DEEP EPISTEMIC VICES

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Abstract

Although the discipline of vice epistemology is only a decade old, the broader project of studying epistemic vices and failings is much older. This paper argues that contemporary vice epistemologists ought to engage more closely with these earlier projects. After sketching some general arguments in section one, I then turn to deep epistemic vices: ones whose identity and intelligibility depends on some underlying conception of human nature or the nature of reality. The final section then offers a case study from a vice epistemic tradition that emerged in early modern English natural philosophy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Vice epistemology emerged, over the last decade, as the study of the identity and significance of the character traits, attitudes, and ways of thinking that, in various ways, tend to obstruct inquiry—an influential conception dubbed 'obstructivism' (Cassam 2019).[1] The more familiar epistemic vices include arrogance, dogmatism, inflexibility, closed-mindedness, and other features of agents opposed to the corresponding virtues of the mind – curiosity, humility, open-mindedness and so on – which are the purview of virtue epistemology (cf. Zagzebski 1996). Virtue and vice epistemology collectively constitute what we might call *character epistemology*, reflecting a conviction that the study of epistemic activity ought to invoke, to some substantive degree, the epistemic characters of individual or collective agents. Such characters are typically complex and dynamic, consisting of both the strong stable traits we call virtues and vices, alongside others that are weaker and less stable. Most epistemic agents' characters will be dappled, consisting of well-developed virtues and vices, alongside an array of less stable and less well-formed dispositions.

Although the discipline of vice epistemology is only a decade old, the broader philosophical project of studying our epistemic vices and failings is much older. Ancient Indian, Greek, and Chinese philosophers challenged sophistry, prejudice, dogmatism, willed ignorance, and other obstacles to virtue, reason, and wisdom, as do contemporary philosophers, whether 'post-truth politics', epistemologies of ignorance, and other signs of concern about our individual and collective epistemic failings. The positive expression of this concern is what Nicholas Wolterstorff (1996) called 'regulative epistemologies', overtly normative projects aimed at facilitating the proper use and direction of our individual and collective epistemic conduct. Analysis and amelioration of our epistemic vices and failings is a crucial dimension of this regulative enterprise.

In this paper, my claim is that contemporary vice epistemologists ought to attend more closely to the methods and deliverances of historians. In section one, I offer a set of arguments for what an historical vice epistemology and then, in sections two and three, develop a case study – a sophisticated early modern English tradition in vice-epistemology. My claim is that an historical perspective indicates the existence of *deep conceptions of epistemic vice*: one whose form, identity, and intelligibility are only explainable adequately in relation to a deeper underlying conception of human nature or the nature of reality – a *Weltbild*, perhaps. I argue that *epistemic hubris* is one such deep epistemic vice, insofar as it presupposes a conception of human beings' epistemic capacities and situation within the wider order of reality, one shaped, within early modern English natural philosophy, by an underlying postlapsarian anthropology – a conception of human beings as fallen, corrupted creatures.

Although vice epistemology is relatively young, most work so far has tended not to be strongly historical in the senses just outlined. Other than due reference to Aristotelian virtue theory, there tends not to be intensive engagement with the historical contexts and contingency of the vices of the mind. Given the nascent state of the discipline, this is not a sign of any entrenched ahistoricality, especially when compared to its sister discipline, virtue epistemology. The last few years have seen more historically sensitive work, either searches for precursor virtue epistemologists – Hume and Nietzsche, say – or applying virtue-epistemic resources to the history of philosophy and of science (cf. Alfano 2016; Gelfert 2013; Roberts and Wood 2007). I hope vice epistemology will also come to develop its own historical sensibility, with this paper being a contribution to that end.

Additional grounds for confidence in an 'historical turn' is the increasing interest in epistemic virtues and vices among intellectual and cultural historians (cf. Paul and van Dongen 2017; Paul 2016; Paul *et al* 2016). Over the last fifteen years, historians have turned their attention to questions of epistemic character – of what Steven Shapin dubs 'scientific personae', normative ideals stipulating the sorts of qualities constitutive of good scientists. In his book, *The Scientific Life*, Shapin explains his interest as the relationship between the '*authority* of knowledge' and 'the virtues of people' and the '*character* of knowers' (2008: xvi). Shapin traces the ways normative conceptions of the scientific self – 'personae' – shape the array of epistemic virtues and vices judged salient in particular social, institutional, and historical contexts. Within eighteenth century natural theology, we find the humble and pious Godly Naturalist, a figure distinct from the ambitious, confident Venture Capitalist of late modern technoscience – variations occluded by ahistorical and acontextual talk of *the* virtues and vices of the mind.

A classic study of the contextual and contingent nature of epistemic virtues and vices is *curiositas*, a trait reviled as an epistemic and spiritual vice by medieval Christians, only to be rehabilitated, during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, as an integral epistemic virtue. In his magisterial book, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age,* Hans Blumenberg (1983) argues that that satisfying explanation of *curiositas*'s changing status, from vice to virtue, requires systematic attention to theological, and cultural developments. Although Blumenberg focuses on a single character trait in a single historical period, subsequent historians, such as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison (2007), offer wider studies. They charted the emergence and evolution of a set of broad conceptions of objectivity and the virtues stipulated as constitutive of the objective inquirers. 'Mechanical objectivity', animated by an 'ideal of purity', required strict exclusion of intruding idiosyncrasies and minimization of the subjective preferences of the inquirer. The virtues of mechanical objectivity therefore included attentiveness, discipline, and self-restraint. Other conceptions of objectivity, such as 'truth-to-nature' or 'trained judgement', stipulated their own sets of virtues and vices. By studying them, we see tables of virtues and vices developing in response to changing 'regulative ideals', practical and epistemic agenda, and projects of enquiry.

Some of the historians engage with work in virtue epistemology, although criticizing, albeit politely, its ahistoricality. Epistemologists have been slower to return the interest, and so opportunities for collaboration are missed. Naturally, the claim is not that all projects in

vice epistemology necessitate the incorporation of historical methods and results. Adoption of historical methods must be motivated by a sense of their relevance to one's questions or concerns. My modest proposal is that that *certain* work in vice epistemology would benefit from engagement with historical methods and scholarship (cf. Kidd 2014, 2017a, 2018a).

