

Friendship and Epistemic Norms

[The final publication is available at: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11098-012-9953-0#/page-1>; *Philosophical Studies* 165 (2):349-370 (2013)]

In recent work that is both careful and provocative, Sarah Stroud and Simon Keller have independently argued that the demands of being a good friend can conflict with the demands of epistemic norms (Stroud 2006; Keller 2004, 2007).¹ For example, good friends will be hesitant to believe claims that place their friends in a bad light. They will tend to seek favourable interpretations of their friends' behaviours, interpretations they would not apply to strangers, and that an impartial observer would be unlikely to apply to their friends. Good friends appear to alter their belief-forming behaviour not out of any obvious concern for the truth, but rather simply as a friend is involved. Epistemically unjustified beliefs and withholdings seem likely to result.

In what follows we can treat norms of friendship as Keller does:

A norm of friendship is a truth about what you should do, insofar as you are a particular person's good friend. (Keller 2007, 25-6)

With respect to epistemic norms, we can draw upon William Alston's influential account of the epistemic point of view:

Epistemic evaluation is undertaken from what we might call the 'epistemic point of view'.

That point of view is defined by the aim at maximizing truth and minimizing falsity in a large body of beliefs. The qualification 'in a large body of beliefs' is needed because otherwise one could best achieve the aim by restricting one's beliefs to those that are obviously true.

(Alston 1989, 83-4)

¹ Much of the relevant material in Keller's 2007 book is drawn from Keller (2004).

We can thus treat epistemic norms as those norms that guide us in attempting to maximize truth and minimize falsity in a large body of beliefs.²

Keller at times suggests a very modest proposal – “I intend to argue that good friendship sometimes requires epistemic irresponsibility” (Keller 2007, 29). But taken strictly this would be too weak to be of significant interest; after all, we can well imagine that most any practice or commitment could *sometimes* require problematic epistemic behaviour in unusual circumstances: an evil genius threatens to severely harm your family (your valued art collection; the charitable foundation you established) unless you take a pill that will cause hallucinatory beliefs, or diminish your ability to carefully reason and weigh evidence. For most any sets of norms or commitments, we can imagine scenarios where they come into conflict (compare an artist needing to abandon her art in order to get a job to help support her family), but this is hardly surprising, and there would be nothing unusual in finding such cases of conflict between epistemic and friendship norms.

More interesting, and what both Keller and Stroud focus on primarily, is a more fundamental conflict between epistemic norms and the norms of friendship. As Stroud presents her project,

I shall argue here that friendship involves not just affective or motivational partiality, but *epistemic* partiality. Friendship places demands not just on our feelings or our motivations, but on our *beliefs* and our methods of forming beliefs. I shall also argue, however, that this epistemic partiality is contrary to the standards of epistemic responsibility and justification held up by mainstream epistemological theories. (Stroud 2006, 499)

² The exact scope and nature of the epistemic point of view is controversial, but Alston’s account is a prominent one, and nothing significant hinges on the details of his account for current purposes.

A pervasive clash is thus at stake, not merely chance conflicts of typically compatible norms. As good friends we will – and should – treat our friends differently than others. We should be more concerned more about their well-being, more motivated to help them than strangers (*ceteris paribus*), and so on. Stroud and Keller treat a bias in belief-formation as a further instance of these broader demands of friendship.

Still, in what follows I argue that we should reject Stroud and Keller’s proposal. In section I, I present two examples used by Stroud and Keller that effectively capture and motivate the proposed clash between epistemic and friendship norms. In section II I clarify the epistemic partiality that is at stake for Stroud and Keller; it is a mild epistemic bias, one not requiring an extreme blindness to evidence. In section III I examine in depth the arguments given by Stroud and Keller for why friendship would require this sort of modest epistemic bias, and argue that their arguments are unsuccessful. There is no need to posit a norm of friendship *requiring* biased beliefs about one’s friends. Finally, in section IV, I show that even in cases where we think some bias in belief formation might be *permissible* by the standards of friendship, that any such modest bias can be treated as falling within the bounds of epistemic propriety. The proposed clash between friendship and epistemic norms thus vanishes.

I Two Cases

To focus our discussion we can appeal to two examples, one drawn from Keller, the other from Stroud. Keller has us imagine a case where Rebecca is going to read poetry at a local café. Her friend Eric (previously unaware of her poetry) has agreed to attend, but Eric is a regular at the café and has found most of the poetry there to be quite poor. Keller suggests that Eric, as a good friend, should not believe prior to her reading that Rebecca’s poetry will probably be awful, even though he would form this belief about a stranger’s poetry. During the reading, according to Keller, Eric will listen to Rebecca’s poetry with a sympathetic ear, actively seeking out strengths, and downplaying

weaknesses; he would listen to the poetry of a stranger much more critically. Finally, after the performance, there can be possible situations where he would come to believe her poetry was quite good, even though he would not have had these same beliefs had a stranger presented the same works (Keller 2007, 27-9).

Stroud makes extensive use of the following case:

Suppose again that someone tells a damning story about a friend of yours. Your friend appears in a bad light in this tale; he is portrayed as having acted badly, even disreputably [...] Suppose, for instance, that a third party reports that your friend Sam recently slept with someone and then never returned any of that person's calls, knowingly breaking that person's heart. (Stroud 2006, 504)

Stroud argues that *qua* good friend of Sam, you ought to react differently to this information than you would otherwise, or than a detached observer would. For example, you ought to scrutinize and question evidence for the damning claim about your friend more rigorously than usual, and you ought also to devote more effort to finding more positive interpretations of your friend's behavior in light of the evidence (Stroud 2006, 504).

II That Friends Form Different Beliefs Concerning their Friends

Certainly there is something to the intuition that good friends will often seek out favourable interpretations of friends and their actions. Consider again Keller's case of Eric and Rebecca. He suggests that

In listening as a friend [...] he [Eric] will actively seek out its strengths, and play down its weaknesses; he will be disposed to interpret it in ways that make it look a stronger piece of work. [...] As Rebecca's friend, he should listen to her poetry in a way that makes him more likely to emerge with the belief that it is good poetry (Keller 2007, 28-9)

Suppose Rebecca has written an epic teenager's love poem. Perhaps as her friend, Eric will notice a genuinely interesting and original running metaphor, her occasional clever turns of phrase, and so on. But everyone will notice how overwrought the thing is as a whole, Rebecca's use of terrible clichés, and awkward attempts at rhyming.

