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INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES, CIVILITY, AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

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“[O]pinion ought, in every instance, to determine its verdict by the circumstances of the individual case—condemning everyone, on whichever side of the argument he places himself, in whose mode of advocacy either want of candor, or malignity, bigotry, or intolerance of feeling manifest themselves; but not inferring these vices from the side which a person takes, though it be the contrary side of the question to our own; and giving merited honor to everyone, whatever opinion he may hold, who has calmness to see and honesty to state what his opponents and their opinions really are, exaggerating nothing to their discredit, keeping nothing back which tells, or can be supposed to tell, in their favor. This is the real morality of public discussion.” – John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1978/1859: 52)

Mill’s description of the “morality of public discussion” marks a sharp contrast with the present state of public discourse in the U.S. and beyond.¹ Specifically, it calls attention to a familiar and problematic deficiency of civility. Of course, incivility in public discourse is nothing new. In certain respects, public discourse is more civil today than it has been in times past.² Nevertheless, the quality of public debate and disagreement remains poor. And questions about the nature of the problem and what can be done about it remain worthy of consideration.

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Later in the chapter we will look closely at the sorts of uncivil actions and attitudes that comprise the deficiency of civility in public discourse. However, to orient the discussion, I briefly note two examples of it:

Lenar Whitney is a member of the Louisiana House of Representatives. In connection with her recent bid for a seat in Louisiana's 6th Congressional District, Whitney released a video titled "Global Warming is a Hoax," in which she describes belief in global warming as a "delusion" and as "perhaps the greatest deception in the history of mankind." She claims that "any ten-year-old can invalidate [the global warming] thesis with one of the simplest scientific devices known to man: a thermometer."³

Whitney's rhetoric here is marked by problematic and uncivil exaggeration, oversimplification, and distortion of the truth.

In a *New York Magazine* article titled "Why I'm So Mean," Jonathan Chait criticizes a column by Veronique de Rugy in which the latter argues that the U.S. tax code is more progressive than those of most other countries. Chait describes his ensuing exchange with de Rugy as follows: "I wrote a response, noting that this reasoning is completely idiotic ... De Rugy's reply is an incoherent collection of hand-waiving that does not come close to addressing this very simple and fatal flaw with her claim. She introduces a series of other fallacies ... It's a simple case of her making up false claims based on extremely elementary errors."⁴

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De Rugey is a nationally syndicated columnist with a Ph.D. in economics. While she is on an end of the political spectrum opposite from Chait, the assertion that her reasoning is “idiotic,” that her response to Chait was “incoherent,” and that she is simply “making up false claims based on extremely elementary errors” seems like a clear case of the kind of uncivil name-calling, exaggeration, and mental inflexibility that regularly undermine the quality of public discourse.⁵

In this chapter, I undertake an application of virtue epistemology to our understanding of the state of public discourse and of what might be done to improve it. Virtue epistemology is an approach to the philosophical study of knowledge that focuses on intellectual virtues and their role in the life of the mind.⁶ Intellectual virtues are strengths of intellectual character like curiosity, attentiveness, open-mindedness, intellectual carefulness, and intellectual thoroughness.⁷ I argue that virtue epistemology (1) provides an illuminating diagnosis of the deficiency of civility in contemporary public discourse and that it (2) contains important resources for addressing this deficiency.

Readers already acquainted with virtue epistemology may find the claim that it contains resources for diagnosing and addressing the state of public discourse obvious, perhaps even trivially true.

Accordingly, part of my aim in the chapter is to show why my thesis is significant and substantive.

Readers unfamiliar with virtue epistemology present a different challenge. They may have little sense of what intellectual character or intellectual virtues are and thus be ill-equipped to follow or appreciate the argument. For this reason, I begin with an overview of the concepts of intellectual character, intellectual virtues, and intellectual vices. I then turn to defend the two main claims noted above. Next, I respond to several possible objections to my argument. Finally, I offer some practical suggestions concerning intellectual virtues and public discourse.

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1. INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER, VIRTUES, AND VICES

A person's character (*simpliciter*) consists of a nexus of dispositions she possesses to act, think, and feel in various ways. *Virtues* are excellences of personal character and *vices* are deficiencies of such character. Thus a person who is disposed to tell lies (action), think uncharitable thoughts about her neighbors (thought), and be pained by the accomplishments of her peers (feeling) possesses various character defects or vices (e.g. dishonesty, unkindness, envy), while a person who is disposed to speak the truth (action), think well of others (thought), and take pleasure in the accomplishments of her peers possesses various character excellences or virtues (e.g. honesty, charity, selflessness).

We can think of a person's *intellectual* character as the character she has *as* a thinker, learner, or inquirer.⁸ Alternatively, it is the nexus of her dispositions to act, think, and feel in various ways *in the context of* thinking, learning, or inquiring. A person possesses intellectual virtues to the extent that she is disposed to act, think, and feel well in this context and she possesses intellectual vices to the extent that she is disposed to do so poorly.

To unpack the concepts of intellectual character, intellectual virtues, and intellectual vices in a bit more detail, it may be useful to take a step back and consider a broader question: namely, what are the requirements of successfully inquiry? More specifically, what qualities or strengths would we expect an ideal inquirer or truth-seeker to possess?

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Several things come naturally to mind. One is general *intelligence* or raw cognitive aptitude. An ideal inquirer would be intellectually gifted or talented; she would be naturally “smart.”⁹ Second, an ideal inquirer would also have an adequate *knowledge* base, particularly with respect to the field or fields of inquiry at issue. One cannot be good at scientific inquiry if one has no knowledge of science, a good historical inquirer without any knowledge of history, and so on. Third, an ideal truth-seeker would also possess a wide range of intellectual *skills*. These include general intellectual skills like reading, writing, and logical inference. They also include certain domain-specific skills, for example, the skills necessary for operating a microscope, doing statistics, or analyzing an historical text.

This suggests that being an excellent inquirer is a matter of general cognitive ability, knowledge, and intellectual skill. While these are no doubt of central importance, they are not sufficient. To see why, we need only observe that a person can be highly intelligent, knowledgeable, and intellectually skilled while also being *intellectually lazy, arrogant, aggressive, careless, hasty, superficial, closed-minded, fearful, dishonest, and quick to give up*. If a person is strong in the former areas but also manifests the latter sorts of qualities, her excellence as an inquirer will be seriously limited.

Good inquiry, then, has a *characterological* dimension. Intellectual virtues, as I am thinking of them, are the traits that comprise this dimension. Intellectual vices are the traits that mar, disrupt, or detract from it. Intellectual virtues include qualities like curiosity, attentiveness, intellectual humility, intellectual autonomy, open-mindedness, intellectual thoroughness, intellectual tenacity, and intellectual courage. And intellectual vices include qualities like intellectual laziness, inattentiveness, intellectual arrogance, dogmatism, intellectual dishonesty, intellectual hastiness, narrow-mindedness, and closed-mindedness.¹⁰

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2. VICES, VIRTUES, AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

In this section, I argue for two main claims. The first is that intellectual *vice* concepts provide an illuminating *diagnosis* of the breakdown of civility in public discourse. The second is that intellectual *virtue* concepts suggest a promising *antidote* to this problem.

