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Intellectual Humility and Epistemic Trust

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Abstract. Epistemic trust helps secure knowledge, and so does intellectual humility. They do so independently; but they can also support each other, and this chapter discusses how. Epistemic trust, at least the form discussed here, is trust in oneself or another person for knowledge. It involves a norm-governed relationship with positive affective and volitional attitudes, and is effective at securing knowledge when directed toward a trustworthy person. Intellectual humility is a character virtue that involves caring about epistemic ends and promotes accurate insight into those of one's own cognitive, affective, and volitional faculties that are relevant to acquiring knowledge. Intellectual humility, I argue, promotes effective epistemic trust in oneself and in others. It promotes effective epistemic self-trust by yielding insight into one's own epistemic trustworthiness, and by ensuring that one is motivated to epistemically self-improve if necessary. It promotes effective epistemic trust in others, at least in the context of testimony, by helping a hearer assess whether he needs outside epistemic assistance, and how apt he is at selecting trustworthy testifiers; and by helping a speaker be epistemically trustworthy.

Intellectual humility has something important in common with trust: both, independently, help secure knowledge. But they also do so in tandem, and this chapter discusses how.

Intellectual humility is a virtue of a person's cognitive character; this means that it disposes her to perceive and think in certain ways that help promote knowledge. Trust is a form of cooperation, in which one person depends on another (or on herself) for some end, in a way that is governed by certain norms. *Epistemic* trust is trust for epistemic ends, where the one that I will focus on here is knowledge. When the parties to an epistemic-trust relationship exhibit intellectual humility, I will argue, they are in a better position than otherwise to secure knowledge. Some think that this is true trivially, on the grounds that knowledge (on their view) is *constituted by* the exercise of epistemic virtues. Whether or not this is so, I will focus on two different ways in which intellectual humility makes epistemic trust knowledge-conducive: first, it equips trusters to invest trust effectively – that is, in those who are trustworthy; second, it equips trustees to be epistemically trustworthy.

I will start by sketching epistemic trust (section 1) and intellectual humility (section 2). Then I will show how intellectual humility promotes effective epistemic trust in oneself (section 3), and how it helps relationships of epistemic trust between two parties be effective (section 4). Along the way I will draw comparisons with the epistemic vices of intellectual arrogance and intellectual servility.

1. Epistemic Trust

Trust is a three-place relation: one person trusts another person (or herself) for some thing or end.¹ Trust involves *relying* on the trustee for the end in question. But trust is more than

¹ Some argue that one- or two-place trust is more basic. See e.g. Jones (2004), and Domenicucci and Holton (2017).

reliance, for you can rely on a person without trusting him. Immanuel Kant was said to be so regular in his habits that his neighbors could set their clocks to the time at which he left his house each day – but they did not *trust* him for the time. Mere reliance is a matter of planning on someone’s predictable behavior, whereas trust involves a cooperative relationship with her.

This relationship has two aspects (see Dormandy forthcoming). First, it imposes certain norms on the truster and trustee alike (Jones 2017, Hawley 2014, Faulkner 2011, Hinchman 2017). For example, the trustee, insofar as she accepts trust, should do her best, within reason, to fulfill it; culpable failure to do so constitutes betrayal, or at least letting the truster down. As for the truster, he should allow the trustee a measure of discretion in fulfilling his trust, without nagging or micromanaging her efforts (Baier 1986).

Second, trust relationships have a characteristic psychology. The truster, for his part, works from the assumption that the trustee will respond positively to him or to the trust relationship; and the trustee – supposing that she accepts his trust – is responsive in this way. She might for instance care about the truster, be motivated by the fact that he is depending on her, aim to advance a common project, or be committed to coming through given that she has accepted his trust (Baier 1986, Jones 1996, Hinchman 2005, Faulkner 2011, Hawley 2014).

We trust people for various things, so many that trust is sometimes compared to the air we breathe – we notice it only when it is absent (Baier 1986, 234). This holds of our trust for epistemic aims. We gain a vast proportion of our knowledge by trusting people for it, ourselves as well as others.² We trust ourselves, for example, to perceive accurately, reason carefully, or to intuit cogently, and we trust others (parents, teachers, colleagues, friends, the media, scientists) to teach or inform us.