Still, a difference in epistemic focus does not yet entail that this behaviour must thereby be flawed. Eric, in focusing on positive aspects will presumably come to have many justified true beliefs about these aspects of the poem, truths that he would have overlooked if he were listening to a stranger's poem due to his different epistemic focus. Eric may well be simply forming different beliefs – but still justified beliefs – when he listens to a friend's poem rather than the poem of a stranger. He might miss out on some potential flaws of the friend's poem; but then he might similarly miss out on some potential strengths of the stranger's poem.

More broadly, different people will notice and focus on different aspects of a situation depending on their interests, but this difference in attention does not yet show any of their approaches to be epistemically flawed. We walk into a pub – as a whisky-drinker you immediately look to those bottles and form justified true beliefs about them; as a beer-drinker I fail to form the beliefs that you do, but given my interests I form justified true beliefs about what beers are available. Keller writes:

Were it not Rebecca whose poetry is in question, Eric would form beliefs different from those that he is under pressure to form about Rebecca, and would take himself to have perfectly good evidence for those beliefs. (Keller 2007, 33)

Keller takes this as evidence that Eric is thus acting in an epistemically flawed fashion in assessing Rebecca's poetry. But Eric is forming justified true beliefs about Rebecca's poetry, even if he would have formed different justified true beliefs had she been a stranger. That a friend focuses more on positive aspects of a work does not *yet* show any epistemic flaws in this behaviour.

Still, the worry can be refined. What if the friend focuses on positive aspects to the near-total exclusion of negative aspects? For example, suppose Eric, listening as a good friend, would only notice ten positive features of Rebecca's poem and no negative features, while if he were listening to a stranger, he would notice five positive features and five negative features. Presumably his *overall* assessment of the poem would differ in the two cases, and we might now have poor epistemic performance on the part of Eric. But crucially, such severe epistemic irresponsibility is not a demand of friendship, as both Keller and Stroud acknowledge. Stroud suggests that

The good friend is not blind to the data she receives about her friend, whether through direct observation or testimony. [...] Rather, the bias of the good friend will normally take the form of casting what she sees or hears in a different light, shading it differently, placing it in a different optic, embedding it in a different overall portrait of her friend. (Stroud 2006, 508)

In a similar vein, Keller writes

Note also that my rendering of the case is not premised upon the claim that good friends will provide each other with slavish, unconditional affirmation. That, of course, is false. [...] A sympathetic interpretation need not be ultimately favourable. Even if Eric listens sympathetically to Rebecca's poetry, even if he sees and interprets it in the best possible light, it is possible that he will end up believing her poetry is no good, and that she does not have a realistic chance of getting it published. (Keller 2007, 30)

Thus Stroud and Keller do not hold that good friends must distort or ignore evidence in a highly epistemically irresponsible fashion. Instead a modest sort of epistemic irresponsibility is required – the good friend does not act in a normal, proper epistemic fashion, but nor does she stray off into extreme irrationality or bias. For Stroud, the required bias typically comes at the level of interpreting a friend's actions; Keller allows more room for friends to diverge from others on the basic ground-

level evidence about a friend's behaviour, perhaps due to their focusing on different aspects of a situation. But either way, the main differences in epistemic behaviour would typically come at the higher level of interpretation, where we end up with more positive interpretations of our friends' actions and character.

Now why think this modest bias would be required of good friends?

III Evaluating The Arguments for Epistemic Bias as a Demand of Friendship

We will consider five main lines of argument from Stroud and Keller. First, they argue that biased beliefs can lead to greater relationship satisfaction, in addition to providing encouragement and confidence to a friend. Second, Stroud argues that friendship places demands on our attitudes more broadly, and that as such, we have reason to expect this to apply to our beliefs also. Third, Stroud argues that our friendships are based, at least in part, on our esteem for our friends, and so we should expect good friends to be somewhat biased in favour of their friends. Fourth, Keller argues that even if many or most friendships do not require such bias, there can be *some* friendships that do require such bias, and are not poorer for it. Finally, both Stroud and Keller can appeal to a simple but powerful argument resting on our intuition that there would be something problematic about a person (as a friend) if she were to evaluate and form beliefs about her friends as if she were a detached observer, acting as she would if she were simply evaluating strangers. We can consider each argument in turn.

1) Positive Illusions and the Shift from Descriptions to Norms

Stroud draws attention to work in psychology concerning so-called positive illusions. People tend to think highly of themselves, more highly than the available evidence would seem to justify in many cases. Thus, a majority of people will believe themselves to be better than average drivers, more popular than average, and so on (Gilovich 1991, ch. 5). Stroud notes that there are also studies

suggesting that similar biases are present in our beliefs about our friends and partners. Many of the authors of these studies suggest that positive illusions are often good for us – providing us greater confidence, ambition, and (in the case of skewed beliefs about friends and partners) yielding greater relationship satisfaction.³ Keller, comparing friends to coaches, writes “It can be helpful to have [...] someone who believes that you really are capable of achieving what you want to achieve, who takes your failures to be temporary and anomalous and your successes to indicate greater things to come” (Keller 2007, 34). As such, we might think that good friends should be prone to positive illusions about their friends and partners in order to create greater relationship satisfaction, and perhaps also greater confidence, ambition, and so forth, by reinforcing their friends’ positive illusions about themselves.⁴

Still, while there is a large body of research focusing on the beneficial aspects of positive illusions, there is also a significant body of work drawing attention to their dangers: such illusions can lead individuals to underestimate risks, enter into ventures where they lack the skills to succeed,

³ Stroud cites Taylor and Brown (1988), Murray and Holmes (1993, 1997), and Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996).

⁴ I will simply treat supposed positive illusions in romantic relationships as relevantly similar to positive illusions in other friendships. If future empirical work were to suggest that romantic relationships are very different from friendships with respect to positive illusions, the current discussion would need to be revised. Note also that positive illusions and epistemically unjustified beliefs can come apart (as when a person forms an unjustified, but luckily true belief); in the current sub-section I will focus solely on positive illusions.

and so on.⁵ The value and extent of positive illusions are thus controversial among social psychologists, and we should not be too quick to assume that possessing positive illusions about our friends will be beneficial; we will return to this point shortly.

Much of the literature cited by Stroud is questionable when taken as support for the claim that individuals tend to possess positive illusions concerning their loved ones. For example, Stroud refers approvingly to Murray, Holmes, and Griffin's "The Benefits of Positive Illusions: Idealization and the Construction of Satisfaction in Close Relationships". How are positive illusions understood in this study?