II. VICE CONCEPTS

Many of the conceptual resources of vice epistemology are drawn from analytic character epistemology. Additional resources become necessary, however, for theorizing epistemic vices and failings, which often have distinctive aetiologies, structures, and manifestations to our epistemic practices. Familiar Aristotelian analyses do not always help – many virtues are flanked more than the usual two vices, and the vices of deficiency and excess do not have to be equal in number – and vices are not always inversions of the related virtues (cf. Crerar 2018). Moreover, there are many more vices than virtues of the mind, so more ways to fail epistemically than to flourish. To find these additional resources, we can turn to history.

Consider two such examples: *epistemic corruption* and *capital epistemic vices*.

(i) Much contemporary vice epistemology focuses on analysis, description, and appraisal of the vices of the mind, tasks that necessarily invoke the etiological question of how individual and collective epistemic agents come to acquire or develop their various vices and failings. Certainly, many vice epistemologists evince this sort of interest, with Miranda Fricker (2007: 55, 58, 163) and José Medina (2012: 34, 42), for instance, exploring the ways certain experiences and social conditions can lead to the 'erosion' or 'deterioration' of an agent's epistemic character, which is thereby unable to develop - 'thwarted' or 'inhibited'.

Concerns about characterological harm, including the erosion of epistemic virtues and the acquisition or exacerbation of epistemic vices, is familiar from earlier generations of feminist and critical race theorists. African-American and Afro-Caribbean theorists such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Fanon, and Aimé Cesaire describe how subjection to systemic racial oppression 'leaves its stamp' on the oppressed, 'sensitizing' and 'collapsing' a subject's epistemic confidence and character – how, for Du Bois (2015: 153, 154), racial oppression has 'left its mark on the Negro character', which has been, as Cesaire (2000: 7) explained, 'skillfully injected with … inferiority complexes, trepidation [and] servility'.[2] Such terms belong to a

characterological vocabulary, of course, with trepidation and servility being include among what Medina calls the vices of the oppressed.

Associations between epistemic vice and social oppression goes back further, at least into an early modern English tradition in vice epistemology, initiated by Mary Astell. Her 1694 book, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, analyses socially patterned deficiencies in the educational opportunities then afforded to upper class English women. Their curriculum affords only 'froth and trifles', affording women no opportunities to contemplate 'noble and sublime Truths', an epistemically asphyxiating environment exacerbated by the entrenched sexist assumption that women possessed only a 'degraded reason' (2002: 62) – a claim Astell rejects as incompatible with faith in God's providential goodness. The harmful characterological effects of this educational environment is expressed in Astell's (2002: 62) lament that it fuels the development in women of a set of 'Feminine Vices', such as submissiveness and superficiality, by which their epistemic characters are 'degenerated and corrupted'. As a further consequence, the sexist convictions about women's 'degraded reason' are confirmed, since the vices tend to impair women's epistemic agency in ways; therefore, those convictions become realized in a self-sustaining system.

Astell was the earliest figure in this vice-epistemic tradition, to my knowledge, and its second most distinguished member was Mary Wollstonecraft. Writing a century later in *Vindication of the Rights of Women* of 1792, the same gendered patterns of epistemically corrupting education are continued to ongoing critique. Wollstonecraft 's strategy was to track ways that the transplantation of sexist social norms into educational practices tended to deprive women of opportunities for the cultivation and exercise of epistemic virtues. In one example, if 'women are not to be contradicted in company', she argues, they are effectively locked out of the dialectical practices that would enable them to develop virtues like clarity, carefulness, and tenacity (1995: ch.4, *passim*). Instead, they tend to develop what Wollstonecraft scathingly dubs 'negative virtues', such as docility or patience, incompatible with the 'vigorous exertion of the intellect' required for robust epistemic agency. Such educational experiences are therefore corrupting, stifling the 'dispositions' required for a virtuous and active 'temper of mind' (1995: ch.4, *passim*).

What these critics are describing is the phenomenon of *epistemic corruption*. By that term, I refer to experiences or activities that promote the development and exercise of epistemic vices and/or fail to encourage the cultivation and exercise of the epistemic virtues

(cf. Kidd 2018b). This concept gathers the diverse rhetorics of 'erosion' and 'deterioration' of character cited earlier, and is useful for two related reasons. First, it captures a genuine, deleterious phenomenon, reflecting the fact that our nascent set of epistemic dispositions evolve under the influence of all sorts of factors, which shape their development into the stable forms we call virtues and vices. Corrupting conditions feed vices and starve virtues, so require identification and nullification, tasks informed by these earlier projects. Second, the phenomenon of epistemic corruption can challenge the agenda and methods of vice epistemology. Battaly (2016a) and Cassam (2016) characterize the badness of the vices in relation to epistemic values, insofar as being vicious makes one a *bad thinker* or *obstructs enquiry*, respectively. Epistemic corruption is certainly bad in these respects, but they do not go far enough in capturing the badness of the vices, since this must also include facilitating, entrenching, and concealing social oppression. If so, analyses of certain epistemic vices must be axiologically pluralistic, invoking epistemic and non-epistemic values – a love of truth and a commitment to social justice, for instance, allied to Nancy Dumas's liberatory virtue epistemology (2017) and Robin Dillon's (2007) feminist critical character theory.

I therefore propose a type of *oppressivist vice epistemology*, which is sensitive to the epistemically obstructive and socially oppressive aspects of vicious agency (cf. Kidd 2018c). With roots in critical race theory and feminist epistemology, contemporary examples would include Fricker, Medina, and Alessandra Tanesini, who agree that epistemic vices are both epistemically and socially objectionable. Indeed, bad thinking and epistemic obstruction can interact in mutually reinforcing ways with social oppression – the epistemic is political. Developing oppressivism is a task for the future, starting with developing a methodology sensitive to Medina's (2012: 30) insight that 'epistemic character traits … have a distinctive sociogenesis for subjects who occupy a particular social location.' Social positionality affects the types or ranges of epistemic vice to which one is susceptible and the types of epistemic resources, challenges, and dangers that one faces, and should discourage asocial talk of The Epistemic Agent and acontextual talk of The Epistemic Vices. Instead, oppressivists should be alert to the 'sociogenesis' of the vices, the contingencies of epistemic (anti)socialization, the suboptimalities of agents' epistemic formation, and the roles played by epistemically corrupting social conditions. Such *aetiological sensitivity* significantly complicates the typical critical practice of charging others with epistemic vice (cf. Kidd 2016c).