Epistemic trust can be *effective or ineffective*. Effective epistemic trust is trust in a trustworthy agent – that is, an agent disposed to deliver the knowledge that she is being trusted for. Ineffective trust is trust in someone who is not trustworthy, and is all the more ineffective if she is actively untrustworthy. Epistemic trustworthiness has two elements. One is *willingness*. This in turn has two components. The first is willingness to abide by the norms of the trust relationship: to be sincere, to do her reasonable best to provide the knowledge that she is being trusted for, and so forth. The second component is willingness to enter into the characteristic psychology of trust: to experience the normative pull of commitment or the emotional pull of knowing that the truster is counting on her. These two aspects of willingness typically have a motivating effect: subjecting oneself to normative expectations encourages conformity to them, and responding to a truster’s dependence typically involves feeling motivated to come through for him.

The second element of epistemic trustworthiness is *competence* to perform the epistemic tasks that accompany knowing and sharing one’s knowledge. An epistemically trustworthy person is competent to form her own knowledge on the matter at issue: it is foolhardy to trust someone for knowledge if she is not competent to secure it. When the trustee is someone other than the truster himself, then competence has a second aspect: competence to communicate to him the knowledge that he needs in his context. This is important, for if even the most competent knower cannot do this, trusting her for knowledge will be of little benefit.

² Trust, either in ourselves or others, is not *necessary* for knowledge; merely relying on ourselves or others is an option, though less effective. See Dormandy (forthcoming).

Epistemic untrustworthiness,³ by contrast, involves being *unwilling* or *incompetent*. Trust in an untrustworthy person is ineffective: such a person is not apt to come through for you. The fitting attitude toward her is thus *distrust*. This is more than simply declining to trust her, for you might do this simply because you do not need anything from her. Distrusting someone, by contrast, involves declining to trust her *because you regard her as untrustworthy* (Hawley 2014, D’Cruz 2019). A person can exhibit epistemic distrust in herself: she can construe herself as unwilling to subject herself to the norms of trust or to respond positively to her own epistemic needs, or as incompetent to secure the needed knowledge (Dormandy forthcoming). And this attitude can be fitting: a person can be unworthy of epistemic self-trust.

Epistemic trust undoubtedly has a role in *securing* knowledge. But accounts of knowledge differ about what additional role, if any, epistemic trust has in *constituting* it. One account worth mentioning here is virtue responsibilism. On this view, knowledge is true belief formed by the exercise of epistemic character virtues (Code 1987, Kvanvig 1992, Montmarquet 1993, Zagzebski 1996, Baehr 2011) – such as intellectual humility. If virtue responsibilism is the right account of knowledge, then exercising intellectual humility when you form a true belief on trust can yield knowledge trivially. But I will not discuss virtue responsibilism here. For I aim to show, instead, that intellectual humility is of great value to epistemic trust even if virtue responsibilism is false. The reason is that exhibiting intellectual humility, whether or not this helps constitute knowledge, can *cause* you, if you are a truster, to direct your epistemic trust in knowledge-yielding ways; and if you are a trustee it can help you be trustworthy in your supplying of knowledge. It is this causal role of intellectual humility in securing knowledge that I will explore here, whether or not intellectual humility also has any role in constituting it.

The next step is to give a (very general) sketch of intellectual humility.

2. Intellectual Humility

Intellectual humility is an epistemic character virtue. As such it is a stable trait of a person’s cognitive character.⁴ The intellectually humble agent has two features, one marking him as epistemically virtuous in general, the other as intellectually humble specifically.

The general feature is this: *the intellectually humble person is epistemically motivated* (Baehr 2011; Roberts and Wood 2003; Church 2016; Whitcomb et al. 2017; Tanesini 2018). That is, he cares about achieving epistemic aims such as knowledge, and this is what motivates his cognitive behavior. One corollary of being epistemically motivated is that the intellectually humble person is disposed to strive for epistemic self-improvement for its own sake. This is not to say that intellectually humble agents cannot have other aims in their cognitive activities (such as career-advancement in a field that prizes epistemic prowess), only that these cannot be their sole or primary aims.