[G]iven the difficulty of pinpointing "objective" truths, we're faced with a dilemma: How can we measure the actor's constructions without knowledge of the partner's "real" qualities or "true" nature? In the absence of a gold standard for reality, we turned to partners' own perspectives on their virtues and faults. Investigators typically use such self-ratings as indexes of individuals' personality traits, despite the necessary caveats with using self-reports to estimate reality. (Murray, Holmes, and Griffin 1996, 82)

Murray and her co-authors make use of a similar approach in other studies cited by Stroud, but a significant flaw should be clear. For example, following a question format used by these authors (in one of the questionnaires used in their study), if I were to rate my own honesty at 9 on a 9-point scale, while you, my loved one, were to rate my honesty at 6, your answer would be construed as a *negative illusion* concerning my honesty. Why? Because your assessment differs from mine; my self-assessment is treated as a proxy for reality. Rather than seeking a more objective measure of an individual's traits, Murray and her co-authors appeal to the individual's own self-assessment. That

⁵ See, for example, Dunning, Heath, and Suls (2004), Colvin and Block (1994), Colvin, Block, and Funder (1995), and Kruger and Dunning (1999).

investigators in social psychology “typically use such self-ratings as indexes of individuals’ personality traits” provides no justification for the methodology. Consider again: if we were to rate highly the abilities and potentials of a talented woman whose confidence had been undermined by an abusive spouse, our assessment would be understood as a positive *illusion* insofar as it is a more positive assessment than she would give herself. These studies give us no guidance as to the presence of genuine positive illusions (seeing friends more positively than they *actually* are); they instead focus on differences between an agent’s assessment of a friend, and the friend’s own self-assessment. It would not be surprising if people did tend to have actual positive illusions about friends and partners, but the literature does little to support this claim.

Even if we were to simply accept at face value the interpretations given by the authors of the studies noted above, important questions would remain. Suppose that couples with “positive illusions” about each other tend to feel greater relationship satisfaction. It would not follow that there is a norm of friendship *requiring* us to form beliefs in ways that tend to produce such illusions. For example, an influential, broadly Aristotelian position is that friendships allow friends to learn about themselves through the interpretations of the other (see, for example, Cocking and Kennett (1998)). We can help each other to improve, to recognize our strengths and weaknesses, and so on through our knowledge of each other. Friends might be more satisfied (and less frustrated or disappointed) if they view each other in a biased light, but they could also lose out on other valuable aspects of friendship, including the potential to gain self-knowledge and to improve themselves. It is far from clear that friendships would require, as a norm, that we be biased in our beliefs about our friends - there would be significant trade-offs at stake.

2) *Demands upon belief as an instance of more general demands upon attitudes*

Stroud provides two main additional reasons for why friendship would require significant shifts in our epistemic behaviour (and resultant beliefs) when forming beliefs about our friends. We can begin with the following:

Our friendships function as commitments. To be someone's friend is to have cast your lot in with his, and indeed with his good character; and this properly affects how you respond to new situations and data. [...] A commitment to your friend's merits is more something you bring to the various situations you confront than something you take away from the information you receive. This is reflected in our epistemic partiality toward our friends.

(Stroud 2006, 512)

Friendships thus act as constraints, shaping our attitudes and actions with respect to our friends; Stroud and Keller see our epistemic behaviour as no exception.

In response, notice that beliefs *are* importantly different from many other attitudes, and as such, it could well be that while friendship properly places demands on other attitudes and their formation, our beliefs would stand as exceptions. The distinction is sometimes put, controversially, in terms of direction of fit – our beliefs are intended to fit the world (while with desires, for example, the goal is to have the world come to fit the desires). Less controversially, beliefs, by their nature, represent the world as being a certain way – when we believe that *p* we are committed to the truth of *p*. When our beliefs are false, we are in error; if we instead hope that *p* is true, even if *p* is not true, we are not making an error in the same way – it is simply that our hope is not satisfied. Our beliefs form our picture of the world upon which our other attitudes are based. We should not be surprised that the demands (if any) that friendship places on our beliefs and belief-forming behaviors are rather different – and more restricted than – the demands placed on other attitudes and behaviors.

Furthermore, standard epistemic norms can allow for more differences in belief-forming behavior than Stroud and Keller acknowledge. In other words, there is scope for good friends to alter their belief-forming behaviour with respect to their friends, but while still abiding by epistemic norms. As such, standard epistemic norms can accommodate the more restricted demands (if any) that friendship places upon our belief-formation; I will defend this claim in some depth in section IV.

At one level, Stroud and Keller both clearly recognize the importance of attitudes other than belief in friendship – indeed it is their recognition of how friendship places demands upon these other attitudes in the case of good friends that, in part, leads them to suggest that our epistemic behaviour and attitudes are not exempt from being altered by friendship. But we should worry both (i) that they still underplay the importance of these other attitudes, and (ii) that they also underplay the normality of having negative beliefs about our friends.

Keller and Stroud seem to overstate how rare and difficult it is for friends to embrace negative beliefs about each other. To be sure, as noted above, they do recognize that good friends need not be entirely blinkered to the faults of their friends; presumably we will all recognize at least some flaws in our friends. Still, the entire thrust of their work is that good friends will try to avoid forming negative beliefs about their friends. But consider: among the elements of friendship are such things as acceptance, hope, encouragement, and forgiveness. With our best friends we hope and expect that they *accept* us, flaws and all; they see enough value in our other traits, or enough potential to change that they stand by us. They will *hope* that we can improve, and will presumably *encourage* us to do so. They will also typically be more *forgiving* than others when we do fall short. But all of these important aspects of friendship only come into play as we recognize our friend's shortcomings, and they ours. Indeed, it is often taken as a mark of best friends that they are quite aware of our flaws yet they still find us worthy of love; they recognize our strengths and potentials.

We might wonder: if Keller and Stroud allow that good friends can recognize many flaws and shortcomings in their friends, why should friendship then require a subtle epistemic bias on the part of friends such that we are blinded to certain other flaws?

Consider again Eric about to listen to Rebecca's poetry. Do we really think it would be bad of him as a friend to believe it likely that her poetry will be poor, given his experience of poetry at this venue, and his only now discovering that Rebecca had any interest in poetry at all? Rather, would we not expect Eric in this case to sadly form the belief, but also to *worry* about Rebecca's decision, and to *hope* that her poetry will be better than he expects?⁶ A poor friend would be indifferent to Rebecca's potential failure, or indeed might delight in it. Would Rebecca be justified (as a friend) in expecting Eric not to believe there is a good chance her poetry will be poor, despite his lack of knowledge about her poetry, and the poor quality of the poetry he has heard in the venue? Surely not; it would be a juvenile expectation on her part! That said, Rebecca *would* have grounds to complain if Eric were to hope that she would fail, or if he were not to listen carefully to her work, and so forth.

