lies in shifting the focus of open-mindedness from specific propositions to ourselves as believers. To be open-minded is to acknowledge one's fallibility as a knower, to doubt oneself rather than the views one affirms. Thus, 'open-mindedness is . . . a second-order (or "meta") attitude toward one's beliefs as believed, and not just toward the specific proposition believed' (Adler, 2004: 130).

To clarify his view, Adler asks us to imagine an assembly line where widgets are made:

The company imposes extremely high standards, so that each widget that comes through the manufacturing process is of the highest quality. So, as a product of the process, each widget is certified as non-defective. (This is the analogue of strong or all-out belief that each widget has no defect.) Nevertheless, as indicated by the returns of a few upset customers, some widgets get through with slight defects and imperfections – as good as the process is, it is not infallible. (Note that this is a judgment about the process, or second-order judgment.) (Adler, 2004: 132)

In such a situation, Adler notes, for any particular widget there is no conflict or incompatibility in affirming both that it has no defects *and* that it should be carefully examined for defects. Thus, Adler points out, ‘since the company’s fallibilism is about the process of manufacturing, not any specific widget, recognition of that fallibility need not diminish assuredness about any widget’ (Adler, 2004: 132). This, of course, represents the compatibility of one’s second-order doubts about oneself as a believer and one’s complete assurance of the truth of one of her particular beliefs.

While Adler’s meta-attitude analysis appears to succeed in reconciling open-mindedness with absolute confidence in one’s beliefs, it cannot account for ordinary cases of belief-specific attributions of open- or closed-mindedness. For instance, it would not be unusual for someone to assert any of the following:

- ‘Don’t bother trying to convince him to see a doctor about his back. His mind is closed about it.’
- ‘I am keeping an open mind regarding your proposal for the ad campaign.’
- ‘She is generally an open-minded person but her mind is closed about selling the house.’

Such statements indicate that open-mindedness is, at least sometimes, if not paradigmatically, about specific beliefs and not just a meta-attitude about oneself as a believer. Of course, Adler seems to grant this much when he says ‘open-mindedness is . . . a second-order (or “meta”) attitude toward one’s beliefs as believed, and *not just* toward the specific proposition believed’ (Adler, 2004: 130) [my italics]. But is this meta-attitude properly categorized as open-mindedness or is it another epistemic quality? I will challenge Adler here and recommend the latter, but first I want to affirm his claim that this trait is indeed virtuous.

Recognizing one’s fallibility

What, precisely, does it mean to recognize one’s fallibility as a believer? And why should one adopt this attitude, after all? Although the answer to the latter question might seem obvious, it will be helpful to address it in detail because doing so will provide some insights in responding to the former question. So let’s consider why recognizing our epistemic fallibility is appropriate. First, there is the simple matter of odds. Given the hundreds of beliefs that you, like any typical adult, hold about issues in religion, ethics, politics, art, economics, history, business, sports, personal relationships, not to mention myriad trivial and mundane matters, regarding every one of these beliefs there are intelligent, informed

people who disagree with you. So it is a virtual certainty that you now hold some, if not very many, false beliefs. And this is so even if you happen to be especially smart, perceptive, and circumspect.

There is also the evidence from experience. History has seen countless truth claims which, though once nearly universally accepted, are now rejected or even laughed at by reasonable people, from flat-earth theory to the 'sciences' of physiognomy and phrenology. Even aside from the sciences, where disciplinary advances are not contingent upon technological innovation, the overturn of views is no less dramatic. Just a few generations ago, African-Americans were viewed by many, if not most, white Americans as inferior, and the century before that a large number of Americans viewed slavery as legitimate. Similarly, moral views on sexual morality and animal welfare have changed significantly in the West. So which of our ethical convictions, or lack thereof, will be viewed with disdain by the next generation in just a few decades?

