2018

Intellectual Virtues and Truth, Understanding, and Wisdom

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It is a familiar feature of virtues, whether moral, intellectual, or otherwise, that they aim beyond themselves, that is, that they have a characteristic end or goal. And yet there are several aspects of this feature that bear further scrutiny. For instance, what exactly is the nature of the relevant "aiming" relation? Is it primarily causal? Intentional? Or do virtues aim at their respective ends in some deeper metaphysical sense?[1] A further question concerns the ends themselves. At what exactly do virtues aim? This is the issue taken up in the present chapter. I focus in particular on *intellectual* virtues, addressing the question: *What is the proper aim or end of an intellectual virtue?*

As with many philosophical questions, the answer to this one depends in a significant way on certain prior commitments or assumptions. Specifically, I argue that how we should think about the aim or end of intellectual virtues turns in no small part on our initial conception of what an intellectual virtues is—a matter about which there is little agreement in the philosophical literature.[2] One of my central claims is that if we understand intellectual virtues as "personal excellences" like curiosity, open-mindedness, and intellectual courage, then we should conceive of them as aiming at *wisdom*—in particular, at *theoretical* wisdom or *sophia*. This represents a significant departure from standard ways of thinking about intellectual virtues.

1. "Orthodox" and "Unorthodox" Conceptions of Intellectual Virtue

We can begin by drawing a distinction between two accounts of what it is for something to be an intellectual virtue. The distinction is not exhaustive. However, it maps fairly well onto the two main ways in which virtue epistemologists have tended to think about intellectual virtues.[3]

According to the first conception, intellectual virtues are, as a matter of *definition*, a constitutive element of knowledge. In particular, they largely (if not entirely) constitute the justificatory or warrant component of knowledge. Subscribers of this conception accept some variation of the view that knowledge is true belief produced by (and true on account of) an exercise of one or more intellectual virtues.[4]

Note that—at least in principle—this leaves wide open which qualities or capacities might count as intellectual virtues. Intellectual virtues could be cognitive *faculties* like memory or vision; or they could be intellectual *character* strengths like curiosity or intellectual tenacity.[5] The important point is that, on the present conception, the appeal to intellectual virtue is part of an attempt to describe the nature of knowledge. Intellectual virtues just are a central ingredient of knowledge. Given the traditional concern in epistemology with

trying to specify the essential or defining features of knowledge, and given the focus of several early views in virtue epistemology (e.g. Sosa 1991), we can refer to this as the "orthodox" conception of intellectual virtues.[6]

An illustration may be helpful for clarifying this conception. In her pioneering 1996 book *Virtues of the Mind*, Linda Zagzebski argues that knowledge is true belief arising from acts of "acts of intellectual virtue," where intellectual virtues are understood as excellences of intellectual character along the lines noted above. To perform an "act of intellectual virtue," a person must perform the *actions* and instantiate the *motives* characteristic of intellectual virtues and form a true belief as a result (270). Zagzebski's proposal has been criticized on the grounds that a great deal of knowledge can be acquired independently of any virtuous intellectual actions or motives.[7] A considerable amount of basic perceptual knowledge, for instance, appears to be acquirable strictly on account of the natural or "brute" operation of our cognitive faculties—an operation that needn't involve the kinds of actions or motives characteristic of intellectual character strengths like open-mindedness, intellectual courage, or intellectual thoroughness. Suppose this criticism is right. The important point is that if the orthodox conception of intellectual virtues is correct, then what Zagzebski calls "intellectual virtues"— open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and so on—are not intellectual virtues after all, for neither they nor their constitutive elements (i.e. characteristic actions and motives) are an essential feature of knowledge. Again, on the orthodox view, the concept of intellectual virtue has application only to such features.

On an "unorthodox" view of intellectual virtues, the concept of intellectual virtue has philosophical significance and is of philosophical interest apart from any role it may or may not play in a satisfactory analysis of knowledge. More precisely, something counts as an intellectual virtue independently of such considerations.[8]

Potentially, this conception contains even greater leeway when it comes to the *sorts of qualities or capacities* that count as intellectual virtues (e.g. whether cognitive faculties like vision or memory or intellectual character strengths like open-mindedness and intellectual tenacity). For "unorthodoxy" in this context is simply a denial of orthodoxy. Again, on an unorthodox conception of intellectual virtues, a quality or capacity need not be a contributor to knowledge in order to be an intellectual virtue. Per the Zagzebski example above, this leaves open the possibility that intellectual character strengths might count as intellectual virtues even if they are not required for knowledge.

An unorthodox conception of intellectual virtues is also open in a second and related way. On an *orthodox* conception, there is no question about *what gives intellectual virtues their status as virtues*, that is, about the sense in which they are good or excellent. They are virtues because of their contribution to knowledge. By contrast, on an *unorthodox* conception, the kind of excellence instantiated by intellectual virtues is not settled in advance. Indeed, there are, at least in theory, any number of ways in which a given quality or capacity might achieve its status as an intellectual virtue.