Keller might be seen as providing a variation on Stroud's proposal. Keller writes that "when good friends form beliefs about each other, they sometimes respond to considerations that have to do with the needs and interests of their friends, not with aiming at the truth" (Keller 2007, 24-5). Here again we have the question of whether, even if the descriptive claim are true, good friends *ought*

⁶ One could question the epistemic propriety of forming beliefs about the likely quality of a person's poetry based on the quality of the poetry of others who happen to have read at the same venue. To ensure such propriety, we can assume that the owners of the café have a settled taste whereby the poets they invite typically share a common, bad, style.

to have their beliefs shaped by such considerations, even from the point of view of friendship. It could be that they would be better friends with more accurate, justified beliefs.

Keller is certainly right that good friends should respond to considerations that have to do with the needs and interests of their friends. But the question is whether such responsiveness should also manifest itself in our belief-formation. And as noted above, we have reason to think that beliefs are different from other attitudes insofar as when we believe a claim, we commit ourselves to the truth of that claim. With flawed and distorted beliefs about our friends, we are less likely to be able to properly support them or offer them advice.

Notice the flipside of Keller and Stroud's position – if I am constantly slightly biased in favour of your doing well, etc., I might not recognize that you are struggling, and in need of support (as I keep interpreting your apparent failures and shortcomings in a positive light). Keller emphasizes the importance of friends supporting each other, but the belief-forming bias that he and Stroud suggest would often seem to have the impact of blinding (to some extent) friends to the struggles of each other.

We arrive at an alternative picture of the appropriate responses to potentially negative information about our friends (to that endorsed by Stroud and Keller). The alternative emphasizes that the hopes, desires, fears, and other attitudes of friends properly capture the partiality demanded by friendship. On the other hand, we can and do form negative beliefs about our friends. Recognition of the flaws and errors of our friends allows other aspects of friendship to come to the fore – acceptance, encouragement, support, and so on. We can thus manifest a proper concern for our friends while also manifesting a proper concern for the truth and epistemic norms.

3) That friendships are based, at least in part, upon esteem for our friends

Stroud provides a further argument for why friendships would require the epistemic standards of good friends to be altered:

I am assuming that friendship is in some important sense based on your friend's character and esteem for his merits [...] I think some such constraint is required in order to respond to the common intuition that we want our friends to love us for who we are. But if [...] friendship *is* importantly contingent on continued esteem for one's friend's merits and character, then it is not surprising that we would massage our beliefs about our friend's character in a favourable direction and downplay any information which might threaten that esteem. (Stroud 2006, 511)

The claims here seem plausible. But even so, we should hesitate to see friendship as requiring skewed epistemic behaviour. To begin, even if we in fact tend to 'massage' our beliefs about our friends, it is not yet clear that this is yet an obligation imposed by friendship as such. This might be, for example, simply a common tendency among individuals that prolongs flawed friendships; friendship might instead require that we find friends for whom we can have adequate esteem based on a justified, honest evaluation of their traits. Once again, there remains a gap between the descriptive and normative claims.

More fundamentally, while we might hope and expect that our friends would believe us to possess a range of positive traits (and to act well), we would want such beliefs to arise from acceptable epistemic practices. In particular, we would hope that our friends would think highly of us due to our track record with them; we think that our friends know us well, and know of our abilities and virtues. They know of how we act and the values we espouse. We do not desire just

any positive belief⁷ on the part of our friends – rather, we hope to have earned the trust and goodwill of our friends. Adam Smith makes the point clearly:

The most sincere praise can give little pleasure when it cannot be considered as some sort of proof of praise-worthiness. It is by no means sufficient that, from ignorance or mistake, esteem and admiration should, in some way or other, be bestowed upon us. [...] The man who applauds us either for actions which we did not perform, or for motives which had no sort of influence upon our conduct, applauds us not, but another person. (Smith 1976, 114-5)

We want our friends to think us honest because they remember all of the occasions where we have told the truth though a lie would have been easier for us (and so on); we do not merely want unthinking endorsement that is insensitive to what our friend knows about us. As Stroud herself notes, we want our friends to love us for who we are – we do not desire unjustified cheerleading, or that our friends love a mere illusion. As such, her promotion of epistemic bias on the part of friends seems somewhat puzzling. Yes, we want our friends to think well of us. But crucially we want to be worthy of this esteem; we want our friends to hesitate to form negative beliefs about us because they are well-acquainted with our character and actions, and we hope these justify (epistemically) our friend's attitudes towards us.

Stroud does attempt to address this worry – that to the extent we possess biased beliefs, we do not genuinely love our friend as such, but rather something of an illusion:

⁷ By 'positive belief' I mean a belief that a friend possesses some valued trait, or has performed well, etc.; similarly, a 'negative belief' means a belief that a friend possesses some bad trait, or has performed a wrong action, etc.

Note that friendship can still be said to be based on esteem for your friend's merits even when that esteem is to some degree artificially maintained through biased shading. For your original perception of A's merits – part of the basis for your becoming friends with A – may have been objective, impartial, and unbiased. (Stroud 2006, 511, note 28)

But this seems dubious. While our friendship may originally have been based on esteem for our friend's merits, to the extent that it is 'artificially maintained through biased shading' now, it seems to that extent to no longer be based on our friend's actual merits.

A dilemma emerges for Stroud: to the extent that the skewed beliefs do little or nothing to sustain the current friendship, to that extent it seems there is no reason to hold that friendship would demand such beliefs (or altered belief-forming processes). There is no need to be biased in trivial matters that do not affect the friendship.

On the other hand, to the extent that the biased beliefs do play a significant role in sustaining the current friendship, to that same extent we do not seem to love our friend and her merits, and instead love her based on the traits we attribute to her in an epistemically unjustified fashion. We love the rose-colored image of the friend we have created. It is possible, of course, that some of our epistemically unjustified beliefs about our friend turn out to be true. But we do not really appreciate our friend as such in these cases – we would likely have formed the same belief about our friend, regardless, given the bias suggested by Stroud and Keller.