With the concept of epistemic corruption in place, I now turn to another – *capital epistemic vices*.

(ii) Since vice epistemologists are identifying and describing many vices, they will soon be faced with the task of taxonomy, of cogently organizing the epistemic vices and failings being identified. Taxonomy has not occupied much attention so far, though are resources available in the history of philosophy and theology, from predecessors who sought to order human vices and failings – ethicists, moralists, theologians, and others. Such taxonomies of sins, vices, and failings had to be justified, lest they evince arbitrariness or procrustean artificiality, as with Judith Shklar's (1984) list of 'ordinary vices', inherited from Montaigne, which gave no criteria for selection, and omitted such plausible candidate vices as laziness.

Without endorsing any one, I propose three potential taxonomic strategies, two are drawn from contemporary work, the other from the early Christian vice tradition.

Consider, for a start, an *activity-based taxonomy*. These group the vices according to the types of epistemic activity which they typically affect or obstruct. Consider the activities of communicating claims, ideas, possibilities, and other epistemic goods. If done well, these evince a set of what we might call *virtues of articulation*, which would include clarity, lucidity, and precision. But this also sets up a corresponding set of vices of articulation, such as vagary, dullness, and imprecision. This strategy has the advantage of not confining vices to a single set of activities: imprecision can be manifested in question-asking or standard-setting. But this points to a main disadvantage of the activity-based strategy: some vices will manifest so widely across our epistemic lives that trying to classify them by activity will be futile. A vice that affects very many or all activities cannot be classified in terms of a special relationship to any specific set of activities.

A second possibility are *challenge-based taxonomies*. I take my cue here from one of the few taxonomic efforts in virtue epistemology – Jason Baehr's (2011: 21) grouping of the epistemic virtues in terms of nine 'challenge-relevant demands'. These are generic challenge encountered by inquirers in the course of their activities, including those of 'initial motivation', 'focusing', 'integrity', and 'endurance'. The epistemic virtues are character traits that enable an agent to appropriately respond to those demands so as to enable inquiry to continue. Curiosity, for instance, is a virtue enabling agents to meet the demands of 'initial motivation', since it generates a desire to acquire epistemic goods (cf. Watson 2019).

Combining Baehr's account of inquiry-relevant challenges and Cassam's obstructivism, we might define epistemic vices as character traits, attitudes, and ways of thinking that obstruct inquiry by impairing an agent's capacity to appropriately respond to the various demands of inquiry.

In his discussion, Baehr does not apply this taxonomic strategy to the vices. This prompts the question of whether it can be, and, if so, how effective it would be. I think certain vices could be classified in this way – for instance, incuriosity and insensibility as character traits that impair an agent's capacity to meet challenges of initial motivation. But other vices are less easily handled, such as the vice of epistemic laziness. Usually, it has been conceptualized in relation to the challenges of initial motivation and endurance.[3] (Roughly speaking, a lazy agent fails to start or to stick with inquiries – which might be two subsets of a single motivational challenges that occurs before and during inquiry.) But this is too narrow: laziness can affect an agent's capacity to respond to *all* of the inquiry-relevant challenges – if and how one initiates and continues inquiry, but also if and how one focuses investigations, evaluates evidence, and attempts to act with epistemic integrity and flexibility. If so, then epistemic laziness is a *universal vice*, that impacts on the whole range of inquiry-relevant challenges, such that it cannot be classified usefully in relation to any one type of challenges (see Kidd MS).

A third taxonomic strategy is taken from the history of the early Christian vice tradition, as described by Rebecca DeYoung (2009) in her book, *Glittering Vices*. By the fourth century AD, theologians had drawn upon biblical and philosophical sources to identify a huge array of vices, sins, and human failings. The first known lists of the vices were compiled by Evagrius of Pontus (346-399 AD), a Desert Father concerned with the moral and other temptations faced by monastics. Some are familiar to us (anger, gluttony, avarice) while others are less so (vainglory, *acedia* – a spiritually inflected laziness). John Cassian (360-430) and Pope Gregory (540-604) then systematically ordered these lists into a set of seven capital vices, subsuming some and discounting others. Critics soon protested that the vices included in these official lists were neither the commonest nor the worst, an objection compounded by the fact that these vices did not correspond to the principal virtues, such as faith and courage. An answer came in the concept of a 'capital vice', those with a special *generative capacity* to produce or act as the source of other vices. Cassian uses an organic metaphor, describing the capital vices as the 'roots' from which other vices are 'offshoots', while others

prefer aquatic imagery: the term 'capital vice' comes from the Latin *capit*, meaning 'head', as in 'source' or 'wellspring', such that the capital vices are, as DeYoung (2009: 29 and 33) 'singled out because they are "source vices" … that serve as an ever-bubbling wellspring of many others.'

I have suggested elsewhere that there may be *capital epistemic vices* (cf. Kidd 2017b). These have a special capacity to act as the roots or sources of others, giving them a privileged ontological status that, in turn, gives them a special taxonomic status. Whether the idea can be cashed out is a task for another time, pending investigation of a set of issues, of which three stand out. First, what is the nature of the putative 'capitality' relationship – it is conceptual, causal, or psychological? Second, to what conception of the ontology of epistemic vice would acceptance of capital epistemic vices commit us? The Christian vice theorists took the vices to be tracking genuine moral categories, meaning that, for them, capital vices – moral and spiritual ones, at least – are discovered rather than created or imposed. But contemporary vice epistemologists demur, with Cassam (2017) arguing for an 'impositionist' account, by which boundaries between vices are imposed by us in relation to our specific interests and concerns, not discovered as existing objects. A third worry – shared with the other taxonomic strategies – is that *any* vice could, in fact, function capitally as the source or root of others. Assessing this possibility requires, at the least, careful investigation of a range of candidate capital epistemic vices.

