

Wise Collectives

Prepared for *The Epistemic Life of Collectives* (OUP, Fricker and Brady eds., forthcoming 2013).

I. Can Collective Agents Be Wise?

Increasingly common in recent philosophical literature is the claim that collectives can make *judgements* and perform *actions* (see Pettit and List 2011, Copp 2006, Anderson 2007, Gilbert 1987, Fricker 2010, Lahroodi 2007). Furthermore, the beliefs and actions of a collective are claimed to be non-reducible the judgments and actions of individual members of the collective, but it is only the latter that has been thoroughly investigated. Following this trend, I shall here grant, rather than argue, that *collectives have an epistemic life*. I will be interested in a very specific feature of collective cognitive life that has received little attention: wisdom. Even if collective epistemic agents have true beliefs and knowledge, it does not follow that collectives can be *wise*. Christian List (2010) has recently argued for a ‘thin’ conception of collective wisdom that is achieved by solving what he calls *correspondence* and *consistency* problems facing collective agents. However, List’s thin account of collective agency cannot ground a thicker, more traditional conception of wisdom, where this would invoke aspects of character, virtues and vices, motivation and actions that promote important ends. Miranda Fricker examines *thicker* collective states in her excellent essay “Can Institutions Have Virtues?” (2010), and argues that institutions can be virtuous or vicious, although she does not directly address the virtue of wisdom. Combining the insights of both, I argue that a thick account of collective wisdom is available by using Fricker’s account of ‘acting under a practical identity’. On List’s rigorous but thin account, a collective is wise in virtue of using sufficiently coherent aggregation procedures. In contrast, I will defend a thicker account of collective wisdom according to which *individual epistemic virtues* play an essential role and which carries more practical implications than List’s thin collective wisdom.

It is easy enough to imagine an individual that has an epistemic life, but is not wise. Animals and children are probably amongst them, and of course there are the many unwise adult human beings. While consensus might be emerging that collectives also have epistemic lives, they might turn out to be like the animals, children or many unwise adult humans; cognitively endowed, but yet not capable of wisdom. Philip Pettit and Christian List’s recent work on judgment aggregation (2011) shows that collective agents face unique problems in forming rational and coherent judgements. In fact, these will be exactly the kinds of challenges that *wise collectives* will be expected to surmount. A number of “impossibility results” demonstrate that collectives are very susceptible to forming inconsistent beliefs, and the culprit can be found in the *aggregation procedures* used, where this is some function that take us from sets of individual epistemic states to epistemic states of the collective itself.

The findings on looming collective *irrationality* are both good and bad from the perspective of collective wisdom. The results from Pettit, List and others show that very straightforward and presumably common procedures for aggregating individual judgments (e.g., “majority rule”) will regularly violate basic laws of logic, including modus ponens and even conjunction. Since this irrationality will typically not be found in the individual members, it seems to be a genuinely *collective* irrationality.

The numerous ‘impossibility results’ facing collective agents are clearly worrisome for any account of collective judgment, but they also create the possibility of a certain kind of collective wisdom. We can say that a collective achieves this form of wisdom precisely by achieving basic rationality in its collective judgments. Combining insights from both Condorcet Jury Theorem results and recent developments in judgment aggregation theory (that can now identify the properties of aggregation procedures that create the problematic results), List argues that we can properly attribute wisdom to collectives with certain virtues in their aggregation procedures, although he admits that this is a ‘thin’ kind of wisdom. Attributions of wisdom to a collective will be true simply because of certain virtues possessed by the *aggregation procedures* that partially constitute the collective. Since these virtuous aggregation functions achieve basic rationality in the face of numerous impossibility results (to which lesser collectives might fall victim), it is not improper to regard a basically rational collective as wise in some sense.