With respect to the first kind of leeway noted above, while an unorthodox conception of intellectual virtues leaves wide open which qualities or capacities might count as

intellectual virtues, in reality, its proponents have tended to think of intellectual virtues as excellences of intellectual *character*. Some have taken to exploring connections between intellectual character virtues and other cognitive practices or goods like inquiry (Hookway 2003), epistemic justice (Fricker 2007), and education (Baehr 2013 and 2016). Others have developed models of the nature and structure of an intellectual virtue (Zagzebski 1996; Baehr 2011) and of individual virtues like open-mindedness, intellectual courage, intellectual humility, and curiosity (Roberts and Wood 2007). By contrast, proponents of unorthodoxy have given scant attention to reliable cognitive *faculties* like memory or vision.

With respect to the second way in which an unorthodox conception is open, its subscribers have adopted an array of views concerning what gives intellectual virtues their status as virtues. For some, intellectual virtues are such because of their systematic causal connection with epistemic goods like truth (Driver 2003). For others, it is their contribution to human flourishing that explains their status as virtues (Roberts and Wood 2007). And for other still, the qualities in question are intellectual virtues because of their contribution to their possessor's personal intellectual excellence or worth, that is, because they make their possessor good or admirable qua person (Zagzebski 1996; Baehr 2011).

To summarize: proponents of an "orthodox" conception of intellectual virtue stipulate a conceptual connection between intellectual virtues and knowledge. Intellectual virtues just are the qualities or capacities necessary for acquiring knowledge. Proponents of an "unorthodox" conception resist this stipulation. They take an independent interest in the concept of intellectual virtue and offer a range of accounts as to what gives intellectual virtues their status as virtues.

2. The Aim of Intellectual Virtues

We are now in a position to address the central question of this chapter: namely, what is the proper end or goal of intellectual virtues? At what do intellectual virtues, *qua* intellectual virtues, aim?

Unsurprisingly, the answer to this question depends on whether one is thinking about intellectual virtues along orthodox or unorthodox lines. An exploration of how and why this is the case will, I hope, shed significant light, not only on our options for thinking about the aim of intellectual virtues, but also on other aspects of these qualities, including their role within the broader epistemic landscape.

2.1. The binary thesis

We can begin by taking a step back and considering an initial response that is likely to prove disagreeable to proponents of orthodoxy and unorthodoxy alike. Several epistemologists have identified "truth" or true belief as the goal of our epistemic states and processes. More specifically, the "epistemic goal" has been identified as the acquisition of as much truth or as many true beliefs as possible.[9] In keeping with this view, it has also been

suggested that true belief is the proper aim of intellectual virtues.[10] Nonetheless, as others have pointed out, this cannot be a fully adequate characterization.

If the aim of intellectual virtues or of an intellectually virtuous person were (merely) to form as many true beliefs as possible, then something like *hyper-credulity* might be an intellectual virtue. For, a reasonable policy might be simply to *believe as much as possible*, with the expectation that one will end up with more true beliefs than if one had adopted a more cautious or discriminating doxastic policy (Alston 2005: p. 32). The problem, of course, is that in being hyper-credulous, one can also expect to form many *false* beliefs. As such, hyper-credulity cannot be an intellectual virtue. Neither will it do, then, to understand the proper aim of intellectual virtues strictly in terms of truth or true belief.

The obvious response at this point is to claim that intellectual virtues aim, not merely at true belief, but also at *the avoidance of cognitive error*; alternatively, they aim true *and only true* belief. Call this the "binary thesis." This thesis has no shortage of subscribers. Sosa, for instance, says: "An intellectual virtue is a quality bound to help maximize one's surplus of truth over error" (1991: p. 225). And Keith Lehrer comments: "What is intellectual virtue? It is a virtue that aims at an intellectual goal. What might that be? To obtain truth and avoid error in one's intellectual endeavors, on the present account, to accept what is true and avoid accepting what is false" (2000: p. 210).

But is the binary thesis plausible? This is the point at which differences between orthodox and unorthodox conceptions of intellectual virtue begin to emerge.

2.2. An unorthodox, personal worth conception of intellectual virtues

Let us begin with an unorthodox conception. Partly to keep matters simple, and partly because no other more fine-grained conception is more widely accepted among virtue epistemologists, let us focus in particular on a conception of intellectual virtues according to which intellectual virtues (1) are excellences of intellectual character like open-mindedness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, and intellectual autonomy and (2) gain their status as intellectual virtues on account of their contribution to their possessor's personal worth or excellence, that is, on account of making their possessor good or admirable qua person.[11]

Once we think of intellectual virtues in this way, problems arise for the binary thesis. One problem is a matter of "substance" or content and the other is a matter of "form" or structure.