In later sections of this paper, my sympathy for an impositionist account will become clear. I offer the concept of capital epistemic vices here as a contribution to the effort to map out the range of options available to vice epistemologists once they begin the task of taxonomy.

III. LISTS OF VICES

It is obvious that there are many epistemic vices and failings. A short list would easily exceed the dozen sketched by Linda Zagzebski (1996: 162) in her book, *Virtues of the Mind*. We might divide the epistemic vices into two types. *Familiar vices* are those entrenched in our vocabularies for describing forms of epistemic character and conduct, naturally and easily springing to mind, as it were – arrogance, dogmatism, laziness, inflexibility, closedmindedness, and so on. *Esoteric vices* are those that do not feature in prevailing vocabularies, despite their tracking genuine forms of epistemic viciousness. Examples include

epistemic self-indulgence and *epistemic malevolence* (cf. Baehr 2010, Battaly 2010). Over time, many vices will flux between categories, becoming more or less familiar with the vagaries of time and culture. Historically, this happens to the moral vices, too, with once-familiar vices like cupidity and concupiscence having now become esoteric – signs of what DeYoung (2009: 26) calls the 'fluidity of the vice tradition.'

The plurality and variability of our epistemic vices and failings offers a further argument for an historical vice epistemology. By exploring historically, we can identify and retrieve vices that were once recognized but since lapsed into obscurity. Certain vices are perennials, to be sure, enduring in history as stable features of our epistemic vocabularies. But there are also *transient vices*, ones confined to particular cultures or historical periods and which disappeared when they passed. An example is the vice of testimonial injustice – roughly, a disposition to allow negative prejudices to deflate the testimonial credibility of persons against whom one is prejudiced (cf. Battaly 2017 – who usefully reminds us that Fricker does conceive of testimonial injustice as a vice). Although testimonial injustice is an entrenched feature of human epistemic life, its description as a *vice* only occurred in the late 20th century. It did so against a certain cultural and intellectual context shaped by feminist and black activism, social epistemology, egalitarian political values, and so on (cf. Kidd, Medina, and Pohlhaus Jr., 2017, Parts II and III).

By searching historically, we can track how certain vices emerged, evolved or disappeared in relation to changing social and intellectual contexts. Not all of the vices we find will be intelligible or relevant to contemporary life, given the variations in the convictions, enthusiasms, and sensibilities of different cultures. But nor should we rule out the possibility that others may be. Even if not, they still teach us things about the range of forms of epistemic depravity identified by earlier generations.

A particularly rich array of epistemic vices and failings was identified in the Late Baroque and early Enlightenment European cultures, described by Sari Kivisto (2014) in *The Vices of Learning*. Its title refers to critical discourses of that period devoted to *vitia sive errores eruditorum* – 'the vices and errors of scholars', hybrid ethico-epistemic failings to which the new scholarly classes were judged particularly susceptible. Tables of 'scholarly vices' were constructed from existing moral and religious concepts, intellectual and social norms, and satirical and polemical tropes. Using this complex inheritance, a range of traditional sins and failings gradually, explains Kivisto, 'acquired new meanings and

interpretations in a scholarly context', as part of a more positive project to 'construct an ideal type of scholar' (2014: 6, 259). Scholarly vices of the period included many of Christian vintage, most obviously pride, while others were rooted in a historically newer Enlightenment concern for sociability. Many have splendid names – *titulomania*, *logomachia*, and *misocosmy* – but none survive into modern lists of epistemic vices, even if many of the relevant epistemic behaviors are still familiar.

The scholarly vices described by Kivisto are one set of options from a single period of European cultural and intellectual history. Other periods offer us many others, beyond those of early Christian and early modern European culture. Instead of piling up examples, I simply affirm that historical researches can give us a set of new epistemic vices and failings. Naturally, some of these transient vices faded for good reasons, most obviously with the dissolution of their surrounding 'forms of life'. The early Christian vice of *acedia* was embedded in a form of monastic life, indexed to its particular values, imperatives, and temptations (cf. DeYoung 2009: ch.4). It ceased to exist when that form of life dissolved, even as other vices with which it was listed, like gluttony and pride, did persist in new, alternative forms.

Other transient vices may be quite different. The scholarly vices described by Kivisto were indexed to what were then newly emerging scholarly structures, where pursuit of authority and esteem could fuel desires for fame and futile quarrelling. It's not cynicism to suggest that such corrupting social and professional structures are still in place, often in more complex and entrenched forms. If so, there is value in our scrutinizing *vitia sive errores eruditorum* to see which, if any, apply to contemporary academic culture.

Underlying these points is a deeper one about the *contingency* of the *range* of vices that have become entrenched in our epistemic imagination. It is clear that our inherited table of the vices is incomplete and partial, which is unsurprising, given that it was not the result of careful design and deliberation. Many developments influence the kinds of vices and failings that we recognize: theological debates, moral cultures, social movements, and much else. Such contingencies influence not just the specific vices we recognize, but also the broader *ranges* those we recognize fall into (a point made by historically-minded and feminist virtue ethicists).

That work calls attention to a tendency within Western moral philosophy of the last few centuries to privilege a certain range of moral values: confidence, autonomy, independence – and so on – while marginalizing others, including love, care, and dependence.

Such contingences have many sources, including demographic biases, deep-rooted masculinist prejudices, ongoing marginalization of those with caregiving roles, and many others. Whatever the causes, a clear effect is the privileging of a set of promethean moral virtues such as confidence, creativity, and self-sufficiency—as feminist theorists, care ethicists, and others have documented. As a result, the range of virtues and conceptions of flourishing comes to be contingently delimited in ways that ought to be resisted.