List’s account of collective wisdom will be discussed in detail in the following section, but I will close this section by considering the sense in which his account is ‘thin’ and why he stays away from a thicker account. To see how thin his account is, first consider that List seems to have something closer to *collective knowledge* in mind. A collective agent that satisfies List’s desiderata will be sufficiently reliable by virtue of meeting correspondence problems (Condorcet Theorem results), and will be (subjectively) rational in virtue of meeting coherence problems (Pettit and List impossibility results). This might be a decent conception of *collective knowledge*, but wisdom has an essential agentive aspect at least in this respect: a wise agent *could and should* act on their knowledge. Any item of understanding that *could not* be acted upon because it exceeds the agent’s capacities would not seem to constitute wisdom, nor would a person be thought wise if they failed to recognize that they *should* act on this item of understanding if and when it applies. Wisdom also essentially involves *especially valuable* forms of knowledge. The nature of wisdom in general will be discussed in the next section, but we can fix ideas here by saying that wisdom is some form of “knowledge of how to live well”, or “understanding of the problems and predicaments inherent in human life”, where both are understood to characteristically lead to action for an agent, or at least to give a wise agent a reason for action, and such actions will typically promote the most important aims of the agent. The traditional “thick” property we attribute to individuals also involves accurate normative judgments about *what is most important* from the standpoint of the agent.

Thin though it is, List gives a rigorous account of a legitimate form of collective wisdom, and I will examine this in some detail below. In defense of a thicker account of collective wisdom, I will then examine Miranda Fricker's work on 'individual action under a practical identity'. I conclude with an argument that an account of thick collective wisdom can inform educational policy and ground a general social commitment to cultivating *individual intellectual virtues*.

2. wisdom in general

The nature of wisdom itself is, of course, a difficult and somewhat neglected issue in the history of philosophy. Dennis Whitcomb recently distinguishes *Apologetic, Two Fold* and *Practical views*. Epistemic humility and accuracy characterize the Apologetic approaches (see Ryan 2007 and interesting empirical work from Whitcomb's essay), and is exemplified by Socrates. The Practical accounts (Ryan 1999) see wisdom as involving a free agent that succeeds in living well, where their living well is caused by their knowledge of how to live well¹. Or, more simply from Nozick (1990) "knowing the problems and predicaments human beings typically find themselves in" where this knowledge is not mere common sense and is integrated with agency and action in appropriate ways. Two-fold theories like Aristotle's distinguish between theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) and practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Theoretical wisdom, the highest epistemic achievement, will be some form of *episteme* grounded in *nous*. Practical wisdom involves good practical reasoning, general knowledge of what ends are best to pursue and the best available means to achieve them. Our interest in wisdom *per se* will have to be selective, as we want to move to the issue of collective wisdom, but it will be helpful to have in mind some constitutive features of wisdom in general that have come in for recent discussion.

Wisdom admits of two distinctions I will briefly explore here. First, accounts of wisdom throughout history of philosophy typically contain a *cognitive* and *volitional* element. For our purposes here, let us say that wisdom is a form of knowledge or understanding (and thus involves a cognitive achievement) such that:

- (1) the content of that knowledge is not mere common sense or species knowledge and is thus an achievement
- (2) the content of that knowledge involves an understanding of the best aims for the relevant agent to pursue (individual or collective agent) and this is understood in a purely internal sense of 'best aims'
- (3) the content of the understanding enables an agent to avoid many problems and predicaments that beset human beings if acted upon

¹ Ryan refines this account in later essays, but these will not be a focus of the current

(4) the knowledge or understanding is acted upon at the relevant time, or at least gives an agent compelling *reason for action*; the wise person must thus have an excellence of agency or will to some extent².

My interest in the remainder of this essay is to determine whether and in what ways collectives can satisfy these conditions, or other reasonable conceptions of wisdom not addressed above. I will be equally interested to see how *individual* epistemic virtues function in accounts of collective wisdom. I argue that, in an important range of cases, individual epistemic virtues are essential for achieving collective wisdom, and this has normative implications for educational policy and social philosophy more broadly.

3. List on Group Agents and Thin Collective Wisdom

As a backlash to the extreme individualism of Popper and Hayek who insisted that all social phenomena should be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, and attitudes of *individuals*, and that we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called “collectives” (Popper 1945: 91), recent analytic social philosophy has witnessed a significant resurgence of theories of joint action, collective intentionality and social ontology, including accounts of ‘we-modes’ by Toulmin (2006), ‘shared agency’ from Bratman (2009), Institutional facts (Searle 2011), plural subjects (Gilbert 1992) and collectives (Copp 2007), Fricker (2010) and Anderson (2007). These are all inquiries into *group agency* and *collective judgements*, the beliefs and actions of collective subjects. It is commonly said that epistemology took a turn to the agent with virtue epistemology, and that agent now appears to be going social, plural and collective.