Next, consider the effect of social context on worldview formation. Each person is most likely to embrace the religion or philosophical perspective most favored within his or her social context. If you grew up in the United States, then you are more likely to be a Christian than a Muslim or a Buddhist. And if you grew up in India, then you are more likely to be a Hindu than a Christian or Muslim. And, to narrow the sociological focus, if you were raised by Christians, then you are more likely to embrace a Christian worldview than if you were raised by, say, devout Muslims or Marxists. These are rather mundane facts about environmental conditioning, of course, but they should give us pause about just how objectively or rationally we came to arrive at our worldview commitments.

Finally, to get to the root of the matter, there is the fact of human cognitive fallibility. Human beings are remarkably vulnerable to the formation of false beliefs due to a variety of factors, from cultural trends to the limitedness of our understanding to our susceptibility to self-deception and the epistemically corrupting influence of desires on belief-formation and belief-sustenance (i.e. we tend to believe what we want to be true) to fear and intimidation by authority figures within our sphere of intellectual influence.²

Second-order open-mindedness as intellectual humility

The upshot of all of these considerations is that we can be confident that some, if not very many, of our beliefs are false. And these false beliefs possibly include some of our most basic and cherished convictions about ultimate reality, human nature, ethics, politics, and science. Clearly, this realization should inspire what Adler calls a second-order recognition of one's fallibility as a believer. However, is 'open-mindedness' really the appropriate term for this attitude? It seems to me that this trait is more properly regarded as humility of a specifically intellectual sort. But let's consider some philosophical accounts of humility to see if this is correct.

Conceptions of humility fall into two basic categories. What may be regarded as the traditional view sees humility as essentially taking a properly low view of oneself. Gabrielle Taylor, for instance, says 'the man who accepts his lowly position as what is due him is the man who has humility, or the humble man' (Taylor, 1985: 17). And Nancy Snow writes, 'central to the role of humility is the acknowledgement of error or personal deficiency and its negative impact on others' (Snow, 1995: 205). On this traditional view, recognizing

one's epistemic fallibility would certainly qualify as humility, and properly so as the liability to error in the formation of one's views is one of the more significant human deficiencies. And, to put it in Taylor's terms, to acknowledge our epistemic fallibility is to accept our 'lowly position' from an intellectual standpoint, not just as compared to an absolute assurance in one's rational powers but even relative to a Cartesian confidence in our ability to overcome the limits of those powers.

Those who reject the traditional account of humility usually do so because they think it cannot account for the humility of especially accomplished or praiseworthy people, for whom a low self-estimation would not accurately reflect their true worth. Thus, Norvin Richards complains that such persons 'could be humble only through self-deception or ignorance' (Richards, 1992: 2). Therefore, Richards prefers to define the trait as an accurate estimation of oneself. So 'being humble is not a matter of thinking poorly of oneself but (roughly) a matter of having oneself in perspective . . . It is not a matter of thinking that one's accomplishments and virtues come literally to naught, but just of esteeming them no more highly than they deserve' (Richards, 1992: xii). Note that on this view, too, acknowledging one's epistemic fallibility qualifies as humility, at least given the assumption that all human beings are indeed subject to error in belief-formation. To affirm this fact about oneself, no matter how intellectually accomplished one might be, is simply to face the facts about one's epistemic condition.

So whether one takes the low-estimation or accurate-estimation view of humility, recognizing one's fallibility as a knower turns out to be intellectual humility, or at least one significant form that this trait takes. It seems, then, that Adler is guilty of a category mistake in labeling it open-mindedness. Eliminating this confusion should help to clear the way forward as further work is done on both of these intellectual virtues.