Before getting to these arguments, a few qualifications are in order. First, I am concerned, not with *every* manifestation or variety of civility or incivility, but rather with these phenomena as they manifest in the domain of public discourse, and especially in the domain public debate and disagreement, whether in politics, traditional media, social media, or related spheres. Second, even with respect to this domain, I am not attempting to specify an exhaustive or comprehensive diagnosis or antidote. My claim is not, for instance, that intellectual vice concepts shed light on *all* that is uncivil in the context of public debate; nor that intellectual virtue concepts point in the direction of a *complete* solution. As these points illustrate, my thesis is fairly modest. Nevertheless, I hope to show that the bearing of virtue epistemology on “the morality of public discussion,” as Mill refers to it, is both theoretically and practically significant.

To support of the claim that intellectual vice concepts provide an illuminating (if partial) diagnosis of the breakdown of civility, I will begin by noting several attitudes and actions that one often encounters in public discourse venues like political debates and campaigns, newspapers, magazines, television news shows, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter:

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- Erecting and tearing down straw man representations of an opposing view
- “Black and white” thinking
- Attributing vicious motives to an intellectual opponent
- Name-calling
- Listening poorly (if at all) to an opposing side
- Failure to fact check
- Ignoring powerful objections or counter-evidence
- Willful misinterpretation
- Hiding, obscuring, or finessing the limitations or weaknesses of one’s own point of view
- Selective evidence-gathering
- Biased reporting
- Framing issues in terms of false dichotomies
- Sweeping and hasty generalizations
- Failure to ask or answer tough questions
- Making claims without sufficient evidence
- Lack of awareness of one’s cognitive fallibility
- Appeals to authority
- Reliance on unreliable sources
- Dismissive treatment of an alternative point of view
- Inability to comprehend the possibility of reasonable disagreement¹¹

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I am going to assume—reasonably, I hope—that these features of public discourse are familiar, that they are not especially rare, and that they go a significant way toward capturing the kind of incivility that is familiar in this domain.¹²

How do the attitudes and actions just noted stand with respect to the earlier characterization of intellectual vices? The fairly obvious answer: *they are precisely characteristic of a wide range of such vices, including (but not limited to) intellectual dishonesty, narrow-mindedness, closed-mindedness, dogmatism, intellectual arrogance, intellectual carelessness, intellectual cowardice, and intellectual rigidity.* Thus intellectual vice concepts put us in a position to describe in personal or characterological terms a good bit of the incivility characteristic of contemporary public discourse.

A reasonable question at this point might be: So what? Why is it significant that intellectual vice concepts can be applied to the relevant actions and attitudes? Is there anything particularly illuminating about this observation?¹³

I have two main replies to this question. The first is related to *accuracy*. Intellectual vice concepts provide a fitting or accurate description of the relevant attitudes and behaviors. “Closed-mindedness” is an apt description of many of the listening behaviors that characterize public disagreement. “Intellectual arrogance” does a nice job of describing the kind of name-calling and lack of self-awareness that is also familiar in this context. “Dogmatism” is a fair characterization of familiar forms of selective evidence gathering and biased reporting. And so on. Again, intellectual vice concepts equip us with concepts and terms that have appropriate—and intellectually satisfying—application to the actions and attitudes in question.¹⁴

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Intellectual vice concepts differ in this regard from, say, moral vice concepts or concepts of general intellectual aptitude or ability. Think, for example, about the kind of mishandling or ignoring of evidence, inability to conceive of alternative points of view, or sloppy inferential reasoning common in public discourse. While failures of a sort, it isn't clear that these are *moral* failures. Moral vice concepts don't have quite the right application in this context.¹⁵ Presumably this is because the failures in question are primarily *cognitive* or *epistemic*. For this reason, one might think that the relevant behavior can instead be understood in terms of low levels of raw *intellectual* ability or intelligence. But this doesn't seem quite right either. Many people who engage in the behaviors in question are extremely intelligent. Their shortcomings don't clearly reflect a deficiency of innate cognitive ability or talent. Instead, these shortcomings are more volitional, personal, or characterological.

Intellectual vice concepts are useful and applicable precisely where moral vice concepts and concepts of general cognitive ability leave off. Like moral vices and unlike deficiencies in general cognitive ability, intellectual vices are robustly personal and volitional. But like deficiencies in general cognitive ability, and unlike moral vices, intellectual virtues are epistemically robust and manifest principally in intellectual activities. As such, intellectual virtue concepts are uniquely well suited for characterizing the kinds of attitudes and actions that largely comprise the deficiency of civility in public discourse.

This leads to my second main reply, which is that conceiving of the relevant attitudes and actions as characteristic of intellectual vices also has notable *explanatory* payoffs. One such payoff is *evaluative*. The kind of incivility we are concerned with is objectionable, and it is objectionable in a way that is

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personally indicting. It reflects poorly on a person *qua person* when he routinely ignores evidence, gives straw man characterizations of standpoints he rejects, and draws hasty inferences in his thinking about important topics. However, when described merely at this level (e.g. as a mishandling of or insensitivity to evidence), it is not immediately clear why this behavior should elicit the rather strong and condemnatory assessment that it does. By contrast, if we view this activity as characteristic of intellectual vices, then an explanation is ready at hand. For, again, intellectual vices are character traits and thus reflect on their possessor *qua person*. To describe someone's intellectual conduct as consistently narrow-minded, rigid, or dogmatic is to suggest that there is something defective about the person in an intellectual-cum-personal respect.¹⁶ In this regard, viewing the relevant features of public discourse from within an intellectual vices conceptual framework helps explain their negative evaluative status.¹⁷

Another explanatory payoff of an intellectual vices diagnosis is that it may shed important light on the *psychological or motivational basis* of the behavior and attitudes in question. Up to this point, I have taken pains (see e.g. note 13 above) to avoid claiming that the kind of uncivil behavior we see in contemporary public discourse is indicative of *actual* intellectual vices, that is, of stable or ingrained *habits* to engage in this behavior. But suppose, plausibly enough, that at least some significant amount of the behavior in question is expressive of genuine vices—that it reflects standing dispositions to behave in the relevant intellectually vicious ways. According to a fairly standard way of thinking about intellectual vices, they arise from an insufficient concern with or attachment to epistemic goods like truth, knowledge, and understanding.¹⁸ The idea is that people who disregard evidence, make little effort to characterize a position accurately before objecting to it, or view the world in black and white terms aren't sufficiently concerned with or don't care enough about

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forming beliefs that are accurate or that might expand their understanding (instead, they tend to be more concerned with things like winning arguments, avoiding embarrassment, achieving high status, power, or the like). Given this account of the motivational basis of intellectual vices, an intellectual vices diagnosis of the breakdown of civility has the potential to shed important light on the root of the problem.

This is valuable from a purely explanatory or epistemic standpoint because it yields a deeper understanding of the phenomenon at issue. But it is also significant from a practical standpoint. If we hope to do something to *mitigate* the problem of incivility—in ourselves or within society at large—it will be important to understand something of its source. Accordingly, if we are right to think that the problem consists at least partly in the manifestation of intellectual vices, this may provide us with some insight into the source of the problem and at least a preliminary idea of how the problem might be rectified (e.g. by addressing our own or others' motivational states with respect to epistemic goods).