One particularly influential account is from Petit and List (2011), according to whom some social groups are “rational agents in their own right”, capable of forming beliefs according to a some process that aggregates individual epistemic states to determine collective epistemic states. To fix ideas, we can clearly distinguish a group of individuals that constitute a housing board from a group of individuals that constitute a crowd waiting for a bus. The individual members of the housing board collectively constitute an entity capable of forming judgements (“Smith must compensate Jones for the damage”) and performing actions (sending Smith the formal assessment of charges). A crowd waiting for the bus, on the other hand, is not a collective agent in any meaningful sense, it is just a crowd. However, as Petit and List have shown, it is surprisingly difficult to aggregate the beliefs of individual group members in ways that constitute a *rational* collective agent. More on this below. To get started, Petit and List require that any *collective agent* must possess:

1. representational states that depict how things are in the environment.

² There is no reason to think that a wise person must be non-akratic or continent in all or even most actions, since many actions are quite trivial and do not pertain to the important aims of life in any way.

2. motivational states that specify how it requires things to be in the environment.
3. the capacity to process its representational and motivational states, leading it to intervene in the environment whenever that environment fails to match a motivating specification.

A mere crowd does not possess these features, and genuine collectives will typically manifest them by exhibiting appropriate forms of *integration* between the cognitive states of its individual members, and this will be achieved through an organizational structure that include *aggregation procedures*. List says aggregation procedures “may take the form of a voting procedure, a deliberation protocol, or any other mechanism by which the group can make joint declarations or deliver a joint report. Such procedures are in operation in expert panels, multi- member courts, policy advisory committees and groups of scientific collaborators” (List 2008). An *aggregation procedure* is a function which assigns to each combination of the group members’ individual ‘acceptance/rejection’ judgments on the propositions on the agenda corresponding a set of collective judgments.

A simple and widespread example of an aggregation procedure is majority voting, “whereby a group judges a given proposition to be true whenever a majority of group members does so” (List 2008). While majority voting aggregation procedures will face extreme difficulties in meeting norms of rationality noted below, we use this procedure for aggregating the beliefs of individual group members to easily attribute representational states (including beliefs about other collective agents), dispositions to act on its representational states, and interests and aims to *group agents*. Without introducing any spooky entities, we can say that under certain conditions a group of individual agents will constitute a *group agent* in its own right.

The fundamental barrier to collective wisdom as List sees it comes from *the discursive dilemma* and similar results, which show how easily group agents can become inconsistent. Rampant inconsistency does not appear to be the mark of a wise agent, collective or individual³. Below is a simple example of the kind of problematic case involving a three-person tenure committee.

The tenure example. A university committee has to decide whether to give tenure to a junior academic (the *outcome* or *conclusion*). The requirement for tenure is excellence in both teaching and research (the two *reasons* or *premises*). The first among three committee members thinks the candidate is excellent in teaching but not in research; the second thinks she is excellent in research but not in teaching; the third thinks she is excellent in both. So a majority considers the candidate

³ While this is intuitive, it is far from obvious that a wise agent needs to be consistent. At most, a wise agent would need to be consistent with respect to those propositions relevant to living well. I briefly consider further reasons to question whether wise agents must be consistent.

excellent in teaching, a majority considers her excellent in research, but only a minority – the third committee member – thinks the candidate should be given tenure. How should the committee decide?

The committee believes that the candidate has satisfied the requirement for tenure (excellent teaching, excellent research), but does not believe the candidate should be given tenure. Similar results are generated for a three person *expert advisory committee* that judges on the following propositions: (a) There will be significant global warming (the *conclusion*). (b) greenhouse gas emissions are above some critical threshold (the first *premise*); and (c) if greenhouse gas emissions are above the given threshold, *then* there will be significant global warming (the second *premise*). Given a similar set of individual judgments as in the tenure case above, a three person expert panel can easily believe (b) and (c) but not (a). These results show that collectives often refuse to honor principles of rationality as basic as modus ponens, and Petit and List have generalized these results to a wide range of aggregation procedures beyond majority voting.

The discursive dilemma and similar results show that *majority voting* aggregation procedures do not ensure consistent collective judgments. We can thus say that meeting the following *coherence challenge* will constitute a collective epistemic achievement: a group aiming to form collective judgments on some agenda of propositions must ensure the *coherence* of its collective judgments. In response to these and similar failures of collective rationality, List opens “the logical space of possible aggregation functions more generally”, and considers a range of different procedures for aggregating individual epistemic states (Dictatorships, Reverse Dictatorships, Premise Approaches, Conclusion Approaches, Distributed Premise Approaches) that each avoid some range of impossibility results, and gradually shows how a basically rational collective agent emerges in virtue of suitable adjustments to its aggregation functions.

