



Intellectual Humility

(eds.) *J. Adam Carter, Jesper Kallestrup, & Duncan Pritchard*
Logos & Episteme Special Issue

Special Issue Overview

This special issue will consist of six full-length articles by leading and up-and-coming philosophers on the topic of intellectual humility, a topic which has attracted a growing interest in the recent philosophical literature. While it is widely regarded that intellectual humility is among the intellectual virtues, a cluster of questions demanding increasing attention are: *why* this is so, what does possessing and exercising intellectual humility consist in, how it should be best understood as advancing our epistemic goals, and how it might connect with an appreciation of how the success of our inquiries depends importantly on features of our social and physical environment beyond our control. This volume will bring together a range of different philosophical perspectives on these and related questions to do with intellectual humility with an aim to contributing importantly to this important and recent debate.

Provisional Paper Titles and Abstracts

Ian Church (St. Louis University)

“A Doxastic Account of Intellectual Humility”

ABSTRACT: Prima facie, intellectual humility is the virtuous mean between intellectual arrogance and intellectual diffidence. The intellectually humble person, to put it roughly, doesn't overly value her beliefs (intellectual arrogance) nor does she under-value them (intellectual diffidence). Instead, she values her beliefs as she ought—valuing her beliefs, their epistemic status, her intellectual abilities as she ought. Given its focus on beliefs, this rough approximation of intellectual humility is what I will call the doxastic account of intellectual humility. This paper will unpack and defend this understanding of intellectual humility. While recent empirical research suggest that intellectual humility might be a multifaceted and multi-layered virtue—with moral dimensions, interpersonal dimensions, intrapersonal dimensions, etc.—I will be defending a fundamentally doxastic account of intellectual humility. Whatever social or moral dimensions intellectual humility might have, I will suggest that it needs to be built upon or understood within this basic, doxastic account.

J. Adam Carter & Emma C. Gordon (University of Edinburgh)
“Knowledge, Assertion and Humility”

ABSTRACT: According to the sufficiency leg of the Knowledge Norm of Assertion (KNA-Suff), one’s assertion that *p* passes epistemic scrutiny provided one knows that *p* (e.g. Williamson 2000; DeRose 2009 Benton 2014). Objections to KNA-Suff have characteristically attempted to establish that there are at least some cases where the impropriety of an assertion is epistemic, even when one very plausibly counts as knowing the proposition asserted. Perhaps the most popular style of case to this effect features expert testimony exhibiting the features of what Lackey (2010) has termed ‘isolated second hand knowledge’ (Lackey 2011; 2013, Carter & Gordon 2011; Coffman 2011; MacKinnon 2010; Gerken 2014). Benton (2014), however, has recently raised some potential problems for this general strategy of argument. In what follows, we want to suggest how considerations to do with *epistemic humility* and its importance in social-epistemic practice might support a novel line against KNS-Suff, one that appeals in some respects to expertise, though which is nonetheless immune from Benton’s (2014) criticisms. We conclude by highlighting some ramifications of our humility-based objection to KNA-Suff for the philosophy of education.

Mark Alfano & Brian Robinson (University of Oregon)

“Educating for Intellectual Humility and Other Paradoxical Virtues Requires Epistemic Anti-Individualism”

ABSTRACT: Virtues are acquirable, so if intellectual humility is a virtue, it’s acquirable. But there is something deeply problematic—perhaps even paradoxical—about aiming to be intellectually humble. Drawing on Edward Slingerland’s analysis of the paradoxical virtue of *wu-wei* (trying not to try) in *Trying Not To Try*, we argue that intellectual developing intellectual humility requires epistemic anti-individualism. Slingerland defines *wu-wei* as the ‘dynamic, effortless, and unselfconscious state of mind of a person who is optimally active and effective.’ Someone who embodies *wu-wei* inspires implicit trust, so it is beneficial to appear *wu-wei*. This has led to an arms race between faking *wu-wei* on the one hand and detecting fakery on the other (e.g., implicit detection of fake versus Duchenne smiles). Like the *wu-wei* person, the intellectually humble person inspires implicit trust. We feel that we can let our guard down around such a person, express our real opinions, and face at worst gentle and constructive criticism. It is thus beneficial to appear intellectually humble. But, of course, someone who makes conscious, strategic efforts to appear intellectually humble is *ipso facto* not intellectually humble. Following Slingerland’s lead, we argue that there are several strategies one might pursue to acquire genuine intellectual humility, and all of these involve commitment to shared social or epistemic values, combined with receptivity to feedback from others, who must in turn have and manifest relevant intellectual virtues. In other words, other people and shared values are partial bearers of a given individual’s intellectual humility. If this is on the right track, then acquiring intellectual humility demands epistemic anti-individualism.