We have considered several reasons in favor of an intellectual vices diagnosis of the deficiency of civility in public discourse. I turn now to the second main claim of this section, namely, that intellectual *virtue* concepts suggest a promising *antidote* to this deficiency. Given what we have just seen about intellectual vice concepts and incivility, this claim is likely to appear fairly obvious and straightforward. Intellectual virtues are corrective of intellectual vices. For example, open-mindedness is corrective of closed-mindedness, intellectual honesty is corrective of intellectual dishonesty, attentiveness is corrective of dismissiveness, intellectual courage is corrective of intellectual cowardice, intellectual carefulness is corrective of intellectual hastiness, and intellectual

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humility is corrective of intellectual arrogance. Accordingly, if an important part of the problem of incivility in public discourse lies with actions and attitudes characteristic of intellectual vices, it is plausible to identify as an antidote the actions and attitudes characteristic of the corresponding intellectual virtues.¹⁹

Here again we confront the “So what?” question. More specifically, someone might object: “To be sure, public discourse would be a lot more civil if people were more committed to interacting and disagreeing with each other in ways that are intellectually careful, thorough, fair, honest, open-minded, and humble. But why is this a substantive or illuminating claim?”

I will respond to this objection by explaining why an intellectual virtues antidote to the problem of incivility is *promising*.²⁰ First, by thinking about intellectual virtues as an important corrective to the kind of incivility that is prevalent in public discourse, we immediately gain access to a wealth of resources concerning how the problem might be addressed. From ancient times to the present, philosophers, theologians, psychologists and others have devoted extensive and sustained attention to the mechanics of character formation, that is, to what individuals, rulers, and institutions can do to help people grow in character virtues and avoid character vices.²¹ While talk of “intellectual character” and “intellectual virtues” is relatively new, the traits in question are structurally similar to moral virtues and civic virtues, such that it is very reasonable to think that the means effective for growing these other types of virtues will also be effective for growing intellectual virtues.²² Thus by thinking about the problem of incivility in public discourse at least partly through an intellectual virtues and vices conceptual framework, we arrive at an idea, not just of what a solution might look like in the abstract, but also of how the solution might be administered or implemented.

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An intellectual virtues antidote is also promising on account of being implementable on a wide scale. As we have seen, intellectual virtues can be thought of as the character traits of a good thinker, learner, or inquirer; they have a distinctively epistemic orientation. As such, they also have important relevance to civic engagement and democratic participation. To be a responsible citizen in a deliberative democracy, one must seek out reliable information, weigh reasons, evaluate arguments, and so on; and one must do so *well* or *excellently*. In short, one must think and reason in an intellectually virtuous manner.²³ Harry Brighouse (2012) makes a similar point in his description of the threat of incivility—understood largely in terms of intellectually vicious activity—to a healthy democracy:

Incivility, in other words, inhibits the search for solutions to common problems. Incivility makes it harder for people to listen to one another and thus acquire evidence about what one another's interests and needs are. It undermines mutual trust, and at the limit it appears to generate a considerable level of false belief among citizens, which makes it harder than it need be for them to scrutinize the effectiveness of law and the behavior of their politicians ... The idea that public debate about political matters can be conducted legitimately using ad hominem arguments, manipulation of—or complete disregard for—evidence, and demonization of opponents not only inhibits good policy formation, it may even spill over into other areas of life, making it more difficult for people to make evidence-based and reasonable decisions about key matters in their own lives or in common endeavors with others who live outside the purview of normal politics. (192)

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Consider as well the proper aims of education. Among the most widely accepted of these aims are *knowledge* and *citizenship*. Schools, whether public or private, typically exist largely for the sake of providing their students with knowledge and helping them become good citizens. Assuming these aims are cogent, the features of intellectual virtues just noted (viz. their epistemic orientation and relevance to deliberative democracy) lead to the conclusion that *schools should educate for growth in intellectual virtues*.²⁴ That is, they suggest the need for a kind of “intellectual character education” the purpose of which is to foster growth in intellectual virtues like attentiveness, open-mindedness, intellectual carefulness, and intellectual courage in the context of traditional academic instruction.²⁵ In short, the promotion of intellectually virtuous conduct is very much at home in an educational context. If so, and if the practice of such conduct is an important antidote to the problem of incivility in public discourse, it follows that schools, whether public or private, can play a critical role in addressing this problem.

I have argued that the intellectual virtues and vices conceptual framework at the center of virtue epistemology (1) provides an illuminating (if partial) diagnosis of the deficiency of civility in contemporary public discourse and (2) contains important resources for addressing this deficiency. As we have already noted, at the heart of the proposed antidote to incivility is a call to the practice of virtues like intellectual humility, attentiveness, open-mindedness, intellectual honesty, intellectual carefulness, and more. In the section that follows, I turn to address several objections to such a call.

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3. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

I will formulate and respond to five objections. The first four can be dealt with fairly quickly. The fifth will require greater attention.

The first objection is one that might arise in response to some of the specific intellectual virtues an exercise of which I have argued is needed in the context of public discourse:

Rational Softness Objection: Virtues like attentiveness, open-mindedness, and intellectual humility are rationally “soft.” They demand listening instead of critically assessing, looking for the good in competing views instead of what is mistaken, being slow to form negative judgments, and so on. As such they threaten to make public discourse mealy-mouthed, uncritical, and wishy-washy, ultimately doing more epistemic harm than good.²⁶

The first thing to be said in response to this objection is that it involves a mistaken view of the virtues in question. Open-mindedness and intellectual humility, for instance, do not prohibit critical assessment or the identification of flaws in competing views. One can be open-minded, intellectually humble, *and* intellectually rigorous and demanding. Therefore, it is an exaggeration (at best) to describe the intellectual activity characteristic of these and related virtues as wishy-washy or uncritical.²⁷

Second, I have focused here on “softer” virtues like intellectual humility, open-mindedness, and attentiveness because they are corrective of several familiar forms of incivility, which of course have

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been our primary concern. However, these aren't the only intellectual virtues relevant to public discourse. Others include intellectual courage, tenacity, carefulness, thoroughness, and rigor.

Accordingly, while this isn't my focus here, I whole-heartedly support a broader application of intellectual virtues to public discourse—one that goes beyond counteracting familiar manifestations of incivility. This includes thinking carefully about and thoroughly scrutinizing opposing (as well as likeminded) positions, holding fast or tenaciously to unpopular but well-supported beliefs or arguments, and courageously speaking truth to power. In sum, while intellectual virtues are likely to introduce a softer edge to acrimonious, bad faith public disagreement and debate, they introduce other important rational constraints as well. Indeed, in other contexts (e.g. in intramural discussions in which the relevant parties are too quick to agree with one another), these “harder” or more demanding constraints may be most salient.

An argument against the notion of civility that has recently gained traction in the popular press and in some academic settings concerns a supposed tension between civility and the First Amendment right to freedom of speech.²⁸ Tailored to the present call to civility-cum-intellectual virtues, the objection might go as follows:

Freedom of Speech Objection: The call to higher levels of intellectual virtue in public discourse is too restrictive. To the extent that it is heeded, individuals will feel reluctant to speak their views freely in a public context. As a result, this call is likely to have a dangerous “chilling effect” on the right to free speech.