Consider the person—a familiar character within epistemology—who spends his years counting grains of sand at the local beach or memorizing names and numbers from phonebooks across the globe.[12] Such a person might amass a very large quantity of true and only true beliefs. In the process of doing so he might also regularly manifest dispositions to think or observe attentively, carefully, and diligently. However, if his dispositions to think or observe in these ways are grounded in his appetite for true beliefs about the sorts of mundane and insignificant matters in question, then presumably there is something

deficient—not excellent or praiseworthy—about this person's attentiveness, carefulness, and diligence. Nor is the problem strictly a moral one. It is not merely that his time would be *better* spent cultivating deep friendships, helping the needy, and fighting for social justice. Even from the epistemic-cum-personal standpoint at issue, his attentiveness, carefulness, and diligence are problematic. The reason, it seems, is that they are rooted in a concern with *trivial* truths.[13]

We will explore this claim in greater detail below. For now, I will assume that it is at least prima facie plausible that intellectual character traits rooted in a desire for epistemic trivia—even traits that can be described using language like "attentiveness" and "carefulness"—are not intellectual virtues, at least when they are also being understood as "personal excellences" or as making a contribution to their possessor's excellence or admirability qua person.

To see an additional problem with the binary thesis, consider an ostensibly "epistemically significant" (vs. trivial) subject matter—the history of the First World War, say.[14] Now imagine a person whose goal is to memorize as many first-order facts or "factoids" about the war. He is a veritable wealth of information when it comes to questions like: When did the war begin? How many countries were involved? What were the major battles? How many casualties were there? What types of artillery were used? When did the war end? Who were the victors? Despite having a vast number of true beliefs (and few if any false beliefs) about the war, his grasp of it is profoundly unsophisticated.[15] When it comes to questions about *how* or *why* certain events took place, about what *would have* happened had certain prior events not occurred, or the ability to make important and illuminating connections between his various bits of knowledge, this person is clueless. In short, we can say that while he has a lot of knowledge about World War I, he possesses relatively little *understanding* of it.[16]

We will have occasion to explore this point in greater detail later in the chapter. But here again: even if the person routinely shows carefulness, attentiveness, and diligence in her pursuit of the knowledge in question, these dispositions, considered as such, do not seem like good candidates for intellectual virtues conceived of as contributors to personal worth. Specifically, an underlying concern with mere "factoids"—even factoids about ostensibly epistemically significant subject matters—doesn't seem sufficiently epistemically appropriate, praiseworthy, or admirable for the kind of attentiveness or carefulness that might arise from such a concern to count as intellectual virtues in the relevant sense.

We have seen that the binary thesis, considered in connection with an unorthodox, personal worth conception of intellectual virtues, fails on two counts: (1) it doesn't impose adequate constraints on the *content* of what intellectual virtues aim at; (2) nor does it make sufficient demands on the *structure* of this aim or goal. Concerning the former point, it fails to stipulate that intellectual virtues aim at a grasp of epistemically *significant* (vs. trivial) subject matters. Concerning the latter point, it fails to require that intellectual virtues aim at reflective *understanding* (vs. a grasp of isolated facts).

2.3. An unorthodox, reliabilist conception of intellectual virtues

Before turning to consider how the binary thesis might fare with respect to an orthodox conception of intellectual virtues, a further unorthodox approach is worth considering. Julia Driver (2000) has defended a reliabilist account of intellectual virtues according to which a "character trait is an intellectual virtue iff it systematically (reliably) produces true belief" (p. 126). Driver does not appear to be interested in defending a virtue-based account of knowledge; and she certainly does not *define* intellectual virtues as a constitutive, justification-conferring element of knowledge. Accordingly, she embraces an unorthodox conception of intellectual virtues.

Driver is interested in intellectual virtues understood as good intellectual character traits (not as mere cognitive faculties). She does not, however, conceive of intellectual virtues as "personal excellences," that is, as necessarily contributing to their possessor's personal intellectual worth. She rejects any constraints on the motives, intentions, or desires of an intellectually virtuous person (p. 126).[17]

As explicitly formulated, Driver's account of intellectual virtue does not include an assertion of the binary thesis (specifically, it does not identify the avoidance of cognitive error as a distinct epistemic goal). Nevertheless, it could easily be modified to do so, resulting in the view that a character trait is an intellectual virtue just in case it systematically leads to the formation of true beliefs and avoidance of false beliefs. Would such an account be satisfactory? Or should proponents of a reliabilist conception of intellectual character virtues also construe of the aim of intellectual virtues in substantively or structurally richer terms?

This depends on a couple of factors. First, it depends on whether true belief *per se* is epistemically valuable (even if not enough valuable enough or in the right way such that aiming at it necessarily contributes to personal worth in the manner described above). If true belief *per se* has at least some epistemic value, then dispositions that systematically lead to the production of true belief and the avoidance of false belief may indeed be intellectual virtues of a sort (even if they are not "personal excellences").[18]

Second, if true belief *per se* is not epistemically valuable (e.g. even if only true belief about "epistemically significant subject matters" is epistemically valuable), the dispositions in question might still be intellectual virtues with respect to certain *domains*. True beliefs—even true beliefs about epistemically mundane subject matters—play an important role in many *practical* domains, epistemic or otherwise. The fine print in the microscope manual about how to operate a certain highly technical function of the device might be dull and insignificant from a general epistemic standpoint. Yet having true beliefs about this content might be essential to the lab worker's epistemic success. True beliefs are also critical, of course, across many other practical domains, from business to law to medicine to education. In each of these areas, the possession of certain true beliefs, including true beliefs about putatively epistemically insignificant matters, is crucial to navigating the terrain and achieving success.[19] In this respect as well, dispositions of intellectual character that lead systematically to true belief and the avoidance of error may be considered intellectual virtues relative to the domains in question.