The specifically distinguishing feature of the intellectually humble agent is that *he is disposed to form largely accurate evaluations of his own epistemic strengths and weaknesses*.⁵ A few clarifications are in order. First, intellectual humility is directed toward

³ It may be possible for a trustee to fail to be epistemically trustworthy without being untrustworthy; if so, then trusting either sort of person is ineffective but here I’ll focus on untrustworthiness.

⁴ Situationists deny that people have stable character traits and thus epistemic virtues. I cannot discuss this objection here, but see (Alfano 2013, chapter 5, and Tanesini 2018, section 6).

⁵ This is closest to the view of Tanesini (2018), but I hope to capture at least the spirit of many other views (see footnote 5). The main outlier is Roberts and Woods’s (2003) “low concern for status” view, which characterizes

the agent himself. In this it can be contrasted with other virtues, such as epistemic charity or open-mindedness, that are directed toward others.

Second, views differ over the precise form of the epistemic self-evaluations involved in intellectual humility. Hazlett (2012) says that they are evaluative beliefs, whereas Church (2016) holds, more generally, that they involve “accurately tracking” one’s epistemic state. Whitcomb et al. (2017) say that the evaluations are states of “recognition” (522), whereas Tanesini (2018) construes them as valenced attitudes, such as like or dislike, that could, but need not, be articulated in terms of evaluations. The form of the intellectually humble agent’s self-evaluations will not concern us here, so I mention this issue only to pass it by.

More important for present purposes, third, is what these evaluations are evaluations of. Some views construe their objects more narrowly than others; I will follow Tanesini (2018), whose construes them the most broadly, as all “aspects of the subject’s cognitive agency” (410). The objects of evaluation thus include the agent’s cognitive abilities and limitations, his cognitive achievements and failures, as well as his beliefs.⁶ Much of the literature reads as if intellectual humility concerns itself only with one’s purely intellectual features.⁷ But we must remember that knowledge acquisition is strongly influenced by our affections and volition. Their influence might be direct, supposing that emotions or desires can simply bring about beliefs; whether or not they can, they certainly exert indirect influence, as when an emotion or a desire influences what a person attends to or ignores, or “colors” his perception of some even, thereby nudging him to form a particular belief on its basis. Epistemic self-evaluation, then, must at times include emotional and volitional self-evaluation, at least insofar as these states influence one’s cognition. This observation will prove important in our discussion below of the relationship between intellectual humility and epistemic trust and trustworthiness, for these, as we saw, have not only intellectual, but also emotional and volitional elements. I will refer to the objects of the intellectually humble agent’s epistemic self-evaluation as his *noetic* faculties.

Fourth, the intellectually humble person’s epistemic self-evaluations tend, at least in benign epistemic contexts, to be accurate (Tanesini 2018, 414; Whitcomb et al. 2017; Church 2016). That is, if she evaluates some feature of her noetic system, she does so accurately, and does not fail to evaluate any feature that matters for a given case (or at least, she does not fail to form the requisite affective attitude that would naturally give rise to an evaluation). This means, among other things, that the agent tends to recognize her noetic strengths and weaknesses, the strength of her evidence, and so forth. She is likely aware of whether she is well or poorly versed in a given topic, and if she harbors implicit racial or gender stereotypes that influence whom she trusts for knowledge, she is clued into this fact or at least to its likelihood. That said, intellectual humility does not *entail* that any given self-evaluation will be accurate, for even an intellectually humble person can be non-culpably misled (Tanesini 2018, 414).

intellectual humility as not caring about the way in which others perceive your epistemic abilities. That said, low concern for status is often an outworking of intellectual humility as construed here (Whitcomb et al. 2017, 523).