An interesting question is whether the range of epistemic vices (and virtues) we currently privilege evinces a similar degree of contingent constriction. Certainly, a contemporary focus on the epistemic vices surrounding humility is partly a legacy of the enduring influence of the Christian tradition, even if the fidelity of subsequent conceptions of Christian humility to that tradition are more complex than is realized (cf. Pardue 2013). Other writers discuss deeper forms of influence – ones shaping a more heterogeneous set of epistemic character traits. Neil C. Manson (2012) argues that 'the standard conception of epistemic virtue' operative in contemporary epistemology tends to characterize virtues as 'traits and dispositions relevant to *acquiring* knowledge'. But this 'acquisitionist' conception is, he argues, 'partial and unbalanced', insofar as it 'downplays or ignores the fact that there are virtues in *not* seeking knowledge' (2012: 240). Manson dubs these occluded traits and dispositions 'virtues of epistemic restraint', which are ignored by most virtue epistemologists, who prefer acquisitionist virtues, such as curiosity, inquisitiveness, and love of knowledge. Similar claims are made by Richard Smith (2006, 2016), who advocates for 'virtues of diffidence', such as reserve, reticence, and discretion.

Manson and Smith argue that the range of epistemic virtues currently recognized and esteemed within virtue epistemology is unduly narrow. The set of occluded virtues includes those of restraint and diffidence, characterized by a quietist rather than activist stance on epistemic agency. With two caveats, I share their worries. First, many epistemic virtues can surely take acquisitionist or 'restrained' or 'diffident' forms: epistemic courage can involve bold, muscular actions, but also a refusal or reluctance to initiate or perform epistemic acts. Second, there are at least two ways a conception of epistemic virtue can be 'unbalanced' or 'partial' – call these *inclusion-partiality* and *aspect-partiality*. A conception can fail to include a set of virtues or it can include only certain of their aspects, or both (so courage might be included, but only in its activist forms). Similar points surely also apply to epistemic vices. Our conceptions of vice may contingently fail to include certain vices or they may fail to recognize

certain aspects of those vices that we do. Compare the plurality of vices of humility that we recognize with the dearth of terms for the vices opposed to curiosity or courage – a task made easier when we turn to other philosophical and cultural traditions with quite different conceptions of epistemic virtue and vice are quite different. More generally, if certain ranges of virtues are being occluded, so too are certain ranges of vices. By adopting an historical stance, we may be able to identify certain patterns and partialities in our conceptions and tables of epistemic virtue and vice.

The existence of transient epistemic vices and imbalances in our conceptions of vice points to a more general value of adopting an historical perspective. This is the disclosure of the contingency of our epistemic imaginations – of the ways that our ways of thinking about forms of epistemic character are shaped by social and historical developments that may not have obtained. It should be clear that our inherited epistemic imagination is not a product of careful sustained processes of deliberation and decision. It was a result of a complex array of events and developments – theological, cultural, intellectual – and the various convictions, prejudices, and enthusiasms that they reflected and sustained. This means that the range of epistemic vices and failings that we can perceive is a contingent product, highly developed in certain respects but obscure and undeveloped in others. Some vice-clusters are explored in detail, while others languish while they await systematic investigation. These points matter to some of the deep aims of vice epistemology: to deepen our awareness of, and sensitivity to, the range of our epistemic vices and failings manifest in individual and collective characters and conduct, to enable us to better articulate our discontents and appraise critically our ways of socializing epistemic agents, and to chart our more fully the plurality of forms of epistemic excellence and depravity of which human beings are so evidently capable. Such enrichment of our epistemic sensibilities is liable to be challenged by the persistence of undetected and uncorrected imbalances and partialities in our ways of thinking about the vices of the mind.

In this section I have sketched a set of general arguments in support of a greater attention to historical methods and results by vice epistemologists. Doing so can offer new vice-concepts and new vices and various forms of understanding and insight, for instance into the historical contingency of our conceptions of epistemic vice. In the next section, I consider a further set of arguments for an historical vice epistemology.

IV. DEEP CONCEPTIONS OF EPISTEMIC VICE

An important insight of historical vice epistemology is that our epistemic vices and failings do not float free of practices, projects, and contexts. Our epistemic vices are expressed through our epistemic practices, manifested within our projects of inquiry, and shaped by wider cultural and intellectual contexts. The changing history of *curiositas* offers a clear case where changing conceptions of the form and normative status of a character trait was intimately related to changing theological and natural-philosophical practices and projects that were in turn animated by the changing cultural shifts from late medieval to Renaissance humanist to early Enlightenment culture. If so, the identity and intelligibility of the vice of *curiositas* cannot be understood adequately in isolation from these deeper structures. In this section, I want to generalize this claim by arguing for the existence of what I shall call *deep epistemic vices*.

A deep conception of epistemic vice is one whose identity and intelligibility is determined by the set of practices, projects, or contexts within which it is embedded. Explanation of these vices will require one to appeal to those deeper features. What we might call 'shallow explanations' would explain the identity and status of a vice by locating it within the array of practices in which they typically manifest or the particular projects of inquiry they obstruct. By contrast, 'deep explanations' will appeal to something more fundamental – a worldview, *Weltbild*, or metaphysical vision. ('Depth', here, is a descriptive, not evaluative, term.) I do not claim that all epistemic vices are or must be conceptualized deeply in this sense, nor that all work in vice epistemology ought to build in shallow and deep explanations of their practices or projects of inquiry or deeper metaphysical visions. Only certain vices and certain kinds of vice-epistemic work would need to 'go deep'.

The idea of deep conceptions of epistemic vices is largely neglected within character epistemology, but less so among historians. Among character epistemologists, only Bob Roberts and W. Jay Wood have explicitly argued that certain epistemic virtues and vices are 'indexed to' and 'presuppose' such deep objects or grounds as 'conceptions of human nature and the nature of the universe' or 'metaphysical commitments and world-views'. Our conceptions of epistemic virtue and vice, they argue, are 'made the more determinate the more we locate ourselves within a tradition that includes a particular understanding of human nature and the nature of the universe' (2007: 23, 82, 155, 189). But they leave the operative term 'indexing' undefined. On what we might (non-derogatively) call a shallow reading, their claim may be that virtues and vices are historically contingent, coming and going as these

conceptions and worldviews change. But on a deep reading, the claim might be that the very existence and intelligibility of certain virtues and vices depends upon those conceptions and worldviews.