Why open-mindedness and intellectual humility are epistemic virtues

To this point in our discussion I have assumed that open-mindedness and intellectual humility are epistemic virtues. But what qualifies them as such? Generally speaking, a virtue is a specific excellence that enables a person to fulfill some aim or function. For every human project, there are multiple traits that enable a person to achieve the aims of that endeavor. When it comes to human flourishing generally, those traits that enable a person to realize this end or help others to do so are virtues. These include such traits as patience, kindness, compassion, generosity, and courage. The achievement of more specific aims also requires particular traits. So, for example, certain physical traits enable a person to achieve the ends unique to the athletic domain, and certain other traits enable an artist or physician to fulfill the aims of their projects. In the intellectual sphere the primary aim is knowledge, so any trait that conduces to the formation of true beliefs is an intellectual virtue. Such traits as curiosity, discernment, and intellectual courage would presumably be intellectual virtues, then, because they contribute to a person's ability to access information, tell the difference between truth and falsehood, and persist in the quest for truth in the face of opposition, all of which traits improve a person's chances at gaining knowledge.

So how do the traits of open-mindedness and intellectual humility enhance one's ability to gain knowledge?³ As for open-mindedness, this trait makes a person more likely to

revise her beliefs so that they conform to the facts. By ensuring that she feels the force of new evidence and arguments she will be willing to adjust her views and surrender her former misguided opinions. Also, the open-minded person tends to be more irenic and less dogmatic than those who are more closed-minded. This, of course, has an effect on her friends and acquaintances, encouraging them to share alternative views with her, some of which may serve to correct her false views.

However, a concern may be raised here that open-mindedness could work the wrong way as well, as an open-minded person might likewise be prone to revise her true beliefs into false ones. And the irenic spirit she displays will surely expose her to as many false alternative views as true ones, thus creating more temptation to revise beliefs in the direction of falsehood. While this is an understandable concern, it makes the mistake of considering open-mindedness in isolation from other intellectual traits. That is, it assumes that the open-minded person doesn't also have the intellectual virtue of discernment, the presence of which diminishes the likelihood that one will revise in the direction of false beliefs. And the more discerning a person is, the less likely it is that her open-minded attitude will work against her epistemically.⁴ The same may be said of other intellectual virtues, such as wisdom and understanding, which provide safeguards against open-mindedness collapsing into the intellectual vices of gullability or naivete.

So how does intellectual humility conduce to knowledge? I think the answer lies in the fact that this trait tends to spawn open-mindedness. It is easy to see how the meta-attitude of intellectual humility might 'trickle down' into the first-order attitude of open-mindedness as the believer applies this insight of her general epistemic fallibility to her particular beliefs. As she becomes more aware of her epistemic fallibility, she becomes more willing to consider alternative perspectives on various issues, including those about which she feels most secure in her current convictions. Similarly, she will be more eager to recognize, or at least look for, insights in alternative views, including those directly opposing her own. A recalcitrance, imperviousness, or lack of interest in evidence that potentially contradicts or calls into question her view on an issue is inconsistent with recognition of her general fallibility and thus indicates the vice of closed-mindedness (as well as the meta-vice of intellectual arrogance). Similarly, when she does recognize her error on an issue and her view changes, this will impact her view of herself as a believer, inspiring a more modest second-order self-appraisal, that is, a greater intellectual humility.

Thus, it seems that open-mindedness and intellectual humility are traits that tend to beget one another – not that they necessarily do, of course. For example, most of us have known – and been exasperated by – people who readily acknowledge (at least verbally) their general fallibility as a thinker yet are foreclosed to new perspectives or alternative viewpoints on various issues, be they philosophical, ethical, theological or political. In some cases when I have pursued this with people I have been able to get them to admit that they have an emotional, psychological, or some other 'block' that prevents them from being open to a particular view. Naturally, this admission is admirable, but the failure to overcome this impediment and allow reason to prevail is surely an intellectual flaw. For such people their intellectual humility fails to translate into open-mindedness toward their views on particular issues. For this reason we might well doubt the genuineness of their intellectual humility, sincere confessions notwithstanding. On the other hand, we all have known people who are more open to being schooled on particular issues precisely because

they recognize their general liability to error and who, likewise, emphasize their own fallibility precisely because they've been proven wrong so many times before.