Imagine learning that your friend believes your poetry to be excellent, but also learning that this assessment is the result of skewed, epistemically unjustified belief-forming practices. While it might be touching or somewhat comforting that your friend sees you in such a positive light, it will be hard to take these evaluations seriously, and any reassurance concerning the quality of your poetry itself would be lost. Indeed, in the future you may begin to take the positive claims of your friend about you with a grain of salt, as claims not to be taken seriously. It also seems strange to

hold that a friend who did not form beliefs in this way would thereby be failing as a friend. As we noted with Adam Smith above, empty or unwarranted praise provides no satisfaction.⁸

Next imagine a case where it never becomes clear that your friend forms epistemically biased beliefs about you. You are unaware of the bias in your favor, as is your friend - presumably for your friend the skewing will likely be subconscious, in any case. Why think this would be problematic? The first point is that with such skewed beliefs, there is always the potential that they will be discovered, and we will arrive at the problems just discussed.

Secondly, there are dangers if a good friend reinforces a friend's positive illusions. The friend may now take on tasks or goals for which they lack the necessary skills or character. There may be frustration or much worse at stake. It may also be risky for the good friend herself if she comes to rely, unjustifiably, on her friend possessing certain traits and potentials. Imagine, for example, that the good friend unjustifiably overestimates her friend's loyalty or responsibility, leaving her vulnerable to being let down. Keller compares good friends to coaches, helping to encourage and improve their friends. But he himself notes that

There can also, of course, be dangers in having a coach with an inflated view of your capabilities. Good coaches and motivators are people who, among other things, are optimistic about the prospects of those whom they are coaching, without this leading to

⁸ What if someone did still feel great satisfaction in unwarranted praise? This would seem to reflect either vanity or low self-esteem on the part of this person. Either way, it does not seem that there would be a genuine, general norm of friendship requiring biased beliefs simply because there is a small set of people with low self-esteem (or who are vain) who would derive some pleasure or reassurance even if they knew such beliefs were unjustified.

their setting expectations or training regimes whose eventual effect will be to harm performance. (Keller 2007, 35)

How might we avoid such dangerous possibilities? One plausible way would be by having justified, well-grounded beliefs about our friend's potentials. We can still be very encouraging, demanding, and so on, even with an epistemically justified assessment of our friend, but with a justified belief it seems we are less likely to lead or support our friend into problematic situations. And as noted above, with biased beliefs about our friend, we may instead be blinded to potential problems they are facing ("Oh sure, Doyle enjoys a drink or two, but I'm sure he has things under control").

Beyond this, Stroud and Keller may be assuming too strong of a link between positive beliefs and valuable support. Consider – it is quite possible that a friend with an inflated, positive view of her friend's abilities is still unsupportive or unhelpful. And a friend with an accurate, justified assessment of a friend could still be extremely supportive and challenging, etc. As such, why think there needs to be a norm of friendship requiring epistemic bias?

Suppose you were to have three friends, A, B, and C. Suppose further that with biased belief formation of the kind Stroud and Keller propose, your beliefs about A would be skewed, such that you see him as A+ - with slightly better abilities, performing slightly fewer bad actions, and so on. Similarly, you will see B as B+, and C as C+. Finally, suppose that your inflated view of C, C+, would basically have the traits of B, while B+ would roughly have the actual traits of A (and A+ would be a bit better still). It seems odd to hold that to be a good friend of C you need to skew your beliefs to the point where you attribute – in effect – the traits of B to him. Rather than loving A+, B+, and C+, why not simply love A, B, and C? If you can be a good friend to a person with the traits of C+, you could thereby be a good friend to someone with the traits of B. It is hard to see what is accomplished by the proposed bias and resulting beliefs.

Finally, we may again wonder to what extent the good friend would love the friend herself, and not just the skewed image superimposed upon the friend. We can return to the earlier dilemma. To the extent that distorted beliefs are about trivial matters that play no role in sustaining the friendship, it seems there is no need for them, and that there would be no norm of friendship requiring them. But to the extent that a good friend possesses epistemically unjustified beliefs about her friend, beliefs that actually play a role in sustaining and deepening the friendship, to that very extent, we should worry that the friendship is flawed, based on illusion and unjustified belief, and not a love of the friend herself, with her actual character and qualities.

4) That particular friendships might place such demands upon our beliefs

Could there be a duty to form biased beliefs in certain particular friendships, even if this is not true of all friendships? Keller maintains that we need not see friendships in which the parties involved are required to form biased beliefs about each other as inferior to those where the friends form accurate, epistemically responsible beliefs:

To show that the norms of friendship can conflict with epistemic norms, it is enough to show that Eric and Rebecca's friendship *could* give rise to the kinds of norms identified in my presentation of the case, without thereby being a worse friendship than it would otherwise be. (Keller 2007, 30)

But reflection suggests that friendships of the kind Keller suggests are, in fact, worse than others. Compare: two very dishonest people might be capable of a working friendship (involving a genuine concern for each other) from which they derive satisfaction, but which requires each to constantly check-up on the other to avoid serious deception. Perhaps such monitoring of the other is the best thing these dishonest friends can do, given the circumstances. But they are flawed people with a flawed friendship, one lacking the trust that would characterize better friendships. We learn nothing

about genuine norms of friendship as such from a case like this. Similarly, a friendship grounded in epistemically-skewed positive beliefs seems vulnerable (as when the truth about a friend can no longer be overlooked), brings a strong risk of overestimating potentials (which can lead to various harms or frustration), and seems to fail to satisfy – at least in part – the common preference to love and be loved based on actual traits and actions, not simply superimposed illusions. A friendship seems to be flawed to the very extent that it depends upon or is grounded in skewed, biased beliefs.

Consider the following case, one that might seem to work for Keller's purposes: Ishvan is quite uninteresting, unintelligent, unattractive, and generally unpleasant. We might think that the only way for Ishvan to have friends is for them to form skewed beliefs about him, seeing him in a particularly biased positive light – and this in turn might suggest that his friends, as good friends, are required to be biased in this way. But a few points can be raised here. First, I suspect that there are few people who are so awful that they cannot have friends without the aid of skewed beliefs. This is, of course, an empirical claim. But it seems reasonable to think that even generally unpleasant people will have some positive traits that their friends can recognize; very few people are horrible *all* of the time. His friends can still hope for improvement in Ishvan, be supportive of him, and so on, even with more accurate beliefs. Second, to the extent that there are people who (for the most part) really can only have friendships by others having skewed beliefs about them, to the same extent it seems that they are missing out on the best kind of friendships. They are unfortunate individuals. This might be sad, but it also seems to be true. Finally, given the dangers and harms associated with biased beliefs, it seems that even in the case of Ishvan, that it would be better to have understanding, patient friends with justified beliefs, rather than friends embracing potentially problematic biased beliefs.