An important result for our purposes is that List and Dietrich (2008) show that certain desirable formal properties of aggregation procedures can only be achieved if it is a dictatorship or reverse dictatorship (e.g., ruled by a chairperson or in receivership). Collective wisdom thus threatens to collapse into the wisdom of a specific individual, and is thus not *collective* in any interesting sense. However, List argues that these worrisome results about collective irrationality only follow if we require that collective agents satisfy rigid forms of the desiderata **Universality** (aggregation functions that take any consistent and complete set of individual judgements), **Decisiveness** (aggregation functions that produce complete judgements on all propositions), **Systematicity** (collective judgements depend only on individual judgements and patterns of dependence). List argues that we can attain meaningfully *collective* wisdom (not just dictatorial wisdom) only if we “relax” either Universality, Decisiveness, or Systematicity. Thus, a wise collective agent will see that it must give up either strict universality, strict decisiveness, or strict systematicity.

One way of *relaxing systematicity* is to have individual members make judgements only on premises, not conclusions. However, this does not work well for preserving consistency and closure, and can also lead to ‘faking’ premise beliefs in order to produce the intended conclusion belief for the collective, rather than those that would naturally be produced by the aggregation function. A collective can *relax decisiveness* by allowing “supermajority” rules or other ways of allowing a collective to *refrain from passing judgment* if certain patterns do not emerge in the aggregation of individual judgements. *Relaxing universality* involves having things like ‘expert’ subgroups that are considered authoritative on specific agenda items and thus work only on certain premises in collective reasoning. Also, we break down large collective tasks into many smaller tasks, which are distributed to specific subgroups of the collective selected for aggregation on a specific proposition.

List’s ‘thin’ account is a real form of wisdom; a wise collective has the ability to achieve an important collective aim amidst a number of serious problems endemic to being a collective agent, and does so by implementing appropriately virtuous aggregation procedures. Since this turns out to be difficult for a collective to achieve, and is necessary for being a basically rational collective, collectives that meet the coherence challenge can be credited with a kind of wisdom, at least relative to the aim of being a basically rational collective agent. However, as List himself recognizes, possessing a virtuous aggregation procedure is not sufficient for wisdom as traditionally conceived (clearly in the individual case we would not say that the wise person is the merely consistent person). Nonetheless, List shows how virtuous aggregation functions are necessary to avoid incoherence worries that otherwise plague collective agents, and this gives us one way in which some collectives might properly be seen as *wiser* than others.

Before moving to thicker accounts of collective wisdom, it is worth noting that List’s collective wisdom might bear some interesting relations to *individual epistemic virtues*, and to virtue epistemology generally. In particular, thinly wise collectives might be a source of epistemic authority (e.g., through collective testimony) for (individually) intellectually virtuous persons. If List is able to restore coherence to collective judgments and Condorcet style arguments show that appropriately organized collectives will more reliably get to the truth, epistemically virtuous individuals should be sensitive to collective testimony in forming and sustaining their own beliefs. Since List also shows that collectives with poor aggregation functions can easily become irrational, individual competence in distinguishing (thinly) wise from unwise collectives will be an individual epistemic virtue that emerges from List’s account. There do not appear to be additional practical implications to List’s account beyond sage advice for organizational design, which in cases like voting procedures will indeed be very important.

4. Fricker's Practical Identities and Institutional Virtues

In "Can There Be Institutional Virtues?" (2011), Miranda Fricker distinguishes three ways of relating groups to their constituent members. A group may be any of the following:

- (1) A number of individuals - the group considered as the sum of its component individuals
- (2) A collective - the group considered as non-reducible to its component individuals
- (3) An institutional structure - its formal and procedural structure