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By way of response, I will note, first, that I have not argued that intellectually virtuous conduct should be *legally* mandated in the context of public discourse or that intellectually vicious conduct should be legally forbidden. That would be wholly implausible. Instead, my claim is that we should *non-coercively* condemn and *voluntarily* refrain from the kind of uncivil speech and other behaviors characteristic of intellectual vices. As a general principle, this hardly seems controversial. Nor should we be concerned that the call to engage in public disagreement in ways that are open, fair, and intellectually honest will have a problematic “chilling effect” on free speech more broadly. Rather, the call is akin to a (non-coercive) call for people to be less envious of each other or to be less greedy. It is a call to engage with each other according to a higher (non-compulsory) standard. We do not seriously or legitimately worry that public criticisms of envy or greed will have a problematic “chilling effect” on interpersonal competition or on the rights of the ambitious entrepreneur. Nor should we worry that aspiring to intellectually virtuous public discourse will threaten First Amendment rights.²⁹

The next objection is similar to the first two.³⁰ However, here the focus is on the way in which embracing the call to intellectually virtuous civil discourse might put certain controversial but critically important conversation topics off limits:

Sensitive Topics Objection: The suggested practice of intellectual virtues will prevent certain important conversations from taking place in the public square (e.g. conversations about race, poverty, or climate change). For fear of offending others, or of being labeled intellectually arrogant or disrespectful, people will be reluctant to discuss certain sensitive, emotionally charged, but critically important social, political, and moral issues. This will

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prove especially harmful to the more vulnerable members of society, for it is often their well-being that is at stake in these conversations.³¹

Were we conceiving of civility as a kind of social propriety or politeness (e.g. one that upholds existing social norms and conventions), this objection might have considerable force.³² For there is no question that politeness, propriety, or a desire to avoid offense have sometimes been invoked as a way avoiding difficult conversations that are badly needed in a given community or society.

However, the connection between intellectual virtues and politeness is tenuous at best. Recall that intellectual virtues are *epistemically* oriented: they're the character traits of a committed and reasonable truth-seeker. Therefore, as a general rule, the intellectually virtuous person will not (at least as such) be afraid to flout social conventions when the truth is at stake, including (perhaps especially) truth about important social or political issues.

Rather, the requirements of intellectual virtue, particularly in the context of public discourse, pertain primarily to *how* people interact with each other and with each other's views and arguments, not with the *content* of the views and arguments themselves.³³ They demand that we give open and honest consideration to opposing views, not distort or ignore evidence, be mindful of and honest about the limitations of our own views and arguments, seek carefully and thoroughly to understand a position before arguing against it, and so on. There is, then, little concern that a call to higher levels of intellectual virtue in public discourse will stifle discussion of important social, political, or moral issues.

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We have seen that critics of civility often worry that it will make public discussion intellectually soft, that it will have a “chilling effect” on the right to free speech, or that it will stifle public discussion of and reflection on critically important issues. We have also seen, however, that when understood within an intellectual virtues conceptual framework, these concerns about civility receive very little uptake. Therefore, while my intent has not been to offer a *definition* of civility—that is, an account that covers the full range of attitudes and actions identified with civility—adopting an intellectual virtues-based conception of civility may turn out to be a good idea, at least from a functional or practical standpoint.³⁴ On the suggested way of thinking about civility, it is rooted in a concern with epistemic goods, which might make the notion of civility tolerable (maybe even attractive) to some who would otherwise be suspicious of a call to greater civility in public discourse. And, given that civility thus conceived still serves to counteract many familiar manifestations of incivility, civility enthusiasts may find reason to embrace it as well.

The objections considered thus far register general opposition to the claim that we should strive for higher levels of intellectual virtue in public discourse. The final two objections are narrower in scope. While not discounting civility as an important norm of public discourse, they seek to identify important *exceptions* to this norm:

High Stakes Objection: While, in general, higher levels of intellectual virtue may be needed in the context of public discourse, this rule admits of exceptions that mustn’t be neglected. In certain cases, a departure from intellectually virtuous conduct will be justified on account of the greater good of society. For instance, suppose the only way to get one’s fellow citizens to vote for—or to get one’s colleagues in Congress to pass—a particular *truly just and*

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extremely important measure is to argue for this measure in a dubious manner, including ignoring counter-evidence, oversimplifying the issue, building up and tearing down straw man characterizations of opposing views, drawing hasty inferences, etc. In at least some cases of this sort, the value of behaving in an intellectually virtuous manner will be outweighed by a good that can be secured only by way of actions that are characteristic of intellectual *vices*.³⁵

I will note up front my general agreement with this objection. I concur that there may be cases in which, all things considered, the best (or least bad) thing to do is to act in ways that are not characteristic of intellectual virtues—indeed, in ways that may be characteristic of intellectual vices. Thus my argument is not that in *every possible situation* public discourse should satisfy the requirements of intellectual virtue. I will return to this point below. Before doing so, however, a few qualifications are in order.

First, it is important to note how rare cases of the sort just described are likely to be. *Ex hypothesi* these are cases in which it would be *impossible* to secure an overriding good without caricaturing an opposing viewpoint, making hasty inferences, ignoring counter-evidence, or acting in other patently intellectually vicious ways. This kind of case is quite different from one in which, in order to secure a greater good, a person is forced to employ rhetorical strategies which, while not downright intellectually vicious, fail to instantiate the upper normative dimensions of intellectual virtue. We might think of this as activity that satisfies certain basic or minimal constraints proper to intellectual virtue but nothing more.³⁶

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As I get to in more detail below, I suspect that the two sorts of cases just noted are frequently confused with each other. In particular, I suspect that people often: (1) see themselves as needing to resort to intellectually vicious conduct in the context of public discourse when in fact they could achieve the same (if not a better) outcome by adhering to certain minimal standards of intellectual virtue; or (2) mistakenly view a competing good (one that can be secured only by intellectually vicious means) as superior to any other goods that could be achieved via an intellectually virtuous course of action.³⁷ An important conclusion to be drawn from this is that, when it comes to judging whether we are in one of the truly exceptional situations in which the minimal requirements of intellectual virtue needn't be satisfied, we must exercise considerable caution and imagination before making an affirmative judgment.³⁸

All of this notwithstanding, just as I agree that there are rare cases in which lying is morally justified, I think it would be implausible to deny that there are any cases—even “real life” cases—in which intellectually vicious conduct in a public discourse context would be justified on account of some greater non-epistemic good that otherwise would be attainable. This is a consequence of the fact that other kinds of values and normative demands (e.g. certain moral, social, or political values) sometimes outweigh the value and demands of intellectual virtue.³⁹ This is not too surprising. And it does little to undermine the claim that *as a general rule* we should strive for considerably higher levels of intellectual virtue in public discussion and disagreement.⁴⁰

I turn now to a final objection that is related to the previous one and that I suspect is most likely to motivate resistance to my thesis:

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“Beyond the Pale” Objection: The call to higher levels of intellectual virtue in the context of public discourse seems to imply that all viewpoints and arguments merit an open, attentive, and careful hearing. However, no small number of views and arguments defended in the public square (e.g. outlandish metaphysical or religious views and conspiracy theories) are extremely unreasonable; their epistemic credentials are veritably worthless. Accordingly, giving views like this an open and thoughtful hearing is intellectually foolish, not virtuous.⁴¹

Here the idea is not that there is some distinct greater good that can be achieved only via a departure from intellectually virtuous conduct; it is rather that certain views or arguments are epistemically “beyond the pale,” that they fail in their own right to merit an intellectually virtuous response.