⁶ Hazlett (2012) and Church (2016) limit the objects of evaluation to the epistemic statuses of the agent’s beliefs, omitting other sorts of attitude and ability. Whitcomb et al. (2017) limit the objects of evaluation to the agent’s cognitive limitations, omitting her strengths. I adopt Tanesini’s view because it is the broadest: it includes the objects of evaluation highlighted by the others.

⁷ For example, Tanesini says that intellectual humility might be directed at beliefs, theories, cognitive capacities, habits, or skills (2018, 411-412), including one’s vision and hearing (411), memory (412), or problem-solving ability (413). See also Whitcomb et al. (2017, 516). And note the claim of Church (2016) and Hazlett (2013) that intellectual humility is directed solely at the epistemic status of one’s beliefs.

We may contrast intellectual humility with two intellectual vices: intellectual arrogance and intellectual servility.⁸ As with intellectual humility, there is one feature (I will suppose) that marks them as vices, and another singling them out as the specific vices that they are. The general feature is this: *intellectually arrogant or servile agents are not epistemically motivated*.⁹ Their noetic behavior is instead motivated exclusively by other things, such as the desire to advance their career in a field that prizes knowledge. As a result, intellectually arrogant or servile agents are not disposed to strive for epistemic self-improvement, at least not for its own sake.

What makes these vices counterparts to intellectual humility is their second, distinguishing, feature. Like intellectual humility, both are directed toward the agent himself, specifically toward his own epistemic strengths and weaknesses. But whereas the intellectually humble agent is disposed to form accurate self-evaluations, intellectually arrogant or servile agents are disposed to form inaccurate ones. More specifically, *the intellectually arrogant agent is disposed to excessively high evaluations of her own noetic strengths in acquiring knowledge, and excessively low evaluations of her weaknesses in this area; and the servile agent is disposed to inaccuracy in the other direction: to an excessively low evaluation of his noetic strengths in acquiring knowledge, and a high evaluation of his relevant weaknesses*.¹⁰ In other words, the intellectually arrogant agent is apt to think that she is better at securing knowledge than she is, whereas the servile agent is apt to think that he is worse than he is (Whitcomb et al. 2017, 526; Church 2016, 413-414; Hazlett 2012, 220; Tanesini 2018, 418;).

Because the vices of intellectual arrogance and intellectual servility have these characteristics, they tend to be epistemically detrimental in standard circumstances – that is, they tend to impede the acquisition of knowledge.

3. Intellectual Humility and Epistemic Self-Trust

This section and the next explore connections between intellectual humility and epistemic trust. This section discusses epistemic self-trust, the next epistemic trust in others.

As we saw, epistemic trust can be reflexive: a person can trust *herself* for the delivery of knowledge (Foley 2001, Zagzebski 2012, Lehrer 1997, Dormandy forthcoming). She can have normative expectations of herself, and she can rely on herself to respond positively to her own epistemic needs. Similarly, a person can be more or less worthy of epistemic self-trust: she might be more or less willing to treat herself as the norms of trust mandate or to care about her own epistemic needs; and she might be more or less competent in acquiring the knowledge that she needs in her context.¹¹

⁸ Some characterize these two vices as the extremes between which intellectual humility is the virtuous “mean” (Church 2016, 413-414; Hazlett 2012, 220; Whitcomb et al. 2017, 516-517). But Tanesini (2018, 418) cautions against this picture on the grounds that it is psychologically unrealistic: you don’t correct for servility by adding doses of arrogance until you arrive at intellectual humility. Her complex catalogue of other vices opposed to intellectual humility also speaks against a one-scale model (Tanesini 2018c).

⁹ Or so I suppose here, in agreement with (Zagzebski 1996; Battaly 2016; Tanesini 2018a). For contrary arguments, to the effect that intellectual vice is compatible with epistemically good motivations, see (Cassam 2016; Crerar 2018).

¹⁰ These are distinguished from a cluster of related vices, such as intellectual haughtiness and timidity, in (Tanesini 2018c).

¹¹ On closer inspection, Foley (2001), Zagzebski (2012) and Lehrer (1997) seem to construe self-trust as mere reliance on one’s faculties, rather than as trust in the richer sense discussed here (Dormandy forthcoming).