When a person says "The jury was fair-minded", she might "be saying (1) that enough of the individual jurors displayed fair-mindedness", or she might "be saying (2) that the jury taken collectively displayed fair-mindedness." Or, we add that (3) "The jury is a just system" which is about the jury as an *institutional structure* (Fricker, *ibid.*) Fricker is not interested in merely summative accounts of groups, but only in the second and third sense above. List appears to be only interested in groups as (3) has it above, as defined largely by their aggregation function. Properties like fair-mindedness and tenacity primarily apply to a jury or committee only in the sense of (1) or (2), but (1) is not interesting for our purposes here. I do not want to rule out that such properties could be attributed to a collective in virtue of its aggregation procedures or institutional structure (i.e. 3 above), but List also seems to see these as importantly different (thick) collective properties. Thus, "the fair mindedness of the jury" should be understood in terms of (2), where we understand this as follows: *a collective is not reducible to its component individuals or its aggregations procedures*. We can say that the actions of any specific collective *manifest* its institutional structure, but we will have to bring in additional explanatory devices to account for institutional virtues and vices. Of interest for our purposes will be the account of 'an individual acting under a practical identity' that Fricker uses to explain institutional virtues and vices.

Summativism (1 above) fails to account for a number of cases where individual possession of a property is neither necessary nor sufficient for group possession. "Summativism does not work as a general account of group features, for there can be cases where a group possesses a feature that few or even none of its component individuals possess (so individual possession of the feature is not necessary); and there can be cases where the group lacks a feature even though it is possessed by many or even all of the component individuals (so individual possession of the feature is not sufficient)". Borrowing a fine example from Reza Lahroodi showing the effect of the contextual pressures imagining an administrative church committee

made up of individual members who are each open-minded about gay rights. But unfortunately when they get together in the context of the church committee a certain closed-mindedness comes over them, perhaps because they “want others to think they are towing [sic] the church line on this issue. They may clam up in the presence of other members if they anticipate negative reaction by powerful authorities outside the group”. Similar things might be said of the “competitiveness” of a team which does not have particularly competitive individuals members.

In Lahroodi’s example and the tenacious team member (who is otherwise timid), the attributability of a virtue to an individual depends on whether the individual is acting as a church committee member (or team member) or in some other capacity. We can easily describe cases of open-minded individual group members that do not constitute an open minded collective, so reductive accounts of group properties are not promising. Fricker accounts for these collective properties through an intermediate category of *action under a practical identity*, which is neither an entirely collective property (like features of aggregation functions) nor entirely individual properties (since they are often not true of individuals qua individual or when acting in other capacities).

“A more decisive style of counterexample to summativism will not, I suggest, turn on quite such a contingent type of influence as this normative and psychologically structured influence that a subject’s various ‘practical identities’ have on what features and attributes she is committed to displaying. The mere fact that social subjects have a range of practical identities (so that one may confront a situation, decision, or choice *as a professional, as a parent, as a friend, as a gay man, as a Christian, as an interested or disinterested party*, and so on) means that there can be tension, and sometimes downright conflict, between the commitments associated with different practical identities of the same person. This in turn generates the possibility of that individual having a certain attribute only as a group member and not as a private individual.” (*ibid*, my italics)

To account for this tension and conflict between practical identities, Fricker distinguishes between properties that an individual might have as *a group member* and properties they have *as a private individual*. Lahroodi’s administrative church committee and Fricker’s competitive team members show that (a) collectives can have properties lacked by each of its members qua private individual and (b) that every member of a group possessing a feature is insufficient for the group to possess it (e.g., being open minded about gay rights). Fricker concludes that “Some practical identities of individuals are thus intrinsically group-involving, and in such cases there is no lower level of group-independent features to which the higher-level features can be reduced. Any attempted reduction of the group to a sum of uncommitted non-group-identified individuals would literally change the subject, and so fail.” This gives us one important sense of group agency that nonetheless foregrounds the individual.

When an agent performs an action under an essentially group-involving practical identity, *the collective has done something*, but has done so only because a full individual action was performed. Fricker argues that not only these kinds of institutional actions, and the institutions themselves, can instantiate thick collective

properties like virtues and vices. Our question is whether individual actions under a collective identity can be wise collective actions, where this is now a question of whether they can be thickly wise⁴.