Allesanda Tanesini (Cardiff University)

“Humility, Arrogance and Ignorance”

ABSTRACT: In this talk I adopt the framework of attitudes as these are understood in social psychology to offer novel accounts of the vice of intellectual ignorance and of the virtue of intellectual humility. This framework helps to clarify the relations between the motivational, affective, cognitive, behavioural and perceptual dimensions of these traits and to substantiate their empirical reality. In my account both humility and arrogance are strong positive attitudes directed toward the truth as one aim of belief. They differ however in their functions. In the humble person the preference for true beliefs has the function of appraising its objects; in the arrogant person it serves the purpose of protecting self-esteem. For this reason the arrogant is unable to consider how things may seem from a different point of view. This account reveals intellectual arrogance as one of the main causes of ignorance (about some facts concerning oneself and others) as something that is actively cultivated. Finally, given that arrogance and humility are clusters of strong attitudes, I outline some educational interventions, based on psychological research on attitude change, which may prove effective in the eradication of vice and the habituation of virtue.

Andrea English (University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education)
“Humility, Empathy and Teaching”

ABSTRACT: Must one have humility in order to teach? If teachers are understood as all-knowing transmitters of pre-packaged knowledge, it becomes difficult to associate teaching with humility. If, however, teaching is understood as a reflective and dialogic practice in which teachers are engaged in processes of learning with learners, then humility can be understood as an indispensable part of what it means to be a teacher. This latter conception of teaching, as I will show, connects to 19th-century German notions of *Bildung* (education) as well as to contemporary concepts of dialogic teaching. By examining teaching as a reflective practice, I argue that the development of humility is uniquely connected to the development of empathy in teaching. In closing, I draw out the implications of my argument for current international educational policy.

Modesto Gómez-Alonso (Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca)
“Cartesian Humility and Pyrrhonian Passivity: The Ethical Significance of Epistemic Agency”

ABSTRACT: While the Academic sceptics followed the plausible as a criterion of truth and guided their practice by a doxastic norm, so thinking that agential performances are actions for which the agent assumes responsibility, the Pyrrhonists did not accept rational belief-management, dispensing with judgment in empirical matters. In this sense, the Pyrrhonian sceptic described himself as not acting in any robust sense of the notion, or as ‘acting’ out of sub-personal and social mechanisms. The important point is that the Pyrrhonian advocacy of a minimal conception of ‘belief’ was motivated by ethical concerns: avoiding any sort of commitment, he attempted to preserve his peace of mind. In this article, I argue for a Cartesian model of rational guidance that, in line with some current versions of an agential virtue epistemology, does involve judgment and risk, and so that it is true both to our rational and to our finite and fallible nature. Insofar as epistemic humility is a *virtue of rational agents* that recognise the limits of their judgments, Pyrrhonian scepticism, and *a fortiori* any variety of naturalism, is unable to accommodate this virtue. This means that, in contrast to the Cartesian model, the Pyrrhonist does not provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of *cognitive disintegration*, and so that he becomes a social rebel, one that violates the norm of *personal serious assent* that enables the flourishing of a collaborative and social species which depends on agents that, although fallible, are accountable for their actions and judgments.

About the Editors

J. Adam Carter is a research assistant on the AHRC-funded Extended Knowledge project at the Eidyn Research Centre, University of Edinburgh. His work has appeared in venues such as *Noûs*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Analysis*, and *Synthese*. He currently has three books under contract: *Meta-epistemology and Relativism* (Palgrave-Macmillan), *A Critical Introduction to Knowledge-How* (co-authored, Continuum), and *Knowledge First* (co-edited, Oxford UP).

Jesper Kallestrup is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh and Postgraduate Director of the School of Philosophy, Psychology & Language Sciences. His research interests are primarily at the intersection of philosophy of mind, philosophy of language and epistemology. He is the author of *Semantic Externalism* (Routledge, 2011), *Methods and Skills for Philosophy* (Routledge 2015), *Epistemic Anti-Individualism* (in progress), and he has published more than 30 research articles in peer-reviewed journals, including *Analysis*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Synthese*, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, and *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

Duncan Pritchard FRSE is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh and Director of the Eidyn Research Centre, which is based in the School of Philosophy, Psychology & Language Sciences. His main area of research is epistemology, and he has published widely in this area, including the monographs *Epistemic Luck* (Oxford UP, 2005), *The Nature and Value of Knowledge* (co-authored, Oxford UP, 2010), *Epistemological Disjunctivism* (Oxford UP, 2012), and *Epistemic Angst: Radical Skepticism and the Groundlessness of Our Believing* (Princeton UP, forthcoming). In 2007 he was awarded the Philip Leverhulme Prize. In 2011 he was elected to a Fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. In 2013 he delivered the annual Soochow Lectures in Philosophy in Taiwan.