The intellectually humble person, it turns out, is in a good position to exercise effective epistemic self-trust. The reason is that she is disposed to have a good grip on her own noetic strengths and weaknesses, including those which make her epistemically trustworthy or untrustworthy. She will likely have insight into the affective and volitional states that determine how willing she is to come through for herself, and into the cognitive states that determine her level of competence (plus the affective and volitional influences on them). The intellectually humble agent, then, is well placed to tell whether trusting herself for knowledge will be effective.

If trusting herself in a given case turns out *not* to be a wise move (because she lacks the willingness or the competence), then intellectual humility confers a second benefit: it disposes a person to *grow* in epistemic trustworthiness, for it disposes her to noetically self-improve for the sake of promoting epistemic aims. This might mean working on her emotions and will, or honing the faculties that make for competence.

Intellectual humility, then, promotes effective epistemic self-trust: it helps a person know whether she is epistemically trustworthy, and when she is not, it disposes her to grow in epistemic trustworthiness.

Compare the intellectually humble self-truster with intellectually arrogant and servile ones. We saw that the intellectually arrogant person *overestimates* her noetic strengths vis-à-vis the acquisition of knowledge, and *underestimates* her noetic weaknesses in this area. In her capacity as a self-truster, then, she will tend to overestimate her own willingness or competence to secure knowledge. As a result, she will be disposed to trust herself too readily, even when doing so is not effective. This means that she will tend to form many beliefs, of which a large proportion might, unbeknownst to her, be false or unfounded. As for the intellectually servile person, we saw that he *underestimates* his noetic strengths vis-à-vis the acquisition of knowledge, and *overestimates* his relevant noetic weaknesses. In his capacity as a (potential) self-truster, then, he will tend to underestimate his willingness or competence to secure knowledge, and will thus be disposed to *distrust* himself – even when self-trust might have been effective after all. The intellectually servile person may thus form comparatively few beliefs on his own, tending instead toward tentative belief or suspension of judgment. While not conducive to false or unfounded belief, such behavior is certainly not conducive to knowledge.

Another contrast between intellectually arrogant and servile self-trusters is this: The intellectually arrogant person, at least in theory, is in a better position to epistemically self-improve. Her readiness to trust herself, though rash, means that she will have fewer qualms about putting her beliefs out there – testifying them, acting on them, and so forth. She is thus apt to receive at least some corrective feedback from the world. Of course, her arrogance may prevent her from assimilating much of it (she may for example explain it away), but at least she will often have the option. The intellectually servile person, by contrast, is in a much worse position. Because his distrust in himself prevents him from forming many confident beliefs on his own, he forfeits the opportunity to receive much feedback at all. He will thus tend to lack indications of ways in which he might epistemically self-improve. His knowledge-acquiring abilities may even atrophy to the point that his negative self-evaluations become a self-fulfilling prophecy. So whereas the intellectually arrogant person tends to be hindered by real yet unacknowledged epistemic weaknesses, the servile tends to fall victim to imaginary or at least exaggerated ones. The intellectually humble person, in contrast to both, is in much better shape.

We have seen that intellectual humility helps make one's epistemic self-trust effective. Yet some might think that there is an even closer relationship, one of necessity, between

effective self-trust and intellectual humility. Perhaps, at least in worlds similar enough to ours, intellectual humility is necessary for exercising effective self-trust. Or perhaps intellectual humility is sufficient to ensure that one's self-trust will be effective. Both entailment claims, however, are false.

First, intellectual humility is not necessary for epistemic self-trust to be effective. A person could trust herself effectively because she accurately evaluates her own noetic strengths and weaknesses – yet she might fail to be humble, because she is not motivated to promote epistemic aims for their own sake (she might wish simply to advance her career). Second, intellectual humility is not sufficient to ensure that epistemic self-trust is effective. A person could be epistemically motivated, and accurately evaluate her noetic strengths and weaknesses, yet trust herself rashly, even when those evaluations come up negative. For she might have some other epistemic vice, such as cognitive impulsiveness, that she is (on account of her intellectual humility) aware of and motivated to overcome, but is not yet in control of. So even though effective epistemic self-trust is often powered by intellectual humility, it can be found without this virtue; and even though intellectual humility tends to make for effective epistemic self-trust, it is not guaranteed to do so.