Taking stock, Fricker argues that institutions can be properly said to possess virtues and vices; the institutional racism of the police force, open mindedness of the jury, tenaciousness of the research team. Moreover, she argues that collectives can have these virtues *both* in a “motivationally demanding way” (Aristotelian virtues) or as a sheer excellence or skill (Stoic virtues.) This is potentially attractive here because List was only able to provide a thin conception of collective wisdom (perhaps closer to a ‘sheer excellence’ or skill of the collective). If we use Fricker’s account of individual actions under a practical identity and we agree that these actions (a) are sufficiently actions *of the collective* (b) promote important aims of the collective and (c) can be acted upon or give the collective a compelling reason for action, then we can clearly see how an individual action under a practical identity can constitute a wise collective action. Drawing on Fricker’s account, in the next section I defend an account of *thick collective wisdom*, and will then argue that important policy implications arise from properly understanding thick collective wisdom because of the essential role played by individual intellectual and moral virtues (usually virtues other than wisdom). List’s account of thin collective wisdom is also thinner in practical implications. Since wisdom is a practical value, it will count in favor my account if policy makers receive greater guidance from the thick account of collective wisdom defended below compared to List’s thin account which is directly relevant to institutional design and formal structures like aggregation procedures.

5. Thick collective wisdom.

Most of us are familiar with “best practice” sessions which often seek to improve upon current normal expectations for a practical identity by integrating the non-obvious successes of the best performing individuals under that practical identity. Practitioners often seek to further our understanding of and to reliably reproduce outstanding individual performances by incorporating them into updated role specific expectations. In this way, institutions regularly seek to “wise up”. The outcomes that best practice session aim for appear to be increased *thin* collective wisdom, since the improvement to current normal expectations is the goal. The institutional structure is the primary bearer of wisdom here, so I call this *Institutionalized Wisdom*, which also appears to be what List has in mind. This is one way for an institution to become wiser, *but we need to recognize that the input used to arrive at institutionalized wisdom is often itself a different form of collective wisdom*. While we can praise or admire a collective action for the fact that it manifests a wise aggregation procedure, this will only give praise to collective

⁴ the group considered as non-reducible to its component individuals

actions that can be performed simply in virtue of the organizational structure of the collective. We might capture this with the concept of basic competence under a practical identity: *an action of an individual that merely carries out normal expectations of an individual acting under that practical identity is a basically competent action under a collective identity*. However, real world collective actions that aspire to *skillfully use* a wise aggregation procedure and simultaneously negotiate a complex and unpredictable environment in pursuit of important goals will often require *more than basic competence* amongst the individual members. Guidance norms forthcoming by List's wise aggregation procedures will no doubt *underdetermine* a wide range of day to day collective judgements and actions. Even the best guidance norms will underdetermine a wide range of collective decisions when these norms are strictly a function of meeting role specific expectations or implementing an aggregation procedure. When working outside aggregation procedures and normal expectations, the collective must now rely on the abilities of individual members to resolve dilemmas, underdetermination problems and a host of what we might call *manifestion challenges* facing even a thinly wise collective.

This is not to deny that some collective actions can be considered wise simply by virtue of the organizational structure or aggregations procedures. The fact that a certain individual action under a practical identity counts as a certain kind of *contribution to forming a collective judgment*, where this collective judgement is also *sufficiently rational to count as an achievement*, the collective action is praised because of its particular aggregation function more than anything an individual member has done (outside of meeting normal expectations). An individual casting a vote in an election where the voting structures have been modified to avoid discursive dilemma problems would be a case in hand.

Any item of valuable collective understanding (including items of thin collective wisdoms) *per se* will be more valuable if it is appropriately action guiding or gives reasons for action to the agent. Following Fricker, we will say this thicker⁵ form of wisdom will be manifested by *an individual acting in an institutional capacity* where this action constitutes a *non-obvious* role specific decision that promotes some *important aim* of the collective. The action or decision need not promote the aims of the individual (*qua individual*), so it cannot be assumed that thick collective wisdom coincides with individual wisdom. However, the *non-obviousness* of the action is intended here to suggest that there are nonetheless *individual virtues* other than

⁵ The distinction between thick and thin properties is made in various ways by different philosophers. See Eklund for an interesting discussion, and a suggestion to consider Foot's (1958) remarks: "it expresses disapproval, is meant to be used when an action is to be discouraged, implies that other things being equal the behaviour to which it is applied will be avoided by the speaker, and so on" (1958, 102). But see Williams, Smith and others for different ways of drawing the distinction.

wisdom that the individual (*qua individual*) manifests, and this is a point I want to build on. While the potential conflict with individual wisdom raises important issues, and I will hope to address them in the final section, the fact that other moral or intellectual virtues will regularly be needed for a collective to *act wisely* day in and day out cannot be overlooked. Whatever epistemic value individual intellectual (and moral) virtues might have, they have more value when they cause a collectively wise action that would not have occurred independent of the virtues of the individual member⁶.