5) *The Underlying, Intuitive Argument*

Finally, we can consider a straightforward argument that perhaps captures the heart of Stroud and Keller's concerns. Both Stroud and Keller stress that we would find it strange and problematic if a friend, in the sorts of examples they consider, were to form beliefs precisely as a detached observer would, if the friendship were to have no impact on the friend's belief-forming behaviour. Put another way – surely we would see it as flawed if a good friend were to evaluate her friend simply as she would evaluate a stranger in similar circumstances. And while Stroud and Keller would not claim that there should be a *strong* bias on the part of the friend, they believe there should be some impacts on belief formation – and these impacts need not be in accordance with standard epistemic norms. This is the fundamental intuition driving their proposals.

Our response here can draw on several points that have been developed earlier in this section. First, even if we expect changes to a friend's epistemic behaviour, at least part of this can be explained in terms of paying attention to different features of a situation than one might with a stranger; but even with such different foci, the friend's epistemic behaviour can be in accordance with standard epistemic norms. Second, even if we expect some degree of positive bias on the part of friends in some cases, we have seen above that there are important risks if this bias falls outside of epistemic norms (e.g., in encouraging a friend to take on projects in which she will almost certainly fail, etc.). Epistemic norms do allow some leeway, and any bias on the part of a friend should fall within these constraints. I will argue for this claim further in the final section of the paper. Third, even if we sometimes expect some differences in the belief-forming behaviour of friends (in particular cases), we do not expect this in all cases – after all, there might be cases where a friend has sincerely asked us for criticisms of her performance, or where the matter is entirely trivial (do we expect positive bias in the assessment of how a friend ties her shoes?). Fourth, we again have questions here about shifting from our descriptive expectations – that friends will be biased in some cases – to the normative claim that there is a norm of friendship that *requires* such bias (rather

than even merely permitting such bias in some cases). And finally, fifth, while we may (in some cases) expect differences in behaviour and attitudes when a person is evaluating a friend, we have seen that this is primarily a matter of other attitudes that a friend will form – her hopes, fears, desires, and so on concerning the friend, and other actions she will perform – encouraging, reassuring, or confronting (when appropriate), and so on. Beliefs remain as our representations of the world, upon which our other attitudes and actions can be based.

In this section I have attempted to show that Stroud and Keller's arguments for claiming that good friends are *required* to form epistemically problematic, biased beliefs about their friends ultimately fail. Skipping over several points, I have argued that their position (i) underplays the potential harms of unjustified positive beliefs, (ii) does not fully recognize that our other attitudes and actions (hopes, fears, desires, etc.) can properly and fully capture the partiality that is due to our friends, and (iii) underplays our ability to be supportive, encouraging, and so on, even with negative beliefs about our friends. Still, for all this, I do think that a certain, very modest bias on behalf of our friends would sometimes be *permissible* by the norms of friendship. However, as I argue in the next section, I would hold that any such modest bias would fall within the bounds of standard epistemic norms.

IV Justifying Differences in Epistemic Behaviour

We can begin by bracketing certain concerns that lurk in the background. First, our obligations as friends will vary with the depth or closeness of the friendship – presumably we owe more to those with whom we are closer, *ceteris paribus*. In what follows we can assume that the friendships under discussion are strong, close ones – ones that would be among the most demanding. Second, whether an agent ought to be biased in favour of a friend (in any way) when forming a certain belief may depend on (i) the particular friendship, and (ii) the issue at stake. It may be inappropriate for a friend with whom we share a certain history, and certain activities and

interests to suddenly probe into the extent of our charitable giving, for example (and this even if the friendship is a close one); and I may not need to be particularly biased in your favour in assessing your ability to neatly chop vegetables, even if I'm a close friend (particularly if this ability is of little relevance to you, and of little relevance to our friendship). In what follows, we will assume that the issues concerning which the friends are forming beliefs are appropriate and relevant. Finally, friends may genuinely turn to us for the difficult truth ("I'm surrounded by yes-men. As my friend, do you really think this is a good idea?"); in such cases it seems there may an obligation to seek out the flaws or problems in our friend's behaviour or plans, etc. This claim seems to be roughly as plausible as Stroud and Keller's claims concerning the more general positive spin that may be required in forming beliefs about our friends - indeed, it may be more plausible in those cases where a friend specifically asks us for a firm critique. For present purposes, we will put aside cases involving such requests. It is worth noting, more generally, that the considerations mentioned here provide us with further reason to be hesitant in accepting any sort of general norm of friendship requiring us always to be biased in favour of positive beliefs concerning our friends.

With these qualifications in hand, we can consider the following:

Reasonable Optimism about Our Friends: A slight bias on behalf of our friends is, *ceteris paribus*, permissible according to the norms of friendship. However, this modest bias falls within the bounds of standard epistemic norms; there is no fundamental clash between the two sets of norms.

The *ceteris paribus* qualification is intended to rule out cases where, for example, a person has promised to provide an honest, critical evaluation of a friend's effort (where a positive bias thus seems precisely contrary to what is required of a good friend).

A good place to start is with the observation that there are potentially significant costs associated with forming negative beliefs about our friends. Keller suggests that there may be a loss

of trust if the friend learns of our accepting such claims about her; she may feel betrayed, and the friendship may thus be undermined (Keller 2007, 24). Stroud suggests that if we come to think of our friend as a person with such negative traits, we may grow detached from her to the extent that the friendship is based on esteem for her merits (Stroud 2006, 511). Taking it as a given that friendships are valuable, if negative beliefs can thus undermine and damage a friendship, we have reason to be especially careful in forming such beliefs. I do think that Stroud and Keller overstate the potential harms somewhat here, but we can simply accept their claims in what follows.⁹

Consider the following case: Claire is severely allergic to peanuts; her friend is not. At a bakery, the friend is satisfied asking an employee whether there are peanuts in the baked goods she is about to buy. It seems she can form a justified true belief that there are no peanuts based on the employee's testimony - a paradigmatic instance of knowledge-acquisition via testimony. But Claire will presumably be much more careful - are products with peanuts made on the same machinery as these goods? Have there been any past instances of contamination? It is crucial for Claire to be careful to avoid falsely believing that there are no peanuts in the items she is about to purchase. As such, she properly pays greater attention to more unusual possibilities that other individuals would likely ignore.