I will begin by pointing out that being intellectually virtuous does not require giving any and every belief or argument an open and honest hearing. Suppose, for example, that I am approached by someone who requests that I read and give serious consideration to his arguments for thinking that the end of the world is at hand. And suppose I know enough about this person to be confident that he is an unreliable source. As I have argued elsewhere (2011: Ch. 8), it would be no failure of open-mindedness or any other intellectual virtue if I were to pass on the opportunity to give an open and honest hearing to this person’s arguments. Thus the call to intellectual virtue in public discourse is consistent with the claim that some views are epistemically beyond the pale, failing to merit intellectually virtuous consideration.⁴²

It is important to say something about *why* certain views might not merit intellectually virtuous consideration. Taking cues from the example above, the fairly obvious reason is that, in cases of the

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relevant sort, honest and open consideration is likely to constitute a substantial *waste of time and cognitive resources*. This suggests the following “exception principle” (EP): intellectually virtuous consideration of a given viewpoint or argument is required only if such consideration might prove epistemically beneficial (e.g. only if it might help one gain a more accurate or deeper understanding of the matter in question).⁴³ EP explains the objection’s (plausible) assertion that under certain conditions it might be justified (even wise) to refrain from engaging in honest and open dialogue with a particular person or standpoint.⁴⁴ However, it also introduces a significant *problem* that merits careful consideration.

I have been arguing, on the one hand, that we can and should do a much better job of practicing various intellectual virtues in the context of public discourse. On the other hand, I have conceded, as I believe one must, that this requirement holds only where its satisfaction might prove epistemically beneficial. The problem arises from the fact that *a good deal of the kind of uncivil behavior we are concerned with arises from the conviction that the viewpoint being entertained, described, or criticized is epistemically hopeless (or worse)*. In short, people often do a poor job of listening to, are dismissive of, speak derisively about, or refrain from giving serious consideration to opposing views precisely because they think there is no chance that an intellectually virtuous treatment of these views would do any epistemic good.

The problem can be put in the form of a dilemma. (1) Suppose the conviction in question is correct, that is, that the views that elicit (apparently) intellectually vicious treatment in the domain of public discourse really are epistemically worthless.⁴⁵ Given EP, the actions and attitudes in question are justified.⁴⁶ Therefore, my claim that higher levels of intellectual virtue are needed in the context of

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public discourse is unwarranted. (2) Alternatively, suppose the conviction is not generally correct, and specifically, that people often *underestimate* the potential epistemic fruitfulness of engaging with an opposing position in an intellectually virtuous manner. This possibility threatens the call to intellectual virtue in a different way. If, as EP says, this call applies only when consideration of an opposing view might prove epistemically beneficial, and if, as suggested above, we tend to be unreliable at recognizing when this condition has been met, then the call is likely to have very little effect. It may very well leave the quality of public discourse largely unchanged.

The conviction at issue is suspect. From an experiential or commonsense standpoint, it isn't hard to believe, especially when it comes to public debate about important moral, political, and related matters, that we are often too quick to dismiss competing views or to fail to fully appreciate their epistemic credentials.⁴⁷ Mill sheds some light on why this might be the case:

Unfortunately for the good sense of mankind, the fact of their fallibility is far from carrying the weight in their practical judgment which is always allowed to it in theory; for while everyone well knows himself to be fallible, few think it necessary to take any precautions against their own fallibility, or admit the supposition that any opinion of which they feel very certain may be one of the examples of the error to which they acknowledge themselves to be liable. (1859/1978: 17)

This impression is corroborated by empirical research, including research on phenomena like the confirmation fallacy, bias blind spots, hindsight bias, and framing effects.⁴⁸ Put simply, this research suggests (among other things) that we tend to be insufficiently critical of our own beliefs and

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arguments and overly critical of the beliefs and arguments of others, especially those with whom we disagree. If this is right, then we should probably expect to regularly find ourselves in the position of thinking that an opposing viewpoint is epistemically beyond the pale when in fact it is not.

It would seem, then, that we are left to reckon with the second horn of the dilemma noted above. Here the concern is a decidedly *practical* one. Again, the worry is that if the call to intellectual virtue in public discourse is relevant only to situations in which the consideration of an opposing viewpoint might prove epistemically beneficial, it will be unconvincing and ineffective. For, we are overly quick to judge opposing positions as epistemically beyond the pale. As such, we will often think that the call to intellectual virtue doesn't apply to us when in fact it does. And, therefore, the quality of public discourse will remain poor.

4. Toward Greater Civility: Some Practical Suggestions

What can be done about this predicament? One response would be to reject EP at a *practical* level. That is, we might grant that from a theoretical perspective, there are conditions under which we needn't give an opposing view an open and honest hearing. However, knowing how fallible we are at identifying when such conditions have obtained, we might adopt a policy of giving an open and honest hearing to any competing view that comes our way. While perhaps initially attractive, this solution faces a formidable practical challenge of its own. Virtually no one is in a position to give an open and honest hearing to *every* competing viewpoint that he or she encounters. If we are to proceed rationally, we must make judgments about which views to take seriously and which to

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ignore or disregard. Therefore, on further reflection, the suggested solution turns out to be of little practical help.

The question we are grappling with is how to make reliable judgments about the epistemic credentials of an opposing viewpoint while knowing this is something that we tend to do quite poorly. Given that this is an eminently practical problem, I will offer a few practical suggestions concerning how it might be addressed. However, I concede up front that these are at best the beginning of a solution. Even when taken together, they are far from foolproof.

To get at these suggestions, it will be useful to consider a pair of excerpts from a recent essay on civility by Noah Smith titled “Don’t Be Rude, You Loser” (2014). The first excerpt begins with a reference to the point that certain views—e.g. that all red-haired people should be put into concentration camps—are unworthy of a civil treatment:

Putting red-haired people in concentration camps is obviously horrible, but most of our arguments are over things like Obamacare, or antipoverty programs, or financial regulation—issues on which reasonable people can and do disagree. If you’re uncivil in this sort of situation—if you call your opponent an idiot, or a liar, or a nastier name simply because you think his or her argument is bad—you’re basically being overconfident. You’re assuming that there’s essentially no chance that you’re in the wrong, so it’s in the public interest for you to rail against your opponent and score points with the crowd. If you do this, there’s no chance that *you yourself* will learn anything from the encounter. People usually argue to win, but many times it’s possible to argue to *learn*.

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It's a tough call to decide whether an idea is so awful that the only proper response is to denounce it (and its proponents) with full vitriol. In general, these cases are a lot rarer than we think. People rarely lie, and all but the worst arguments contain some grain of valuable truth. If you can't understand how your opponent could possibly believe what they believe, odds are that you could benefit from trying harder to understand. Not always, but usually.

Several practical suggestions can be drawn from these remarks. The first concerns Smith's point that the sorts of cases in which an intellectually virtuous consideration of a foreign or opposing viewpoint might be unwarranted (e.g. the view that all redheads should be incarcerated) are cases in which there isn't *reasonable disagreement* on the matter in question. This suggests a kind of litmus test that can be used to distinguish between cases in which we ought to consider giving an opposing view an intellectually virtuous hearing and cases in which this isn't necessary. Specifically, it suggests something like the following "principle of reasonable disagreement" (PRD): to the extent that reasonable disagreement on a given topic or issue is possible, intellectually virtuous engagement on this topic or issue is advisable. If I am abiding by PRD, then when I am confronted with an opposing viewpoint, I will ask myself questions like the following: "Could reasonable people disagree about this issue?" or "Are there—or *might* there be—reasonable people who believe differently than I do about this?" or "Is it possible that my intellectual opponent has reasons which, at least by his lights, provide reasonable support for his view?" If I arrive at an affirmative answer to these questions, I will take this as a sufficient indication that I ought not dismiss the viewpoint out of hand.⁴⁹

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A second practical suggestion concerns the kind of stance or mindset that one adopts in the context of public disagreement or debate. As Smith's remarks suggest, it seems that the dominant aim in this context is often to win an argument, gain power or status, vent or rant, avoid being proven wrong, and so on. Less cynically, it is to speak or defend (what one sincerely believes is) the truth. Some of these motives are clearly better and more defensible than others. Nonetheless, Smith calls attention to a further stance—one that is lamentably rare in public disputes and arguments: namely, the stance of “arguing to learn.”