It is the latter reading that I want to defend here. I want to argue (a) there that was an active vice-epistemological tradition in early modern English natural philosophy and (b) it had a set of epistemic vices whose identity and intelligibility was ultimately determined by a deep conception of human nature – of our being 'fallen' creatures with defective epistemic abilities and that (c) this background conception substantially shaped the range of vices conceptually available to the early modern English natural philosophers. My hope is that this case study is able to provide 'proof of concept' for deep epistemic vices.

The term 'natural philosophy' is used to refer to the earlier stages of what we would nowadays dub natural science, which was certainly taking form by the late fifteenth century. England was a central site of natural philosophical inquiry, both in practical researches – or what scholars dub 'experimental natural philosophy' – and more theoretical reflection on its methods. The practical and theoretical dimensions were not sharply distinct, of course, since a main task for natural philosophers was to design and to justify methods of inquiry. Most of the active experimentalists of the day were also engaged in debate about what we today call epistemology and philosophy of science.

An integral feature of these philosophical debates was an acute sense of the natural deficiencies and inadequacies of human epistemic capacities. In its earlier stages, this sense was articulated using pathological discourses – of 'diseases and infirmities of the mind' and the many 'defects and imperfections' evident from sober scrutiny of the understanding. Much of this pathological language reflected interests in medicine and physiology common to learned men of the period. But I suspect it also marked something deeper: the fact of there being differences between the various discourses of epistemic deficiencies. Earlier in history the hamartiological discourses dominated owing to the cultural and intellectual entrenchment of Christianity in Europe. But discourses focused on sin tended to downplay the ameliorative roles of human over divine agency. Sinful creatures, stained by original sin, lack the spiritual and moral capacities required for self-amelioration. Pascal (1980, §45) lamented that our 'wretchedness' – our being 'full of natural error' – is so extensive and profound that it 'cannot be eradicated except through grace'. Since only God's grace can repair our moral, spiritual and epistemic deficiencies there was very little grounds for

confidence in the restorative potential of human agency. Such pessimism became much less compelling once attention shifted to discourses of pathology – disease entails cure, weakness entails strength, and defects entail repair.

The conceptualization of human epistemic deficiencies in the categories of pathology started to encourage a new and more confident sense that they might be corrected through forms of human agency. Sorana Corneanu (2011) documents the emergence, within early modern English natural philosophy, of a new medicalized rhetoric of 'cure', 'regimens', 'disciplines', and 'cultures' – all aimed at 'the cure and perfecting of the human mind' by offering ways to 'diagnose the state of one's cognitive and affective faculties' and, if and where possible, 'to cure their infirmities and cultivate their strengths.' Underlying the epistemological and methodological views of Boyle, Locke, and their contemporaries was a therapeutic project to develop 'an anatomy of capacities, limits, and distempers, as well as a view about the possibility and need of a cure and cultivation that may shape a virtuous inquirer' (2011: 2, 220). Corneanu demonstrates that the dominant discourse was pathological, but I want to argue that it slowly evolved into a characterological one that conceived of our epistemic deficiencies in terms of vices.

V. FROM IDOLS TO VICES

The earliest figure in this story is Francis Bacon (1561-1626). In *New Organon*, of 1620, he described a set of 'Idols of the Mind', which 'do violence to the understanding and confuse everything' (2000: §44). These fall into roughly two types. The Idols of the Tribe and the Cave are innate deficiencies: the former are general features of human nature, like our tendency to perceive more order in things than exists. The latter refer to idiosyncrasies of individual persons. By contrast, the Idols of the Marketplace and the Theatre are socially acquired deficiencies, arising from inadequacies in our language or philosophical systems and from our interactions with other agents (acquired biases, say). An obvious feature of the Idols is that they incorporate a range of epistemic vices and failings. It seems obvious that the Idols are not themselves characterological vices, but rather ways of theorizing certain types of natural or acquired epistemic deficiencies.

Into the mid-1660s, however, the pathological discourse gradually began to shift into a more overtly characterological discourse of vice. Joseph Wright, Joseph Glanvill, Thomas Sprat and other luminaries of English natural philosophy all begin to speak in terms of vices.

Wright criticizes a vice he calls 'distraction', a mark of inquirers who are 'desirous of varietie and alteration' and therefore incapable of proper concentration and perseverance. Glanvill – a prescient champion of natural science – castigates credulity and obstinacy, a pair of vices arising from our tendency to make 'precipitate judgments', to receive 'all things' in a spirit of 'promiscuous admission'. Instead of being careful and discerning, the credulous will accept anything while the obstinate will abandon or revise nothing. Sprat – a founder and the first historian of the Royal Society – states his target vice in his 1661 book *Vanity of Dogmatizing*. He actually targets a pair of vices – dogmatism and scepticism – which arise from 'an *over-hasty*, and *precipitant* concluding' before inquiry is complete and '*aversion* from assigning' of any cause to an effect. Each vice reflects a dysregulation in the mind's powers of assent.