The individual actions we have in mind here will often include the very individual performances that *Institutionalized Wisdom* and best practices sessions incorporate into the *updated role specific expectations* above. That is, thick collective wisdom will often be a 'best practice' prior to being institutionalized. The primary subject of wisdom attributions here are *individuals acting in an institutional capacity*, but we saw above (from Fricker) that such properties do not reduce to properties of individuals *qua individuals* (see Lahroodi and Fricker), so they are not strictly individual properties. I argue that such actions constitute *thick collective wisdom*. Broadly speaking, they fill the gap between thinly wise aggregation functions and actual performances of wise collective actions. The property is thicker than that considered by List because its description will invoke a range of deliberative, affective and agential capacities of individual agents acting in the world, not just a savvy set of rules or procedures that predict good outcomes.

One problem facing the account defended here is that thick collective wisdom is *risky*, and institutions may therefore have reason to favor *institutionalized wisdom* whenever possible. Institutions would then seek to convert instances of thick collective wisdom into thin collective wisdom (perhaps through best practice session) as a risk avoidance strategy. Since achieving basic rationality for a collective is challenging in its own right, a prudent collective may be wary to expose itself to unnecessary risks once basic rationality is achieved. The more thin collective wisdom an institution has relevant to a certain aim, the less need it will have for thick collective wisdom. Institutional wisdom may therefore trend *against* allowing individual epistemic virtues to play a significant role in collective actions.

This presents a diminishing prospect for the individual in thick collective wisdom, and thus raises questions about the desirability of wise institutions⁷. Fortunately for the individual, the complexity, fragility and longevity of an institution makes it vulnerable to change and chance, and institutions are often slow and clunky in responding innovation, technological advances and changes in the social environment. I argue that this risk and uncertainty creates an ongoing need for thick collective wisdom even in the pursuit of thin collective wisdom. Thus, there is also an ongoing need for the *individual virtues* that enable thick collective wisdom. With

⁶ This suggests a way of responding to value problem worries, but I have no worked out account of this.

⁷ Margaret Gilbert has raised the worry that a wise society is a less free society.

rapid and unpredictable changes occurring in an institution's environment, the normal role specific expectations for an individual group member will often be insufficient for ongoing institutional success. This shows an ongoing need for the manifestation of individual epistemic virtues even in thinly wise institutions.

I conclude this section by noting two additional features that any thickly wise collective would need to possess: *curiosity and open-mindedness*. These are distinct properties, as one might be open-minded in the consideration of other points of view without being in the least bit *curious* about them, or interested in whether those views are true or false⁸. In order for actions under a practical identity to constitute collective wisdom, they must be properly integrated with the agential structure of the collective. On this complex topic, I only want to say here that in some sense this integration will require that the collective is 'curious' and 'open minded' with respect to a practical identity. A collective that is *not curious* about its individual members may easily lack the motivation to identify and utilize outstanding individual performances. A collective that is *not open-minded* toward its individual members may fail to give a novel point of view sufficient consideration. These are all important properties that collectives will need in order for exceptional individual actions to cause institutional actions, or to give the institution a compelling reason for action⁹. This kind of reason for collective action is distinctive because it will go beyond the reasons for collective action the institution would have strictly in virtue of its aggregation procedures and other organizational structures. A thinly wise institution will thus need qualities like curiosity and open-mindedness to properly integrate and express the role specific supererogatory contributions of its individual members.

6. Practical Implications of Thick Collective Wisdom

Thick collective wisdom enjoins practical considerations that thin collective wisdom does not. One practical implication of the above account is that social policy has a clear interest in *cultivating individual epistemic virtues*, if they are indeed essential to thick collective wisdom as argued above. This is a less salient concern from the standpoint of thin collective wisdom, which might indeed even discourage reliance on individual epistemic virtues over the greater stability of a wise aggregation procedure. The claim I defend here is that the value of thick collective wisdom supports a general moral imperative in favor of cultivating *individual* epistemic virtues because of their ineliminable role in sustaining (even thinly) wise

⁸ For recent work on curiosity see Whitcomb, Inan, Webber. On open mindedness see

⁹. Robust integration makes thick collective wisdom a more *collective property* of wise collectives, although without integration actions under a practical identity are still sufficiently collective to warrant a thick wisdom attribution.

institutions. Exactly which epistemic virtues should be promoted will be another and perhaps vexing important question for social and education policy.

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