We have seen that if one accepts an unorthodox conception of intellectual virtues, the binary thesis may or may not merit acceptance. Where unorthodoxy is combined with a personal worth conception of intellectual virtues, the thesis fails. But where it is combined with a strict reliabilist conception, its prospects are better.

2.4. Orthodox conceptions of intellectual virtue

I turn in the present section to whether the binary thesis is plausible given orthodoxy about intellectual virtues, that is, given the view that an intellectual virtue just is a constitutive element of knowledge. Here as well it turns out that matters are somewhat complicated.

Internalists about knowledge maintain that factors that justify a belief must be internal to the perspective of the knower. On one standard iteration of this view, a person knows that P only if she has *good reasons for thinking that P is true or likely to be true.*[20] Having a good reason in support of a known belief involves having a kind of illuminating reflective perspective on the belief in question—a perspective that provides the knower with some sense of *how* or *why* the belief is true or likely to be true. As such, knowledge, understood in the relevant internalist way, has a reflective component, or a component of reflective understanding.[21]

When conjoined with orthodoxy about intellectual virtues, this internalist account of knowledge warrants a rejection of the binary thesis. If intellectual virtues are a constitutive, justificatory element of knowledge, and if knowledge necessarily involves an element of reflective understanding—if it necessarily involves having some sense of how or why the known belief is true or likely to be true—then we should expect intellectual virtues to aim, not at truth or true belief in some unqualified sense, but rather at the kind of reflective grasp of truth required by internalism. We should expect an intellectually virtuous person to be concerned with, to strive for, or otherwise to be equipped to achieve such a grasp.

Compare this with an externalist view of knowledge according to which the factors that justify a known belief need not be internal to the perspective of the knower. More concretely, consider a view according to which knowledge is belief that is true on account of having been produced by an exercise of intellectual virtues, where this does not require any kind of reflective perspective on the known belief.[22] Here the inclination is to think of intellectual virtues as aiming (in an unqualified sense) at true belief and the avoidance of cognitive error. While intellectual virtues may sometimes result in the kind of meta-perspective in question, given externalism, it would be a mistake to think of such a perspective as a necessary feature of the aim of intellectual virtues.

We have seen: (1) that if one accepts an orthodox account of intellectual virtues together with an internalist account of knowledge, then one will rightly reject the binary thesis; but (2) that if one accepts the conjunction of orthodoxy about intellectual virtue and externalism about knowledge, then it is at least possible that one ought to accept this

thesis. In the former case, the binary thesis is problematic because it fails to make certain structural requirements on the aim of intellectual virtues. In the latter case, the commitment to externalism about knowledge makes any such requirements unnecessary.

One issue we have yet to consider is whether, if one accepts an orthodox conception of intellectual virtues, one should add any *content*-based constraints to one's account of the aim of intellectual virtues, for example, whether one should think of intellectual virtues as aiming at true belief and the avoidance of false belief *about epistemically significant subject matters.* Such a view can be tempting, if for no other reason than that discussions of epistemic significance often occur in the context of an author's attempt to specify the defining features of knowledge, including some virtue-based attempts.[23] However, this would be a mistake; or, in any case, it would be a mistake given certain generic views of knowledge that have prevailed since the modern era.

To see why, note that whether one knows that P doesn't seem to depend in any principled way on whether P is about an epistemically significant subject matter. Trivial matters are— at least in principle—just as knowable as epistemically significant or substantive subject matters. Accordingly, given a commitment to orthodoxy about intellectual virtues, it would be a mistake to exclude trivial truths from one's account of the ends at which intellectual virtues aim.

While the foregoing point is likely to strike most modern readers as compelling, an historical counterpoint is worth noting. Consider: would Plato or Aristotle agree that what we are here referring to as "trivial truths" would—as a matter of epistemic principle—be any less knowable than "epistemically significant" subject matters? I will not attempt to answer this question decisively. There is, however, some reason to think that they would. One gets the sense from their and certain other pre-modern theories of knowledge that knowledge is a rather exalted epistemic state, one that is not easily achievable and whose object is limited to certain metaphysically robust objects and relations (e.g. in Plato's case, the Forms; in Aristotle's, the necessary and unchanging features of reality).

Suppose this view is right. And suppose, plausibly enough, that it excludes epistemically trivial states of affairs from the possible objects of knowledge. These assumptions, together with a commitment to orthodoxy about intellectual virtues, warrant the introduction of a content-based constraint similar to the constraint identified above in connection with unorthodoxy.[24] Further, if the Platonic or Aristotelian account of knowledge were also to involve a commitment to internalism, this would motivate a rejection of the binary thesis on both content-based and structural grounds.

While by no means the consensus view among contemporary epistemologists, such a view is not as foreign as one might expect. For instance, in the context of defending an account of knowledge that requires the manifestation of virtuous intellectual motives and actions, Zagzebski has occasionally flirted with such a view. Specifically, in response to the objection (noted above) that we appear to know a great deal absent any virtuous intellectual virtues or actions, Zagzebski has remarked (with apparent sympathy for but

stopping short of endorsing the claim) that ordinary ways of thinking about knowledge may be too permissive (1996: pp. 273-78).