Notice that Claire's friend, and most impartial observers would form an epistemically justified belief about the absence of peanuts simply on the basis of the employee's report. And Claire herself would have formed a similar belief if she were simply asking about the absence of

⁹ That is, our close friendships will typically tend to be quite resilient; we can form negative beliefs about friends, go through rough patches, have disagreements, and so on, without the friendship being undermined. Again, this is a matter of accepting our friends for who they are, recognizing their shortcomings, trying to be supportive, and in some cases encouraging them to improve.

cooked mushrooms in various dishes (where she has a mild dislike of them, but is not allergic). Claire is thus acting in an unusual fashion, epistemically, with respect to the absence of peanuts. She demands greater evidence that they are not present, and withholds forming a belief (“there are no peanuts in these baked goods”) that other agents would typically form. But it seems implausible to hold that she is thereby being epistemically irresponsible; if anything, it seems she is acting in a more epistemically demanding and careful fashion than the average epistemic agent.

As noted above, there may be significant costs to falsely believing negative claims about ones friends. As such, a good friend might demand more evidence for these negative claims than strangers would; a good friend might withhold forming a negative belief even if such a belief would be epistemically justified and would satisfy other agents. A good friend may treat as relevant possibilities concerning her friend’s behaviour that others might not seek out (“Sam isn’t like that; I wonder if he was out of town and didn’t check his messages?”). But this is hardly epistemically problematic, anymore than is Claire’s being particularly cautious in forming beliefs about the absence of an allergen. And notice how well this captures what Stroud and Keller themselves suggest. For example, Keller writes

The thought behind my presentation of the example, then, is just that good friendship can require that you make a special effort – effort that you need not make with regard to just anyone – to see value in your friends’ projects before you decide (and say) that you think them misguided. (Keller 2007, 31)

This is not epistemically irresponsible; if anything, it could be unusually demanding

Stroud considers the claim that such behavior is especially epistemically responsible, but rejects the proposal:

If, e.g., one considered only the heightened scrutiny to which the good friend subjects new information about her friend, one might be tempted to say that this change is an

improvement from an epistemic point of view. [...] But it is much harder to maintain that the good friend displays enhanced epistemic virtue if one considers the total package of differential epistemic practices and *beliefs* which she will tend to manifest. (Stroud 2006, 523, note 31; emphasis in original)

We might put Stroud's point this way – if the good friend were simply subjecting new putative information about her friends to further impartial scrutiny, then this might be seen as an epistemic improvement. But the further scrutiny tends in one direction, as it were – the friend is searching for ways to avoid negative interpretations of the friend, or to find more positive alternatives. So the further scrutiny is skewed, and thus not really an epistemic improvement at all.

But I think we can properly reject Stroud's worry. Again compare the case of Claire. Here too, the further scrutiny tends in one direction – Claire is especially careful in thinking of possible ways in which peanuts may have come into food, and in raising worries with evidence that might have satisfied others. Yet even so, this does not seem to be poor epistemic behaviour – she is being especially careful to avoid forming a false belief that could have severe, negative consequences for her. This is especially careful epistemic work, and not plausibly seen as flawed. Similarly, then, for good friends who are especially careful epistemically when considering claims that could have severe negative consequences.

Still, we can push further. One could argue that Claire with her food allergies is in fact acting contrary to appropriate epistemic standards when she demands more evidence (and similarly in the case of friends), even if she has good pragmatic reasons to do so. For Claire to be epistemically responsible in this case, the objection would run, she ought to form the belief supported by her evidence (that there are no peanuts), and not withhold. That is, from an epistemic point of view Claire should not demand more evidence concerning the presence of peanuts, and to

the extent that she does, she is acting in an epistemically flawed fashion by being too sceptical and demanding.

Richard Feldman and Earl Conee's evidentialism would provide a theoretical framework for such a view and objection, and it is worth noting that Stroud treats this position as representative of standard epistemic norms. Feldman holds that as epistemic agents we have one duty:

O2. For any person *S*, time *t*, and proposition *p*, if *S* has any doxastic attitude at all towards *p* at *t* and *S*'s evidence at *t* supports *p*, then *S* epistemically ought to have the attitude toward *p* supported by *S*'s evidence at *t*. (Feldman 2005, 178)

The crucial point for our purposes is that Feldman's position would hold that for any given degree of evidence or justification for any claim, there is precisely one attitude towards the claim (disbelief, withholding, or belief) that is epistemically appropriate. If, for example, an agent has significant evidence that a claim is true, yet the agent still withholds belief, then on Feldman's view, this agent is acting in an epistemically problematic fashion – she is missing out on a true, justified belief that she should have, and is instead inappropriately requiring more evidence than epistemically required.

As a first response, notice that a growing number of epistemologists would reject a strict division between epistemic and pragmatic norms. They instead accept various forms of 'pragmatic encroachment'; here we will focus on subject-sensitive invariantism (SSI).¹⁰ Broadly speaking, according to SSI, when the stakes are raised for an agent, a stronger epistemic position is required in order for her to know or have justified beliefs. If having a false negative belief about your friend could have severe negative consequences, then you would need to be in a very strong epistemic

¹⁰ For defences of versions of SSI, see Fantl and McGrath (2009), Hawthorne (2004), and Stanley (2005).

position in order for your belief to be epistemically justified. Consider the following principle from Fantl and McGrath:

(J^K) If you have knowledge-level justification that p , then p is warranted enough to justify you in ϕ -ing, for any ϕ . (Fantl and McGrath 2009, 98)

Intuitively, given the serious harms that could result from believing a negative claim about a friend, an agent would require significant justification in order for it to be rational for her to act (ϕ) as if the claim were true. In turn, this means that the level of epistemic justification that would be required for the agent to know that p would also be especially high in such a case. It is *epistemically* required that the good friend seek greater evidence, treat a wider range of possibilities as relevant, and so on in order to know. As such, there would be no conflict between epistemic norms and any belief-forming behaviour that is required (or merely permissible) by the standards of friendship.

Still, SSI is controversial, and we can consider a second, more conservative position concerning epistemic norms that would also treat any distinctive belief-forming behaviours (and resultant beliefs) of good friends as epistemically permissible. Notice that as epistemic agents we have at least two basic goals – gaining true beliefs and avoiding false beliefs. Further, we must balance these goals; at one extreme we could believe everything to maximize our stock of true beliefs, at the other we could believe nothing to minimize our acquisition of false beliefs. It is not clear that epistemic concerns alone will determine how we ought to balance these twin goals, and certainly it seems that there is a range of plausible balancings, and that pragmatic and other concerns might play a valid role in determining how we balance these concerns in particular cases.¹¹ If a false belief concerning an issue might be especially harmful then pragmatically we might properly tend to

¹¹ Wayne Riggs has done much to draw attention to the importance of the divergence between these twin goals for epistemology. See Riggs (2003, 2008).

gear our epistemic behaviour towards avoiding false beliefs with respect to this issue. We might also embrace somewhat less strict belief-forming practices in cases where a false belief would have little impact on our pragmatic concerns, while still achieving a level of epistemic justification such that our beliefs would qualify as knowledge. The belief-forming practices we embrace with respect to our friends in some cases might be different from those we embrace with respect to strangers, but both sets of practices could properly satisfy standard epistemic norms.