4. Intellectual Humility and Epistemic Trust in Others

We have seen that intellectual humility promotes effective epistemic self-trust. I will now argue that it also helps epistemic trust in other people to be effective. The paradigm case that I will focus on is a testimonial relationship, in which one person, the speaker, tells something to another, the hearer, thereby purporting to make knowledge available (Goldberg, unpublished manuscript) and inviting him to trust her for it (Hinchman 2005). The exchange might be over in an instant, as when one person tells another something that she knows off the top of her head, or it could extend over time, as when she promises to research something and get back to him. I'll argue in section 4.1 that intellectual humility disposes a hearer to invest his epistemic trust effectively; in section 4.2 I'll argue that it disposes a speaker to be epistemically trustworthy.

4.1 The Intellectually Humble Hearer of Testimony

Trusting another person for knowledge is in some ways like trusting oneself for it, and in other ways different. It is similar in that what makes it effective is the trustee's willingness and competence. It is different in that the trustee is another person, so you must gauge these things at a remove (Fricker 2006). Whereas the epistemic self-truster needs accurate evaluations of his own noetic faculties, the epistemic truster of others needs accurate evaluations of others'.¹² Intellectual humility, a virtue of self-evaluation, is tailor-made for the epistemic self-truster. But it will not help the epistemic truster of others in the same way, since evaluating others' noetic faculties is not its remit. For help in choosing which speakers to trust, he must cultivate other virtues.

Yet there are a few ways in which intellectual humility can nevertheless be useful to a prospective hearer of testimony. First, because it puts him in a good position to recognize when trusting himself for knowledge would be effective and when not, it helps him recognize when he should seek outside epistemic assistance as opposed to trusting himself.

¹² This is so regardless of whether she is required merely to respond to any defeaters against trusting others, or to seek positive reasons to trust them.

Second, intellectual humility puts the hearer in a position to recognize his own strengths and weaknesses in assessing others' epistemic merits. That is, it helps him know when he can safely trust himself in choosing his testifiers. He might for example realize that he is better at doing this in some domains or social contexts than others, or that he is biased with regard to certain types of testifier, prompting him spontaneously to up- or downgrade their testimony.

Third, intellectual humility disposes the hearer to *improve* his testifier-selecting abilities – for example to cultivate the relevant virtues, to re-train his biases through seeking counterinstances to them, and so forth.

So even though intellectual humility cannot directly help a hearer choose his testifiers, it can help him indirectly.

Contrast this with intellectually arrogant or servile hearers. As for the arrogant hearer, we saw that such a person *overestimates* her noetic strengths at knowledge acquisition and *underestimates* her noetic weaknesses, leading to an excessive readiness to trust herself. As a hearer of testimony, this person faces two pitfalls. First, she will incline toward trusting herself when it would be wiser to trust knowledgeable others. Second, even when she does opt to delegate a cognitive task to others, her intellectual arrogance will still get in the way. For the abilities that she overestimates include *her abilities to gauge whom to trust for knowledge*, making her apt to trust herself too readily on the topic of which others to trust. She may thus wind up trusting speakers who are not in fact trustworthy. One danger is that she will trust only those whose testimony coheres with her own worldview, fostering cognitive entrenchment. Intellectual arrogance, then, is an epistemic stumbling block for a hearer of testimony.