Furthermore, over the past decade or more, epistemologists have paid a great deal of attention to questions about the value of knowledge. Much of this attention has revolved around the so-called "Meno problem," that is, the problem of explaining how or why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief, especially when the value of the elements of knowledge other than true belief appear to be derivative from the value of true belief itself.[25] Underlying this problem is an intuition to the effect that knowledge is always or categorically more valuable than mere true belief. However, if knowledge can be had of subject matters or isolated facts that are utterly trivial and uninteresting, then it is far from clear that knowledge has the value in question. Accordingly, if one is convinced that knowledge really is supremely valuable vis-à-vis mere true belief, one might fend off the worry just noted by adopting a much more conservative view of knowledge, for example, a view according to which knowledge necessarily has a reflective component and is limited in its scope to epistemically significant subject matters.[26]

For many of us, however, this rather exalted view of knowledge is a very hard sell, for it rules out what many of us take to be some of the clearest and most forceful instances of knowledge. For example, claims like "I exist" or "I have hands" seem clearly to be knowable independently of any virtuous intellectual motives or actions (rather, they appear to be knowable on the basis of the rather simple, mundane, and brute operation of our cognitive faculties). Indeed, that we know such claims has been taken as given in many influential arguments against skepticism (i.e. against the view that knowledge is impossible). While the defender of a more demanding account of knowledge will dispute the intuitions underlying such reasoning, the more restrictive view of knowledge, and of the proper aim of intellectual virtues, is unlikely to gain much traction with a contemporary audience.

3. Wisdom

The primary focus of this chapter is the proper aim or end of intellectual virtues. We began with a lengthy consideration of the binary thesis, according to which intellectual virtues aim at true belief and the avoidance of cognitive error. We noted that if one accepts an *unorthodox* conception of intellectual virtues and thinks of intellectual virtues as "personal excellences," then one will reject the binary thesis on both substantive and structural grounds. However, we also observed that if one accepts an unorthodox conception of intellectual virtues but conceives of intellectual virtues in reliabilist terms, this might make room for an acceptance of the binary thesis. Next we considered the implications of an *orthodox* conception of intellectual virtues, noting that if one embraces the conjunction of orthodoxy and internalism about knowledge, one will likely (and plausibly) opt for the addition of a structural requirement to the binary thesis. We also noted, however, that if one accepts orthodoxy about intellectual virtues but opts for externalism about knowledge, one will likely endorse this thesis.

In the remainder of the chapter, I want to look more closely at how we should think about the aim of intellectual virtues given that intellectual virtues are excellences of intellectual

character that make their possessor good or admirable qua person and absent any assumptions about their relationship to knowledge (i.e. absent a commitment to orthodoxy). Above we saw both that this is a fairly standard way of thinking about intellectual virtues and that the binary thesis is especially problematic given this view. This leads naturally to the question: If we assume that virtues like open-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual autonomy, and intellectual humility are personal excellences, how should their aim or goal be understood if not in terms of the binary thesis?

Extant discussions of this topic are surprisingly thin. Indeed, many occur in passing as the authors in question seek to address related but different issues concerning intellectual virtues and their epistemic significance.[27] Yet this is an important topic, both theoretically and practically. As we noted at the outset of the chapter, it is a central and familiar feature of virtues (in general) that they have a proper aim, goal, or *telos*. Accordingly, if we hope to arrive at an adequate theoretical understanding of intellectual virtues (in particular), including the relevant *character* virtues, we will need to get a handle on the end or goal at which they aim. Second, as admirable personal qualities, and as qualities that are at least conducive to (even if not constitutive) knowledge and other epistemic goods, we should take an interest in fostering them in ourselves and others. Plausibly, the quality of such efforts will depend in no small part on the extent to which they are grounded in at least a roughly accurate view of the end or goal at which intellectual character virtues aim.[28]

In the reminder of this section, I argue that the aim of intellectual character virtues[29] should be understood in term of something like "theoretical wisdom" or *sophia*. I begin by sketching an account of what I take theoretical wisdom to be. Next I offer some reasons for thinking of theoretical wisdom as the proper aim or end of intellectual character virtues.

Elsewhere (2014) I have defended the view that theoretical wisdom or *sophia* amounts to *deep explanatory understanding of epistemically significant subject matters*. Conceived of in this way, theoretical wisdom is fundamentally a species of *understanding*, meaning, very roughly, that it involves a grasp of *how* or *why* certain features of reality fit together or are related to each other (more on this below).[30] In doing so, it yields an explanation of its subject matter—hence the notion of "explanatory" understanding. Further, the kind of understanding in question is "deep" in the sense (roughly) that its possessor has a grasp of the *fundamental* concepts and principles relative to the issues or subject matters in question.