Such remarks often mingle a vocabulary of vice with one of disease and distemper. I suspect a main reason for the gradual shift from categories of disease to vice was that the latter offered more fine-grained resources for articulating our epistemic failings. Generic talk of 'distempers' of the mind is one thing, but there is a variety and complexity to a language of vices – of credulity, distraction, obstinacy, dogmatism, scepticism. By the late 1660s, we find the fullest statement of the natural philosophical vice-epistemic tradition in the work of John Locke. Inspired by Bacon and other natural philosophers, much of Locke's epistemology was concerned with appraisal of the limits of human understanding. Its broad conviction was that our epistemic capacities in their natural, untutored state are deficient in one of two respects. First, our powers of reason and understanding are limited, although also potentially capable of enhancement. Throughout Boyle's 1681 *Discourse on Things above Reason*, there is long discussions of the 'dependency and limitedness of our Natures' and the 'limited nature of the Intellect'. But the tone was not quietist. Boyle argued that the 'most noble and genuine' function of Reason is to turn its powers inward by engaging in the 'perfective action' of self-appraisal of its capacities and deficiencies: the mind 'not only see[s] other things but it self too, and can discern … whatever infirmities is labours under' (quoted in Corneanu 2011: 117). Second, Locke inherited an acute sensitivity to the natural and acquired corruptions of the mind, although he there is no mention of Idols of the Mind. Much of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* uses the inherited pathological vocabulary, as when Locke explains his project as being to 'study … our own abilities and defects', 'peculiar endowments and natural fitnesses, as well as defects and weaknesses' (Locke 1968: 421). But in his very late writings,

what emerges is a fully-developed discourse of vice, the best example being the posthumously published 1706 essay, 'On the Conduct of the Understanding'.

Originally intended as the fifth book of a revised edition of the *Essay*, the 'Conduct' is usually coupled with *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* as a concise statement of Locke's views on educational theory and practice. Certainly, both works discuss the importance of education to the cultivation of the understanding – of children and adults – and the wider political importance of epistemically well-conducted citizens (cf. Tarcov and Grant's editor's introduction to Locke 1996; Yolton 1998). But there is also a further dimension of the 'Conduct', one neglected in the existing scholarship: its status as an exercise in vice epistemology. Much of the essay is concerned with sketching out a range of epistemic failings – of 'Vices [that] oppose or menace our Endeavours', as Locke says in strikingly obstructivist terms (Locke *Essay*, §3.5.18). I count at least thirteen – such as 'haste', 'anticipation', 'resignation', and 'despondency' - which tend to cluster around failures of epistemic discipline and self-control. Like Glanvill and other English philosophers of the period, a running concern is with failures to properly regulate our epistemic agency – the vice of haste, for instance, marks an inquirer whose rushes through the proper procedures of inquiry in ways that jeopardies the integrity of their conclusions (cf. Locke, *Some Thoughts*, §25).

I suggest that there is an explicit exercise in vice epistemology underlying 'Conduct'. It represents a mature characterological discourse of epistemic deficiency in virtue of having four features. First, an explicit vocabulary of vices, some familiar and some esoteric. Second is an explicit concern for epistemic character – its various virtues but also its many vices. As Corneanu (2011: 163) explains, by the time of 'Conduct', Locke has 'moved firmly toward a conception of the *character* of the rightful knower, and of his personal epistemic excellence.' Although the concern with virtues and excellences is important to a characterological discourse, so, too, is concern with vices and corruptions. The third component of a characterological discourse is an analysis of the effects of vices on practices and projects of inquiry. Locke does this in his descriptions of how haste, anticipation and other vices and failings 'oppose' or 'menace' our various epistemic 'Endeavours'. The despondent inquirer abandons inquiries once they become difficult and so confine themselves to low-hanging epistemic fruit, thereby failing to acquire epistemic goods but also to effectively measure the scope of their capacities.

A further pair of features of a characterological discourse is an active concern to give an account of the aetiology of our epistemic vices and failings and – closely related – a set of effective ameliorative practices. Locke and his contemporaries were not concerned simply to describe our epistemic deficiencies, vices, and failings, but rather to correct or nullify them in whatever ways they could. Bacon argued that the historical persistence of Idols of the Mind had systematically impaired earlier projects of inquiry, hence his confidence in the projects of natural philosophy that were Idol-proofed by his 'Great Instauration'. Despite their pragmatic applications, these projects had a deeper therapeutic purpose, namely to nullify the 'Idols of the mind' at both the agential and collective levels through the centralization and methodological discipline of inquiry. Such therapeutic ideals required, in practice, an account of the aetiology – the origins and sources – of our epistemic deficiencies, which, in turn, could indicate effective ameliorative strategies.

There were at least two vice-epistemic traditions in early modern English philosophy. The educative tradition focused on the epistemically corrupting tendencies of prevailing educational systems, their tendency to promote, at least in women, various of the vices of the mind. Within the natural philosophical vice-epistemic tradition, the development of a characterological discourse came later. Over the course of the sixteenth century, we see a steady shift towards discourses that focused on vice, even if the other categories, of sin and disease, continued to rumble away in the background.

My outstanding task is to argue that at least some of the vices of this period were deeply conceptualized, insofar as they were indexed to a conception of human nature or the nature of reality. I do this by offering a 'deep' explanation of an otherwise puzzling feature of the lists of vices of the period—a failure to articulate a vice of 'epistemic hubris'. The absence of this vice invites explanation, since it reflects an exaggerated or inflated estimation of the scope and strength of human epistemic capacities – of reason and understanding – which was precisely the concern of early modern English natural philosophy.

To explain the unusual absence of hubris, I argue their vice epistemology was indexed to a conception of human nature as intrinsically corrupted both epistemically and spiritually by the original sin inherited from the Fall of Man. This conception did not provide what the vice of hubris requires: an estimation of the full array of human epistemic capacities.

VI. HUMILITY AND ITS VICES

The early modern English natural philosophers esteemed a range of epistemic virtues, none more than those reflective of what Sorana Corneanu calls 'epistemic modesty'. A range of dispositions, habits, and attitudes fall under that label, such as preferences for a 'nondogmatic style of discussion and presentation', and 'prudent inquiry rather than positive assertion, for the probable rather than for the infallibly certain' (Corneanu 2011: 99f). This culture of epistemic modesty had many sources: the revival of skepticism, cultural repertoires of gentlemanly truth-telling, the irenic minimalism of the Anglican Reformation, and – my focus in this section – a postlapsarian theological anthropology, one that emphasizes the 'fallen' status of human beings, their intrinsically corruption, as inheritors of original sin (cf. Popkin 2003, Shapin 1994, Shapiro 1983).