The intellectually servile hearer has the converse problem. As we saw, this person *underestimates* his noetic strengths in knowledge acquisition and *overestimates* his noetic weaknesses, not trusting himself readily enough, and perhaps actively distrusting himself. In theory, the effects of this vice could be mitigated by compensating, other-directed, epistemic virtues that help him accurately gauge the trustworthiness of prospective speakers: the servile hearer could obtain his knowledge from them. In practice, however, any such silver lining will likely be sabotaged. For the servile hearer is also likely to underestimate his ability to reason about whom to trust for knowledge. As a result, even if he can reason well about this, he will tend to distrust himself to do so. What he is apt to do instead is to cede the choice of whom to trust to the first or loudest comer, especially if, as Tanesini (2018c) argues, servility is motivated by the desire for social acceptance. In other words, the servile hearer will tend toward gullibility: he will likely wind up, like the arrogant hearer, with a fairly large proportion of (confident) false beliefs to true ones.¹³ Intellectual servility, then, leads to unwise and thus ineffective epistemic trust in others.

In summary, intellectual humility disposes someone in search of testimonial knowledge to invest his epistemic trust effectively. It does not help him assess others' epistemic merits, but it helps him recognize when he needs outside assistance, how able he is to discern whom to trust for knowledge, and it disposes him to improve his testifier-selecting abilities. Intellectual arrogance and intellectual servility, by contrast, promote ineffective epistemic trust in others.

¹³ Another response to distrusting yourself to pick testifiers is that you decline to trust any at all, which (if you are servile and distrust yourself too) will push you toward suspension of judgment on many matters. But this tendency is arguably not proper to intellectual servility, but to the closely related vice of intellectual timidity (Tanesini 2018c).

4.2 The Intellectually Humble Speaker of Testimony

Let's turn to the speaker, in her capacity as trustee for knowledge. I will argue that intellectual humility fosters epistemic trustworthiness – that is, it fosters willingness and competence.

Consider first willingness, which, to recall, includes willingness to abide by the norms of the trust relationship, and willingness to experience the characteristic psychology of trust. Intellectual humility promotes both. The intellectually humble person, as we saw, is motivated to pursue epistemic aims for their own sake; this surely includes social-epistemic aims, where the person gaining knowledge is someone other than herself. So if the humble speaker knows or can find out what the hearer needs to know, she is disposed to be willing to come through for a hearer.

Let's turn to competence. Recall that this amounts to competence to form one's own knowledge on the matter at issue, and competence to communicate to the hearer the knowledge that he needs in his context. We may call these *knowledge* and *communicative* competences, respectively. Intellectual humility encourages knowledge competence: it ensures that the speaker is motivated to promote epistemic ends, with the correlate that she is motivated to epistemically self-improve for the sake of doing so. This does not guarantee that her efforts will succeed, but it certainly promotes success.

What about communicative competence? To see how intellectual humility fosters this, we need a closer look at what it involves. There are three components. One is (a) competence to testify only if one has knowledge. Since testifying is a form of asserting, this competence amounts to the speaker's being able to obey a plausible norm of assertion: to assert only what she knows (Williamson 2000, chapter 11). A speaker who cannot obey this norm cannot be trusted to refrain from asserting things that she does not know – a disaster for a hearer trusting her for knowledge. The next component of communicative competence is: (b) competence to accept the hearer's trust for knowledge only if she is willing to fulfill it; that is, willing to subject herself to the norms of trust and to experience its characteristic psychology. For example, if her jealousy toward the speaker is prone to sapping her commitment to doing her best for him, she must recognize this and perhaps decline his trust. A speaker who cannot accurately gauge her willingness to come through for a hearer is a risky bet. Finally, (c) the speaker must be competent to discern what sort of information the hearer needs in his context (Hinchman 2012, Grasswick 2018). For example, if he asks for directions to the post office and is pushing a baby carriage, she should not automatically direct him in the way that would be simplest for someone traveling light, say, up a flight of stairs. This sort of competence involves thinking herself into the hearer's situation.

Intellectual humility fosters each of these communicative competences. (a) The intellectually humble speaker is well placed to know what she knows and does not know, and hence to testify only what she knows (Whitcomb et al. 2017, 522). This arises from the distinguishing feature of intellectual humility, the tendency to form accurate noetic self-evaluations. (b) For the same reason, the intellectually humble speaker likely has the self-insight to recognize whether she is willing to come through for the hearer, and hence whether she can in good faith accept his epistemic trust. As for the third communicative competence, (c) discerning the particular information that the hearer needs in his context, intellectual humility does not, itself, involve this. For this competence is other-directed, whereas intellectual humility (as we saw) is directed toward oneself. But because intellectual humility, being a virtue, stems from an epistemic motivation, it ensures that the speaker motivated to develop competence in discerning hearers' epistemic needs.