So it seems that some people are more likely than others to see how their general epistemic fallibility should motivate a willingness to revise their particular beliefs. Similarly, some people are more likely than others to properly recognize their general epistemic fallibility due to their discovering false beliefs they have held. That is, for some people, there is a more causally dynamic psychological relationship between their open-mindedness and their meta-attitude of intellectual humility, and this in itself appears to be an intellectual virtue. Though it is not clear what would be an appropriate name for this trait, it seems to be a kind of intellectual integrity because it involves a certain consistency and uniformity of attitude regarding oneself epistemically.

Conclusion

I have argued that Hare's account of open-mindedness as a first-order attitude toward one's beliefs is superior to the accounts of Gardner and Adler. And while I reject Adler's account of open-mindedness, I affirm his intuition that there is a closely related second-order intellectual virtue pertaining to the attitude we take toward ourselves as believers, but, as I have shown, that trait is intellectual humility not open-mindedness. Furthermore, I have tried to show why both of these traits are intellectual virtues and how they properly build off one another in the virtuous mind.

From here we might go on to ask whether open-mindedness and intellectual humility are moral virtues as well. Many virtue ethicists and epistemologists think they are. For instance, Linda Zagzebski says so because she believes the intellectual life is an essential aspect of the moral life. So any intellectual virtue is, in her judgment, also a moral virtue. Thus, she says 'that an intellectual virtue does not differ from certain moral virtues any more than one moral virtue differs from another, that the processes related to the two kinds of virtue do not function independently, and that it greatly distorts the nature of both to attempt to analyze them in separate branches of philosophy' (Zagzebski, 1996: 139). I'm inclined to agree with her but will not pursue the issue here. In any case, open-mindedness and intellectual humility are both excellent traits and well worth nurturing in ourselves as well as others.

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Notes

1. Leading scholars in the field include John Greco (2010), James Montmarquet (1993), Ernest Sosa (2007), and Linda Zagzebski (1996). Their work has been devoted to such tasks as (1) ascertaining which traits enhance one's ability to form true beliefs and thus are worthy to be called intellectual virtues, (2) developing a precise and complete characterization of these virtues to clarify how they conduce to knowledge acquisition, and (3) exploring how, if at all, these traits contribute to human flourishing more generally.

2. The power of authority figures to elicit behaviors that a person considers wrong, even to the point of inflicting significant pain on others, is well documented in Stanley Milgram's famous study (Milgram, 1963). In a recent replication of the Milgram study, researchers found that subjects were about 12% less likely to inflict pain on others than they were in the original study (70% did so, as opposed to 82.5% in Milgram's study) (Burger, 2009).
3. General accounts of the nature of epistemic virtues and their role in the acquisition of knowledge tend to fall into one of two categories: virtue reliabilism (e.g. Goldman, Lehrer, and Sosa) and virtue responsibilism (e.g. Code, Fairweather, Montmarquet, and Zagzebski). Reliabilists focus on the truth-conduciveness of certain epistemic processes and intellectual abilities, whereas responsibilists approach epistemic virtues on the model of moral virtue, seeing these traits as analogous to or aspects of the agent's moral character. These approaches are not exhaustive, however, as some theorists (e.g. Greco and Kvanvig) have defended views that are more contextual or socially oriented, challenging the assumption that epistemic virtues should be analyzed entirely in terms of the traits of individual knowers.
4. What this seems to reveal is a certain interdependence or unity among the intellectual virtues, such that they are useless, or much less useful, in the attainment of knowledge if they do not occur together. Just as moral virtues must be balanced against one another – e.g. courage with temperance, justice with compassion, etc. – perhaps the same is true in the realm of intellectual virtue. For an excellent treatment of the unity of the epistemic virtues, see Goldman (2001).

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Biographical note

James S. Spiegel is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. His publications explore issues in ethics, philosophy of religion, and popular culture. The books he has authored include *Hypocrisy: Moral Fraud and Other Vices* (1999) and *The Benefits of Providence* (2005), and he is editor of *Faith, Film, and Philosophy* (2007). Address: Taylor University, 236 West Reade Avenue, Upland, Indiana 46989-1001, USA. [email: jmspiegel@taylor.edu]