What might this look like? And is it compatible with the (respectable) aim of communicating and defending (what one takes to be) the truth? If I am “arguing to learn,” then when thinking about and evaluating an opposing viewpoint, I might ask myself questions like: “What grains of truth can be found in this perspective?” or “What is something I can learn from this view?” Of course, arguing to learn does not mean arguing *merely* to learn. I can ask myself, of a competing perspective, “What do I have to learn from this perspective?” while also probing its apparent flaws or weaknesses. Similarly, arguing to learn is entirely consistent with a commitment to communicating or defending (what one takes to be) the truth. I can look for what is promising or insightful in an opposing position and still proceed to clearly and forcefully defend my own point of view.⁵⁰

There is a notable connection between arguing to learn and the virtue of *open-mindedness*. Open-mindedness is a willingness to take up foreign or opposing viewpoints and to give them an honest and fair hearing.⁵¹ Part of this willingness is a matter of being quick to think about and identify what one can learn from an opposing standpoint. In other words, in the context of public disagreement or argumentation, open-mindedness involves arguing to learn. Therefore, if we are keen to avoid or

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help others (e.g. our children or students) avoid prematurely concluding that an alternative position is unworthy of consideration, we ought to place a premium on the practice and cultivation of open-mindedness. Here again we needn't worry that doing so will leave us unable to vigorously defend our own point of view. Taking up an alternative perspective on a particular issue is compatible with retaining and defending one's own position on the issue. It is even compatible with rigorous critique of the alternative position. In the latter kind of case, the point is that *before* developing or launching into a critique of an alternative position, we should first do what we can to *understand* it—to enter into it and to see what (if anything) can be learned from it.⁵²

A third practical suggestion concerns Smith's observation that a good deal of uncivil behavior in discussions of topics like Obamacare and antipoverty programs stem from a kind of *epistemic overconfidence* or a sense that "there's essentially no chance that you're in the wrong." Put another way, they stem from an insufficient awareness of the limitations of one's own cognitive perspective or situation (e.g. of human cognitive fallibility in general or of one's evidence about a particular matter). This is a plausible observation, and it underscores the importance of an additional intellectual virtue, namely, *intellectual humility*.

An intellectually humble person is alert to and disposed to "own" her cognitive limitations, which include gaps in her knowledge or evidence, natural intellectual weaknesses, intellectual character defects, and more. An intellectually humble person is "alert" to these limitations in the sense that they appear "on her radar" in appropriate contexts, for example, in contexts when they might lead her away from the truth. She is not *obsessively* concerned with them; nor does she ascribe limitations to herself that she doesn't really have. Rather, she has an accurate and appropriate sense of her

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cognitive limitations. An intellectually humble person also “owns” these limitations in the sense that she accepts them and (where appropriate) takes steps to mitigate or overcome them. She is not in *denial* about her cognitive limitations. She doesn’t seek to rationalize or hide them from others.

When someone directly or indirectly calls attention to one of her cognitive mistakes or weaknesses, she doesn’t get irritated, ashamed, or defensive.⁵³

It should be clear enough that intellectual humility is an antidote to the kind of overconfidence that Smith associates with incivility in public discourse.⁵⁴ The overconfident person who thinks or acts as if there is no chance that he is wrong is out of touch with—or at least has failed to “own” or take responsibility for—his intellectual limitations. He is deficient in intellectual humility. Accordingly, we should also place a premium on the practice and cultivation of intellectual humility. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the quality of public discourse could significantly improve without a significant increase in the actions and attitudes characteristic of this virtue.

But what are some things we can do to practice intellectual humility in the context of public discourse? One suggestion might be that when engaging, or considering whether to engage, an opposing standpoint, we should do our best to attend to and “own” our cognitive limitations.

However, as a standalone strategy, this is unlikely to be very effective. For, as we saw earlier, there is strong empirical support for thinking that we are not, from an introspective or first-person point of view, very reliable at identifying our cognitive limitations, weakness, blind spots, or the like.⁵⁵

Therefore, for any such efforts to be successful, they will need to be supplemented with efforts of a more indirect and objective variety.

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This might include reading up on some of the social science research that sheds light on the limitations and foibles of human reasoning (e.g. the literature on bias noted above). A deliberate and thoughtful engagement with this research can help us gain a more objective and honest perspective on our own cognitive limitations and vulnerabilities. If called upon in the context of assessing, or considering whether to assess, a competing view on some issue, the knowledge in question can have a positive calibrating—indeed a humbling—effect, making us less likely to underestimate the epistemic credentials of the opposing view.⁵⁶ A similar strategy would be to rely on others who know us well to help us develop a more informed view of our epistemic limitations. Thus we might ask trusted friends or colleagues to speak candidly with us about what they perceive to be our biases, blind spots, and other intellectual character weaknesses. Finally, we can surround ourselves with friends and other persons who are recognizably intellectually humble. While we may have a difficult time gauging our own level of intellectual humility, it is less challenging to spot intellectual humility in others. Surrounding ourselves with others who value and practice this virtue can encourage us to do the same.

The foregoing suggestions are far from foolproof. Indeed, they may be least effective for those who need them most. People in the grip of vices like intellectual arrogance, narrow-mindedness, and dogmatism may be very unlikely to recognize instances of reasonable disagreement, find grains of truth in an opposing viewpoint, or acquaint themselves with research on the defects of human cognition. Such is our predicament. As incomplete or imperfect as these suggestions may be, I submit that, if consistently implemented, they are capable of having enough of an impact to warrant a call to greater levels of intellectual virtue in the context of public discourse. If most contributors to

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public discourse were to put these suggestions into practice, it is difficult to imagine that, even given the truth of EP, the quality of public discourse would not significantly improve.⁵⁷

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¹ My primary focus will be the quality of public discourse in the U.S.; however, similar points could be made, some with even greater strength, about the state of public discourse in other parts of the world.

² For more on the history of civility and how the present compares with the past on this theme, see (Orwin 1992), (Carter 1998: pp. 9-19, Ch. 3, 117-120), and (Guinness 2008: Chs. 2 and 3).

³ URL: http://www.washingtonpost.com/posttv/politics/campaign-2014-lenar-whitney-global-warming-is-a-hoax/2014/07/30/e06388ce-17f8-11e4-88f7-96ed767bb747_video.html.

⁴ URL: <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2012/02/jonathan-chait-why-im-so-mean.html>.

⁵ My claim is not that de Rugy is right and Chait is wrong. Rather, my concern is with the way in which Chait has gone about responding to de Rugy’s argument. For an interesting discussion of the exchange between de Rugy and Chait see:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/02/us-taxes-really-are-unusually-progressive/252917/>.

⁶ For overviews of virtue epistemology, see (Battaly 2008) and (Baehr 2004).

⁷ As this list suggests, I am thinking of intellectual virtues along “responsibilist” vs. “reliabilist” lines. Virtue reliabilists like Ernest Sosa (2007) and John Greco (2010) think of intellectual virtues on the model of cognitive faculties like memory, vision, and introspection, *not* as good intellectual character traits. For more on the distinction between these two approaches, see (Baehr 2013: Ch. 4).