In summary, intellectual humility promotes willingness in the speaker, in that it motivates her to meet the hearer's epistemic aims; and it promotes competence by equipping her to be a good knower and a good communicator.

Contrast this with intellectually arrogant and servile speakers, who have several features that make them bad bets for epistemic trustworthiness. One feature puts pressure on their willingness to come through for the hearer: Neither the arrogant nor the servile speaker is characteristically motivated to achieve epistemic aims – either their own or the hearer's – for their own sake. This does not automatically mean that they will be less willing to come through for the hearer. But it does mean that they will need a substitute motivation, and that this motivation must be robust, not dependent on changeable circumstantial factors. The wise hearer, if he is to trust an arrogant or servile speaker at all, would thus do well to ensure that she has some such motivation.

But even then, arrogant and servile speakers also get low marks for competence. Consider first knowledge competence. The intellectually arrogant person, as we saw, is apt to form too many beliefs, of which a significant proportion could easily be false or unfounded. And the servile person is apt to form his own beliefs gullibly, as well as to miss out on corrective feedback that might otherwise sharpen his knowledge. So neither the arrogant nor the servile speaker is apt to have knowledge competence, making neither worthy of epistemic trust.

Let's turn to commitment competence. The intellectually arrogant speaker has two features that sap it. One is that she is apt to testify even in the absence of knowledge, failing with respect to aspect (a) of communicative competence, and the other is that she is apt to accept the hearer's trust even if her will to deliver for him is weak, failing with respect to aspect (b). The reason is that, because the arrogant speaker overestimates her noetic strengths and underestimates her noetic weaknesses, she is prone to thinking that she has what it takes to come through for the hearer even if she does not.

The intellectually servile speaker does not have this problem with communicative competence, for he *underestimates* his abilities. Rather than being prone to accept the hearer's trust when he shouldn't, he is prone to *declining* it when he would be competent to deliver on it after all. Because, in general, a greater proportion of his (comparatively rare) testimony is apt to constitute knowledge than the arrogant speaker's, trusting him for knowledge is might be thought a less dangerous bet for the hearer than trusting an arrogant speaker. However, if servility (as Tanesini 2018c argues) is motivated by the desire for social acceptance, trusting a servile speaker may risk being told what he thinks you want to hear, whether or not it is true.

Neither arrogant nor servile speakers, then, are epistemically wise choices for prospective hearers. An intellectually humble speaker, by contrast, is in a good place to be epistemically trustworthy, so that trusting her for knowledge is likely to be effective.

5. Conclusion

I have considered some important areas of overlap between intellectual humility and epistemic trust. But I have left a number of topics undiscussed, including other types of situation, beside self-trust and testimony, in which epistemic trust and intellectual humility can inform each other. For example, disagreement might threaten a person's epistemic self-trust, and intellectual humility might help him navigate the appropriate response, including helping him learn from it rather than intellectually barricade himself (Whitcomb et al. 2017, 524; Dormandy 2018). And intellectual humility is surely among the epistemic virtues of a

“Socratic authority” (Jäger 2016, 179), a kind of epistemic authority who, by modeling virtuous thinking, helps transmit understanding (as opposed to piecemeal knowledge). So more work is needed to build on the groundwork laid here.

Suffice it for now to summarize this groundwork. Intellectual humility promotes effective epistemic self-trust by enabling a person to assess the extent of her own epistemic trustworthiness, and by ensuring that she is motivated to epistemically self-improve should that evaluation prove negative. It also promotes effective epistemic trust in other people: It puts a hearer of testimony in a position to assess his need for epistemic assistance and his aptitude for selecting testifiers, and it puts a speaker in a position to be epistemically trustworthy. Not a bad record for a humble virtue.¹⁴

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