To illustrate, suppose that there is a minimum degree of justification that is required for a belief to qualify as knowledge; this minimum degree holds for all agents in all circumstances with respect to all issues. For example, suppose the bare minimum degree of epistemic justification for a true belief to count as knowledge - putting aside Gettier worries - is .90 (where degree 1.00 is epistemic certainty).¹² It could well be that when forming beliefs about strangers we feel satisfied when we achieve degree of justification .90 itself; for the allergic person, she may (for example) demand degree of justification .95 in forming beliefs about the presence of allergens. Similarly, friends may demand a degree of .95 before coming to form highly negative beliefs concerning friends. Of course, there could also be a point where our evidence is so overwhelming that it would clearly be epistemically problematic not to believe the claim (consider those who continue to deny the human impact on climate change, for example). Continuing our example, we could say this occurs at degree .98. Notice that our differing demands for justification can arise out of pragmatic and other concerns – but that in each case, despite the differing demands, so long as (i) a degree of justification of at least .90 is demanded before believing, and (ii) we would not continue to withhold belief if we were to reach a degree of justification of .98 or higher, we would be acting entirely

¹² We need not take a stance on the nature of epistemic justification here, beyond assuming that our beliefs can be more or less justified.

appropriately epistemically. The proposal, then, is that while we might demand greater epistemic justification than we usually do when considering negative claims about our friends, this is epistemically acceptable so long as our belief-forming practices still satisfy standard epistemic standards for acquiring knowledge, while not being so sceptical as to refuse to believe when the evidence reaches some very high degree.¹³

While the above paragraphs draw attention to a potential role for pragmatic concerns in deciding whether one is satisfied with a lower degree of epistemic justification in a given case (while still satisfying standard epistemic norms, and having justification sufficient for knowledge), notice that an agent need not appeal to pragmatic concerns, nor need we assume that the agent can precisely determine what degree of justification she has for a belief. That is, what is crucial to the above proposal is that there can be a level of justification that is adequate for a belief to qualify as knowledge (where achieving this level satisfies standard epistemic norms), even if there are higher degrees of justification available (ultimately reaching epistemic certainty). Notice that epistemic fallibilists can embrace something like this view – they explicitly allow that agents can possess knowledge even in the absence of certainty. As Baron Reed notes,

If fallibilism is correct, there is not a single cognitive relation between subjects and propositions that is knowledge. If there are many different grades of knowledge, there will be correspondingly many different ways of determining the space of epistemic possibility (Reed 2010, 236).

¹³ Notice how common a phenomenon this is – we are often comparatively lax in forming beliefs about trivial matters; we are much more careful in forming beliefs when these might impact our relationships, careers, and so on. But in each case we could still be satisfying standard epistemic norms.

Most all epistemologists are now fallibilists; as such, the above proposal shows us that the majority of contemporary epistemologists embrace a position that could readily accommodate the mild differences in epistemic behavior that may appropriately arise in friendships.¹⁴ Friendship does not require belief-forming behavior that runs contrary to widely-accepted, standard epistemic norms.

An objection looms: why should we accept that friendships would only allow shifts in our belief-forming behavior that fall within the bounds of such epistemic norms? That is, even if epistemic norms do allow leeway of the kind being proposed, we might wonder why friendship's demands would fall within this acceptable range. To continue our example, why could it not be that friendship would allow us to withhold belief (in a negative claim concerning a friend) even at degree of justification .99, while the epistemic norms tell us we must believe at degree of justification .98. Is this to prioritize epistemic values?

¹⁴ Reed (2010) draws attention to the following passages as reflecting the widespread commitment to fallibilism: “the acceptance of fallibilism in epistemology is virtually universal” (Cohen 1998, 91), and “We are all fallibilists nowadays” (Williams 2001, 5). Note that not all fallibilists do, in fact, accept norms that accommodate mild differences in epistemic behaviour of the kind defended here – my claim is only that their commitment to fallibilism could allow such acceptance. Finally, notice that Stroud focuses on Feldman and Conee's evidentialism as a paradigmatic, standard epistemic theory. It would be open to her to hold that other standard accounts of epistemic norms could in fact accommodate her proposals; in other words, we could treat Stroud as more narrowly arguing for a clash between the norms of Feldman and Conee's evidentialism (a prominent and important view) and those of friendship, while allowing that other standard epistemic norms would not be so problematic.

In response, note that the current proposal in no way assumes that epistemic norms have priority over the norms of friendship; rather, the proposal reflects limits to the demands that friendship places upon our belief formation. One could value friendship much more than epistemic norms, it is simply that friendship would not require epistemically flawed behaviour in the way proposed by Stroud and Keller.

As to the broader issue, we have discussed in section III the various dangers and harms that can arise with unjustified, biased beliefs about our friends. By having our beliefs remain within the bounds of epistemic propriety, we avoid these additional risks. We can still be encouraging, supportive – or challenging - to our friends even with justified beliefs about their character, behaviour, and potentials. We can be hesitant to form negative beliefs about our friends, but in an epistemically appropriate fashion; as good friends we are typically permitted (though not required) to be as optimistic about our friends as we can be while abiding by at least minimally appropriate epistemic standards. Our behavior can be epistemically responsible, even if it differs from that which we would engage in with respect to strangers - just as the cautious behavior of a person with severe allergies may differ from that of other agents, or her own behavior in other situations. There is no need to posit a fundamental clash between the norms of friendship and epistemic norms.

Acknowledgements: Earlier versions of this paper have been presented at the University of St. Andrews, the Dundee Philosophical Society, and as a Colgate University Humanities Colloquium; I would like to thank all of these audiences for their helpful comments and questions. Parts of this paper were written while I was a visiting fellow at the Centre for Philosophy and Public Affairs at the University of St. Andrews; I would like to thank the Centre and its director, John Haldane, for this support. My work on this paper was also supported by a Picker Grant from Colgate University. Finally, I would like to thank the following individuals in particular for helpful comments and

suggestions: Reid Blackman, Sarah Broadie, Lesleigh Cushing, David Dudrick, James Harris, Simon Keller, Jennifer Lackey, David McCabe, Marvin K. Mooney, Claire Sigsworth, Sarah Stroud, Jens Timmerman, Chris Vecsey, Ed Witherspoon, and the anonymous referees of this paper.

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