The core of this account can be elaborated on as follows.[31] Theoretical wisdom is *domain-specific*: a person can be theoretically wise relative to one dimension or domain of reality or another.[32] It also admits of *degrees*: a person can be theoretically wise (relative to a given domain) to a greater or lesser extent.[33] Given these assumptions, we can understand the above notion of "deep explanatory understanding" in the following, more precise way:

> A person possesses theoretical wisdom or *sophia* relative to a given "epistemically significant" domain D to the extent that this person grasps (1) what is fundamental in D, (2) how the fundamental elements of D stand in relation to each other, and (3) how they stand in relation to other, non-fundamental elements of D.

This characterization leaves open what counts as "fundamental" in a given domain and the sorts of "relations" a grasping of which might constitute theoretical wisdom.[34] But this is as it should be, for these variables presumably can be filled out in a variety of ways. A person might be theoretically wise relative to a given domain on account of knowing what is, say, *metaphysically*, *conceptually*, *causally*, or *normatively* fundamental in that domain. Or she might possess *sophia* on account of knowing how other elements of the domain are *causally*, *logically*, *intentionally*, or *normatively* related to the more fundamental elements.

To the extent that we possess a pretheoretical notion of something like "theoretical wisdom," I take it that the foregoing account is consistent with it. Wisdom, in general, is closely associated with a grasp of how things work. While our ordinary ways of thinking about wisdom may tend in the direction of practical wisdom or *phronesis* (where wisdom involves, among other things, a grasp of how things work or fit together in the practical or moral domain), they also plausibly extend to our grasp of other features or dimensions of reality, features that do not have immediate practical or moral relevance. One can be wise about practical affairs; but one can also have wisdom about the nature of various aspects of reality and how these aspects fit together or function. "Theoretical wisdom" is an apt label for this dimension or variety of wisdom.[35]

This way of thinking about theoretical wisdom also comports reasonably well with ancient notions of *sophia*. It fits well, for instance, with Aristotle's well-known account of *sophia* in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There Aristotle claims that *sophia* as a combination of *nous* and *episteme*, where *nous* involves a grasp of metaphysical first principles and *episteme* consists of knowledge of what follows or can be derived from these principles. Given this conception of *sophia*, we would expect the wise person to have a deep explanatory understanding of the fundamental features of reality. Indeed, we might think of Aristotle's conception of *sophia* as deeply similar to the account put forth above except that for Aristotle the domain proper to *sophia* is primarily metaphysical. For, *nous* presumably involves something akin to a grasp of the fundamental structures of reality and *episteme* a grasp of how other aspects of reality are related to or depend upon these more fundamental aspects.[36]

Theoretical wisdom as described above is a prima facie plausible way of thinking about the proper aim of intellectual character virtues conceived of as "personal excellences." Earlier in the chapter we saw that character virtues thus conceived aim at an epistemic good that satisfies certain substantive and structural constraints. Specifically, we noted that the good in question must pertain to or be about "epistemically significant" subject matters and that it must involve an element of reflective understanding. Theoretical wisdom as just described clearly satisfies these conditions.

Nonetheless, to better appreciate the plausibility of this way of thinking about intellectual character virtues, it will be helpful to look more closely at the basis of what we are here referring to as "personal intellectual worth." In *A Theory of Virtue* (2006), Robert Adams defends an account of moral virtue according to which it is a matter of "excellence in being for the good." As I have argued elsewhere (2011: Chs. 6 and 7), Adams's account of virtue

can be recast as an account of personal worth (whether moral, intellectual, or otherwise). Specifically, we can think of one's goodness or admirability as a person as depending on the extent to which one is (excellently) *for* the good, for example, to the extent that one desires, loves, strives for, protects, or delights in the good. Building on this account, we can think of personal *intellectual* worth—the kind of personal worth relevant to intellectual character virtues—as a function of excellence in being for the *epistemic* good.

Underlying this general account of personal worth is the intuitively plausible idea that the admirability of a person's "being for" a given end is (largely) a function of the *value* of the end in question.[37] If the end is evil, then being for it clearly is not admirable. If the end is at least minimally good, then being for it is at least minimally admirable. And if the end is supremely good, then being for it is supremely admirable.[38]

This has important implications when we consider that intellectual character virtues are *ideals*. One can approximate virtues like curiosity, open-mindedness, and intellectual courage to a greater or lesser extent. Further, when possessed in their fullness, these virtues meet a very high normative standard. This explains the frequent discussion of "exemplars" in treatments of intellectual (and related forms of) virtue, for an exemplar of open-mindedness or intellectual courage, say, is someone who instantiates the quality in question in an especially "pure," admirable, or praiseworthy form.[39]

Given that intellectual character virtues contribute to personal worth, and that personal worth is (largely) a function of the value what one is "for" or aims at, the fact that intellectual virtues are *ideals* suggests that we should view them as aiming at a rather exalted or superior epistemic end. That is, we should construe the "epistemic good," not in terms of "low grade" epistemic states like mere true belief or the memorization of isolated bits of information, but rather in terms of an epistemic end that meets a high normative standard.

Treating theoretical wisdom or *sophia* as sketched above as the proper aim of intellectual character virtues clearly satisfies this constraint, for "deep understanding of epistemically significant subject matters" is a superior or "high grade" epistemic good. Again, this way of understanding the aim of intellectual character virtues is plausible *given* (1) that intellectual character virtues are personal excellences, (2) that the personal excellence or admirability of "being for" or aiming at a given end is (largely) a function of the value of this end, and (3) that intellectual character virtues are ideals.