⁸ See my (2011: Chs. 1-2; 2013).

⁹ On a broader conception of “smarts,” they are partly constituted by intellectual habits or virtues. See (Ritchhart 2002) for a development of this point.

¹⁰ Lists like these raise the obvious question of how intellectual virtues (and vices) are related to what we ordinarily think of as *moral* virtues (and vices). Oversimplifying a bit, we can think of intellectual virtues as the character traits of a good *thinker, learner, or truth-seeker* and moral virtues as the character traits of a good *neighbor* (in the biblical sense). For a more precise and complex account of this relationship, see (Baehr 2011: Appendix).

¹¹ For an instructive discussion of some specific forms of reasoning that are common in public discourse, the intellectual vices they manifest, and the intellectual practices and virtues that can remedy them, see (Garcia and King 2016).

¹² As noted earlier, there may be other aspects of incivility, even incivility in public discourse, that are not very well captured by intellectual vices terminology, for instance, aspects having to do with etiquette or manners. For an account of civility that focuses primarily on these aspects, see (Forni 2012), which includes the following statement: "Whatever civility might be, it has to do with courtesy, politeness, and good manners" (9).

¹³ One might even wonder whether this is a dangerously mistaken diagnosis because it (apparently) lays the blame on people's character rather than on broader societal or situational factors. This worry might arise from either of two deeper doubts: one about the very existence of character (Doris 2002); and the other about whether the specific sorts of behaviors in question really can be attributed to the manifestation of intellectual vices. On the latter point, I wish to remain neutral. As will become clearer below, I am not wedded to the view that familiar manifestations of incivility in public discourse are the result of intellectual vices. What I am committed to is the claim that these are manifestations of the actions and attitudes *characteristic* of intellectual vices. (One can, of course, engage in vicious behavior even if such behavior is not habitual or otherwise "second nature" in the way that is characteristic of the possession of a vice.) On the former point, for an argument against the situationist claim that most people don't possess intellectual virtues or vices, see my (forthcoming).

¹⁴ Mill also describes problematic public discourse using the language and concepts of intellectual character. See, for example, (1978/1859: 50-52).

¹⁵ Of course, some uncivil behaviors in this context (e.g. name-calling) do have considerable moral significance. However, my immediate focus is with certain more purely epistemic manifestations of civility. At a certain level, given the simultaneously epistemic and inter-personal nature of public discourse, it will be impossible to disentangle considerations of intellectual virtues and vices from their moral counterparts (e.g. it may be that the shortcomings in question are at once epistemic *and* moral). At present my point is that intellectual vice concepts appear to be uniquely well suited to capture certain prominent aspects of incivility in this domain. Thanks to Jim Taylor for feedback on this point.

¹⁶ Or, at any rate, it is to suggest that the person is *acting like* a person with such vices, which is also personally indicting. For a full account of how or why intellectual virtues and vices (and not just moral virtues and vices) bear on personal worth, see (Baehr 2011: Chs. 6-7).

¹⁷ A related point is that intellectual vices tend to block access to the truth and other epistemic goods. This provides a further explanation of why the behavior in question is objectionable. However, this feature is not unique to intellectual virtues. Mishandling of evidence, bad reasoning, and the like, also block access to the truth.

¹⁸ This is the flipside of the familiar claim that intellectual *virtues* are character traits rooted in a "love" of epistemic goods. See (Montmarquet 1993), (Zagzebski 1996), (Roberts and Wood 2007), and (Baehr 2013).

¹⁹ While not typically using the words “intellectual character” or “intellectual virtue,” many who write about the nature of civility use language that is rich in intellectual virtues and vices terminology. See, for example, (Mill 1978/1859: Ch. 3), (Schaup 2012: 38-41), (Ladenson 2012: 207-15), (Forni 2002: Chs. 1, 4, 10, 23), (Carter 1998: Chs. 8-9, 12), (Mouw 2010: Ch. 5), (Gutmann and Thompson 1990: 76-82), (Hirschman 1989: 77-78), (Marcuse 1965: 94-95, 106, 112), and (Sinopoli 1995: 612-15, 618-19).

²⁰ The idea is that if the suggested antidote can be shown to be promising, or in a good position to successfully address the problem, this will be sufficient to show that it is substantive and worth taking seriously (even if it also, in some sense, a fairly obvious solution).

²¹ This includes, of course, ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, modern philosophers like Descartes and Locke, contemporary virtue ethicists (e.g. Sherman 1989), and positive psychologists (e.g. Peterson and Seligman 2004), among others. For a recent collection of perspectives on cultivating virtue from the standpoints of philosophy, theology, and psychology, see (Snow 2014).

²² Indeed, what little research there is on “intellectual character formation” suggests that there is substantial overlap between practices aimed at fostering moral virtues and practices aimed at fostering intellectual virtues like curiosity, open-mindedness, and intellectual courage. See especially (Ritchhart 2002). Central to Ritchhart’s account of how teachers can help their students grow in intellectual virtues or “thinking dispositions” is that the claim that teachers must create structures and opportunities for their students to *practice* (the actions characteristic of) intellectual virtues, which of course echoes Aristotle’s famous claim in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that we become (morally) virtuous by performing (morally) virtuous actions.

²³ For more on the connection between intellectual virtues and civic engagement, see (Brighouse 2012: 192-93), (Ladenson 2012: 207-15), (Buechner 2012: 222-30), (Carter 1998: 25-28, 108-112), (Button 2005), (Marcuse 1965), and (Hazlett 2016).

²⁴ For defenses of this claim, see (Brighouse 2012), (Ladenson 2012: 215-19), (Gaffney 2012: 250-54), and (Baehr 2013).

²⁵ Again, for an idea of what this might look like, see especially (Ritchhart 2002), but also (Ritchhart 2015) and (Baehr 2013).

²⁶ For a discussion of this objection, see Guinness (2008: 153).

²⁷ For a similar point, see (Guinness 2008: 153-58) and (Mouw 2010: 22-24).

²⁸ One recent event that led to objections of this sort was the UC Berkeley Chancellor’s statement that “we can only exercise our right to free speech insofar as we feel safe and respected in doing so, and this in turn requires that people treat each other with civility” (URL = <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/09/09/berkeley-chancellor-angers-faculty-members-remarks-civility-and-free-speech>). Another was the rescinding of a job offer by University of Illinois from Steven Salaita on the basis of a series of anti-Israel tweets made by Salaita that were deemed by the university to violate a principle of civility that applies to matters of academic and political dispute (URL = http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/12/14/did-salaita-cross-the-line-of-civility/?_r=0).

²⁹ For more on the distinction between a legal call to civility and one that is normative but not legal (e.g. moral or civic), see (Gutmann and Thompson 1990: 85) and (Carter 1998: 69-71, 84-85, 161-64, 209-212).

³⁰ While the first three objections are similar to each other, the thrust of the first one is epistemic, the thrust of the second is legal, and the thrust of the third is social or moral.

³¹ See (Estlund 2005: 1).

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³² For discussions that draw a sharp distinction between civility and politeness see, (Calhoun 2000: 252), (Shiell 2012: 6), (Schaup 2012: 25), and (Guinness 2008: 3). For a conception of civility that is closely aligned with politeness and manners, see (Forni 2002).

³³ That is, provided that the *epistemic* credentials of these views meet certain minimal standards. More on this below. For a similar point, see (Carter 1998: 108-110).