I close by considering a possible objection. One might worry that by thinking of the aim of intellectual character virtues in such exalted terms, we will be forced to regard as *unvirtuous*—or at least as *non*-virtuous—a good deal of intellectual activity that evidently manifests such virtues. If a person is disposed to think and inquire in ways that are open, fair, honest, and rigorous, and this disposition is rooted in something like a love of truth or knowledge, but the guiding conception of truth or knowledge is not so rich or expansive as theoretical wisdom, does the person in question fail to possess any intellectual character virtues? Imagine a careful, fair, honest, and open inquirer who is simply trying to get at the fact of the matter about some fairly narrow (but nevertheless epistemically significant)

topic. She is not pursuing "deep explanatory understanding" of the topic. She simply has a question and wants to know the answer. Again, can we not view her intellectual activity as manifesting intellectual character virtues or as bearing favorably on her goodness or admirability qua person?

I think that indeed we can. As noted above, intellectual virtues can be possessed in *degrees*; we can approximate intellectual virtues (in their fullness) to a greater or lesser extent. Accordingly, to the extent that a careful, fair, honest, and open inquirer is motivated to acquire a true belief about some fairly narrow (but epistemically significant) subject matter, and to the extent that this belief might contribute to "deep explanatory understanding" of the relevant (or a related, sufficiently broad) subject matter, we can and should view this person as approximating or as possessing a notable degree of intellectual virtue.

A similar point applies to cases in which a person's intellectual activity (as distinct from the *goal* of this activity) is expressive of virtues like open-mindedness and intellectual courage but does not reach the upper normative boundary of what such expressions might look like, that is, while not being identical to what a *fully* or *maximally* virtuous person would do in the situation. In cases like this, it would be a mistake to conclude that the person in question fails to manifest any intellectual virtues. A much more plausible conclusion—and one that is entirely consistent with the argument of this chapter—is that she fails to manifest the relevant virtues in their fullness or perfectly.

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[1] For a helpful overview of some of these options, see Battaly (2015: Chs. 1-3).

[2] As my discussion will make clear, this is primarily the literature in *virtue epistemology*, as virtue epistemologists have had by far the most to say about the nature and structure of intellectual virtues. For overviews of the field, see (Greco and Turri 2015) and Battaly (2008).

[3] The first such way is known as "virtue reliabilism" and the second as "virtue responsibilism." Virtue reliabilists conceive of intellectual virtues (roughly) as truth-conducive cognitive capacities or faculties like memory, vision, and introspection. Virtue responsibilists conceive of intellectual virtues as excellences of intellectual character like open-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, and intellectual thoroughness. For more on the relationship between these approaches, see (Baehr: Ch. 4).

[4] See, for example, Sosa (1991: Chs. 10 and 13) and Greco (2010: Ch. 1).

[5] Whether they *are* depends on several factors, some of which are described below. See (Baehr 2011: Ch. 4) for a more in-depth treatment of this issue.

[6] The distinction between orthodox and unorthodox views is related to but different from the distinction between "traditional" and "autonomous" approaches to virtue epistemology that I have developed elsewhere (e.g. Baehr 2011: Ch. 1). Among other differences, the former are views about the nature of an intellectual virtue, while the latter, as overall approaches to virtue epistemology, encompass much more.

[7] See, for example, (Baehr 2011: Ch. 3).

[8] For example, on account of being a reliable means to (even if not a constitutive element of) knowledge. Or on account of exhibiting a praiseworthy or virtuous orientation toward valuable epistemic ends. More on these possibilities below.

[9] The *quantity* of true beliefs is significant because otherwise a person could be said (implausibly) to achieve the "epistemic goal" by forming just a *single* true belief. See (Alston 2005: pp. 29-32).

[10] Ernest Sosa (1991): "Here we assume only a teleological conception of intellectual virtue, the relevant end being a proper relation to the truth, exact requirements of such propriety not here fully specified" (p. 225). Julia Driver (2000): "A character trait is an intellectual virtue iff it systematically (reliably) produces true belief" (p. 126). While both authors speak here only of truth or true belief, it is questionable whether either really thinks of this as a complete specification. Indeed, a couple of sentences after the statement above, Sosa offers a more nuanced and plausible description (see below). Nonetheless, this illustrates the point that epistemologists tend to emphasize the truth aspect of the epistemic goal. As I get to momentarily, while benign in some contexts, this can obscure certain important epistemic facts. See (David 2001) for more on this point.

[11] For a defense of this way of thinking about intellectual virtues, see (Baehr 2011: Chs. 6 and 7).

[12] See e.g. (Sosa 2001: p. 49; 2003: p. 156) and (Roberts and Wood 2007: pp. 155-59).

[13] See Whitcomb (2012: p. 276) and (Grimm: 2011b) for more on the notion of trivial truths.

[14] Here and elsewhere I invoke the notion of "epistemic significance." I will not develop an account of what gives a subject matter this status. Indeed, my argument is intended to be consistent with a wide range of such accounts. I will take for granted, however, that *some* kind of normative distinction between "epistemically trivial" and "epistemically significant" subject matters is plausible. This distinction is widely recognized in the literature. See, for example, (Plantinga 1992: pp. 33, 98), (Goldman 2001: pp. 37-39), (Alston 2005: p. 32), and (Roberts and Wood 2007: pp. 157-59). For a recent comprehensive treatment of this and related issues, see (Hazlett 2013).

[15] Clearly some notion of "trivia" applies here as well. What should now be clear is that there are at least two ways in which a belief can count as a bit of trivia or as trivial: on account of what it is *about* or on account of being *disconnected* from other beliefs.

[16] For more on the nature and structure of understanding, see (Grimm 2011a and 2014). I intend to leave it an open question whether understanding is a (uniquely valuable) species of knowledge. For more on this topic see (Kvanvig 2003), (Grimm 2006), and (Hills 2015).

[17] That is, beyond the requirement that these things contribute to or at least be consistent with the *reliability* of trait in question. She comments: "Special subjective states are not relevant to the trait's status as a virtue, though to have virtue the being must be capable of intention" (ibid.).

[18] Obviously I am opting for pluralism about kinds or concepts of intellectual virtue. For an exploration and defense of this view, see (Battaly 2015) or (Baehr 2011: pp. 89-90).

[19] For more on this point, see (Sosa 2015: pp. 71-74) and (Alston 2005: Ch. 2). As Alston remarks: "[W]here we seek to produce or influence one outcome rather than another, we are much more likely to succeed if we are guided by true rather than false beliefs about the likely consequences of one or another course of action. That is the basic practical importance of truth" (2005: p. 31).

[20] See, for example, (BonJour 1985: p. 8) or (Moser 1989: pp. 42-43).

[21] Depending on the case, the reflective component may be relatively simple, as when a perceptual experience, say, provides the basis or reason for thinking that the corresponding perceptual belief is veridical.

[22] See Greco (2010) or Sosa on "animal knowledge" (2007: Ch. 2) for developments of this view.

[23] See, for example, (Sosa 2011: Ch. 3).

[24] Exactly how similar it would be depends, of course, on the extent to which the present constraint targets something like the notion of epistemic significance. For some further discussion of this, see (Baehr 2014).

[25] See, for example, (Zagzebski 2000) and (Kvanvig 2003).

[26] Of course, one might also opt for rejecting the guiding intuition, that is, one might conclude that knowledge is *not* categorically more valuable than mere true belief. See (Baehr 2009) for an argument along these lines.

[27] My own discussions of this topic (e.g. 2011, 2013, and 2015) illustrate this thinness. Typically, when specifying the aim of intellectual virtues, I have said little more than that they aim at distinctively "epistemic goods" *like* "truth, knowledge, and understanding," with little explicit consideration of how these states are related to other, their relative conceptual priority, and what a more complete specification might look like. See also (Zagzebski 1996: pp. 166-67).

[28] An instructive example here concerns attempts to foster intellectual virtues in an educational setting. If I am right that intellectual character virtues aim at a kind of deep understanding (see below), it stands to reason that such attempts should incorporate a major focus on educating for deep understanding of the relevant disciplinary or academic content. Such a focus should be reflected, among other ways, in the curriculum and pedagogical practices that are employed. However, the centrality of educating for deep understanding to efforts "intellectual character education" might not be obvious if one is unaware that deep understanding is central to the aim of intellectual virtues. For more on the connection between intellectual virtues, understanding, and education, see (Baehr 2013: pp. 251-52).

[29] Henceforth when I refer to "intellectual character virtues," I am referring to qualities like open-mindedness and intellectual perseverance understood as *personal excellences*.

[30] See (Grimm 2014) and (Hills 2015) for more on this aspect of understanding.

[31] Again, see my (2014) for further discussion of these and related points.

[32] I want to leave open how to specify or individuate "domains" of reality. However, one prima facie plausible way is *discipline*-specific, such that a person can have theoretical wisdom relative to the fundamental nature or structure of, say, physical, biological, psychological, or philosophical reality.

[33] For a development of both of these points, see (Baehr 2014).

[34] It also leaves unspecified what is involved with "grasping" a given structure or relation. While an important and challenging question, I take it that the notion of "grasping" is sufficiently intuitively plausible for our purposes. See (Grimm 2006) for a discussion of this point.

[35] For an argument that we do possess a pretheoretical notion of something like theoretical wisdom, see (Whitcomb 2010). The important point, for present purposes, concerns the distinctive variety of understanding at issue, regardless of whether we call it "theoretical wisdom" or think about it as such.

[36] For more on these and related points, see (Taylor 1990) and (Conway 2000).

[37] I say "largely" because it may also be a function, as Adams suggests, of being for the good *in a certain way*, namely, "excellently." Briefly, this involves (at a minimum) being for the good *skillfully* (vs. incompetently) and with good *judgment* (vs. foolishly).
[38] For a development and defense of this and related principles, see Hurka (2001: Chs. 1-3).
[39] See (Roberts and Wood 2007) for a discussion of several exemplars of intellectual character virtue. For an account of virtue grounded in the concept of exemplars see (Zagzebski 2010).