³⁴ This suggestion is further supported by the fact that there doesn't seem to be a single determinate and univocal concept of civility that answers to all of our rather diverse ways of thinking and speaking about civility. It may be, then, that there are in fact *varieties* of civility, some important with respect to certain contexts and priorities, others important with respect to other contexts and priorities.

³⁵ For defenses or discussions of one or more versions of this objection, see (DeMott 1996), (Carter 1998: 110-11), (Mouw 2010: 50-53), and (Mill 1859/1978: 50-52).

³⁶ One's treatment of an opposing view might be *reasonably* or *minimally* (even if not fully or perfectly) intellectually careful, open, or honest. If so, it will not be intellectually *vicious*. In certain contexts, meeting this relatively low, but not insignificant, standard may be sufficient for achieving some good that a more robustly intellectually virtuous course of action would preclude.

³⁷ Thus I suspect that when we find ourselves thinking (or acting as if), "I can't be civil or intellectually virtuous in this situation; otherwise, I'll lose this argument or others will think I'm a fool or I'll lose the election or my cause won't prevail," we are often overvaluing the good of winning the argument, saving face, winning the election, or having our cause prevail.

³⁸ For further remarks and discussion of the challenge here, see (Mill 1859/1978: 50-52), (Calhoun 2000: 269-72), (Estlund 2005: 8-9), (Gaffney 2012: 243-44), and (Mouw 2010: 50-51, 144-45).

³⁹ I have been thinking of the competing goods in question as moral, social, or political in nature. But could they also be epistemic? I see no reason to think not, that is, I see no reason to doubt that there could be cases in which a person's intellectually vicious behavior in the context of a public debate, say, could lead to superior epistemic goods (e.g. to a greater number of true beliefs) that couldn't be achieved in the absence of such behavior (e.g. because the audience wouldn't be convinced by a more virtuous communication style). However, again, I think cases of this sort are very rare and that it is often tempting to think one is in such a situation when in fact one is not. Such cases raise tricky issues that do not arise in the cases already considered, for example, whether the behavior, if done *knowing that* and *because* it would have the best epistemic outcome, would be intellectually vicious. I won't stop to pursue this question here.

⁴⁰ For more on the claim that a civility principle admits of exceptions, see (Shiell 2012: 16-17), (Curzer 2012: 92-94), (Calhoun 2000: 265-72), and (Marcuse 1965: 83-85).

⁴¹ For defenses or discussions of this objection, see (Gutmann and Thompson 1990: 64-65), (Shiell 2012: 12), (Curzer 2012: 89-90), and (Carter 1998: 122-26, 132-36, 141-45).

⁴² Note that this is different from saying that some views, once under consideration, can justifiably be assessed in ways that are intellectually vicious. Though I will not take up the issue here, I will note in passing that this strikes me as implausible. Put positively, I think there is a wide constraint on our consideration of other views such that if and when we engage in such consideration, it should always—barring the sorts of exceptional, high stakes cases noted above—meet certain standards of intellectual care, honesty, etc. Put yet another way, the fact that a particular view has extremely poor epistemic credentials, while perhaps freeing us from the need to consider it, does not justify considering it in a way that is sloppy, careless, unfair, dishonest, or the like. For similar points, see (Estlund 2005), (Mouw 2010: 142-47), and (Carter 1998: 213-19).

⁴³ Much more could be said in explanation and defense of this principle than I can say here. For a related discussion, see my (2011: 157-62). I will note briefly that a person may have legitimate *practical* reasons for not giving her mind to opposing or foreign views engagement with which “might” prove epistemically beneficial. The main point of EP is to rule out cases in which it is clear enough that an opposing view is an epistemic dead end.

⁴⁴ For similar (but not identical) “exception principles,” see (Curzer 2012: 89), (Estlund 2005: 7), and (Guttman and Thompson 1990: 75).

⁴⁵ I insert “apparently” because if the views in question really are extremely implausible, then at least some of the behavior in question (e.g. not giving the view a serious hearing) might not be intellectually vicious.

⁴⁶ The plausibility of this conclusion depends in part on an issue raised in note 42 above. If giving *no* consideration to certain extremely implausible views can be consistent with intellectual virtue, but (barring the extreme cases discussed earlier) giving *hasty, careless, dishonest, or otherwise intellectually vicious* consideration to these views is always impermissible, then it may be that only a subset of the relevant (apparently) vicious actions and attitudes would be justified (namely, those that involve the former but not the latter kind of intellectual activity).

⁴⁷ The belief also seems dubious given that it is often held by people on opposing sides of a single debate! That is, each side believes that the other’s position is epistemically beyond the pale. But, of course, it is extremely unlikely that both perspectives are correct (unless, of course, the belief in question is held only by extremists and the truth always lies somewhere in the middle—a possibility I will not stop to consider here).

⁴⁸ See, for example, (Nickerson 1998), (Hoffrage, Hertwig, and Gigerenzer 2000), (Kruger and Gilovich 1999), (Pronin 2007), (Pronin, Lin, and Ross 2002), (Nisbett and Wilson 1977), (Wilson and Brekke 1994), (Kahneman 2003), (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997).

⁴⁹ The commendation of this principle presupposes that we are sometimes able to recognize that another person can reasonably disagree with us about a given matter *even though* from our own immediate epistemic standpoint, the evidence seems clearly to support our own position. While this strikes me as plausible (and important), there is no question that people are sometimes so wrapped up in or attached to their own perspective that they lack the kind of recognitional ability just noted. This underscores the fact that the application of PRD will sometimes (maybe often) need to be supplemented by additional measures, some of which I will describe momentarily. Thanks to Jim Taylor for suggesting this point.

⁵⁰ Of course, if, upon looking for what is plausible in an opposing view, I find counter-evidence to my own position, then if I am practicing intellectual virtues, I will revise my position accordingly. But this is unobjectionable.

⁵¹ See (Baehr 2011: Ch. 8) for a chapter-length discussion of open-mindedness thus conceived.

⁵² For discussions connecting open-mindedness to civility in public discourse, see (Mill 1859/1978: Ch. 3, esp. 19-21, 43), (Gutmann and Thompson 1990: 80-82), (Hirschman 1989: 77), (Rawls 1971: 337-38; 1993: 217-18), (Schaup 2012: 38-41), (Curzer 2012: 81-82, 85-89), (Gaffney 2012: 243-44), (Carter 1998: 136-40), (Mouw 2010: 53, 61-64, 118-20), and (Button 2005: 851-56).

⁵³ For an account of intellectual humility thus conceived, see Whitcomb et al (2015).

⁵⁴ For discussions that connect intellectual humility (or something like it) to civility, see (Mill 1859/1978: Ch. 3, esp. 17-21, 41), (Schaup 2012: 24-28, 38-41), (Carter 1998: 136-140), (Guinness 2008: 108, 156-57), (Mouw 2010: 52, 61-64), and (Button 2005: 851-56).

⁵⁵ See especially (Nisbett and Wilson 1977), (Wilson and Brekke 1994), and (Kahneman 2003).

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⁵⁶ We would also do well to pay attention to some of the recent literature on “debiasing” (e.g. Baumeister & Bushman 2010).

⁵⁷ This work benefitted from the generous support of the John Templeton Foundation and the Center for Christian Thought at Biola University. Thanks to several CCT fellows and to Jim Taylor for helpful feedback on an earlier draft.