Without denying the importance of the other contextual sources, I propose that the early modern English vice epistemology was deeply indexed to what Corneanu (2012: 99) calls an 'anthropological conception of human frailties and capacities'. In its general form, human beings were conceived as initially possessing an exalted array of epistemic capacities, expressed in Christian mythology as 'Adamic wisdom', consisting of knowledge and understanding of a remarkable scope, depth, and certitude. Unfortunately, our prior state of epistemic and moral excellence was spoiled, profoundly and irrevocably, by the Fall. During the medieval period, theologians differed in their judgements about the extent and severity of our epistemic and spiritual corruption suffered by postlapsarian human beings.

The optimists, such as Thomas Aquinas, maintained that the 'light of natural reason', since it 'pertains to the species of the rational soul', can never be 'forfeit', even by so profoundly destructive an event as the Fall (cf. *Summa Theologiae* 1a.95,1). Without such optimistic estimations of our natural and untarnished epistemic capacities, the entire project of rational theology would appear futile. But the pessimists, pre-eminently Saint Augustine, demurred: our epistemic and moral natures, although 'at first faultless and without any sin', have been profoundly corrupted, since the Fall 'darkens and weakens' our capacities, which continue to operate only thanks to divine illumination (*On Nature and Grace* 3.iii).[4]

The long story of the gradual entrenchment of the more pessimistic Augustinian anthropologies is not my concern here. What matters, for my purposes, is that, by the late 1500s, it had come to permeate English natural philosophy. It was accepted, *inter alia*, that our sensory faculties are dulled, our passions unbalanced, and our epistemic capacities unable to penetrate to the 'essences' of things, offering only the modest prospect of a slow, collective

accumulation of, at best, probable knowledge (cf. Harrison 2007: 6f). The general epistemological significance of these anthropological convictions to early modern English philosophy should be clear – its modest empiricism, for instance, and emphasis on collectivized inquiry.

Less obvious, as it stands, is how this vision of human nature as epistemically damaged goods can ground a set of epistemic vices. Put in the terms I introduced earlier, the question is how a set of epistemic vices can be inflected by being indexed to a postlapsarian anthropological conception. An important clue is the culture of epistemic modesty, which indicates the range of vices likely to be of special concern to the English natural philosophers. Most obvious, at least to the modern imagination, are arrogance and dogmatism, but the former has a rather minimal presence during this period. Bacon, for one, argues that 'arrogance and pride' are marks of the Idols of the Tribe, which manifests, for instance, in preferences to believe what is convenient rather than what is true (quoted in Corneanu 2011: 22). Others offer more indirect criticisms of arrogance, as in Sprat's (1667: 33-34) condemnation of those who are not 'willing to be taught.'

The more obvious vice of humility that most animated the early moderns was, of course, dogmatism, the 'great disturber of ourselves and of the world', says Glanvill (1661: 225), 'maintain'd upon the depraved obstinacy of an ungovern'd spirit.' Similar, if less vivid protests echo through the early modern writings, as a 'disease' or vice of the mind, that contrasts with the 'docile' inquirer celebrated by Boyle (1999-2000: xii.304-5), fully possessed of the 'modest, humble' dispositions of what Sprat (1667: 46) dubs the 'Character of a True Philosopher'. Within these and countless similar remarks, dogmatism emerges as a primary epistemic vice, a status justified in relation to the underlying anthropology.

Although no definitive conception of dogmatism prevailed during the period, its general features were well-established. The dogmatic person refuses to engage with the views and criticisms of others, they assert beyond what they can establish, and they are not able to properly detect deficiencies in their knowledge and understanding. This has various bad effects on inquiry—for instance, dogmatic inquirers fail to reconsider their views when good reasons are given for doing so, hence the importance placed on both empiricism and collective inquiry. But dogmatism also reflects a bad psychology, since it entails ignorance of one's capacities, what Corneanu (2011: 98) calls a stubborn 'misevaluation of ourselves'. Many early modern natural philosophical practices were intended to nullify or correct our

innate susceptibility to dogmatism, such as the complex array of 'rules of assent' to govern our relations to epistemic claims. This susceptibility to the vice of dogmatism was, of course, explained and rendered intelligible by reference to an underlying conception of human nature. Since dogmatism was understood as a vice rooted in imbalanced passions and other distempers, its ultimate roots were our 'fallen natures'.

I think early modern conceptions of the vice of dogmatism were indexed to this postlapsarian anthropology, as were other vices, such as credulity and obstinacy. But there are other vices which we might expect to find included in the early modern lists of the vices of the mind that are notable by their absence. These include a vice that marks a radical deficiency of humility – namely *hubris*, which rarely features in the historical or contemporary tables of the vices of the mind. A hubristic agent assumes or asserts their possession of epistemic capacities of a type, scope, or strength unavailable to them. But early modern English natural philosophy lacked a conception of our epistemic capacities, meaning that they could not sustain a concept of epistemic hubris.

The only sustained study of hubris, conceived as both an epistemic and existential vice, is offered by David E. Cooper in his 2002 book, *The Measure of Things*. I follow the main details of his account: the vice of hubris reflects an agent with an exaggerated estimation of the type, scope, and strength of human epistemic capacities. In earlier historical periods, hubris was often articulated in terms of pretensions to the status and powers of God, a tendency that only began to recede in the seventeenth century – a development charted by Edward Craig (1987) in his book *The Mind of God and the Works of Man*. What marks out the epistemically hubristic agent is a set of vicious tendencies, ones most obviously manifest in the sorts of epistemic ambitions to which an agent aspires—perhaps to 'acquire insight into the order of reality as God has disposed it', to cite one of Craig's examples of a guiding medieval epistemic ambition (cf. Craig 1987: 224). Although the possibility of such insight was affirmed by most medieval Christian theologians, its realization was only possible with active divine assistance – a form of humility embedded in the doctrine of divine illumination. The pretension to dispense with that assistance by asserting or assuming our possession of such epistemic capacities is hubristic.

Since the vice of hubris concerns assumption or assertion of an inflated set of epistemic capacities, there are important differences between it and closely related vices such as arrogance and dogmatism. A person can be arrogant or dogmatic without their

necessarily supposing they do or could possess an exaggerated set of epistemic powers. On the characterization of arrogance developed by Roberts and Wood, it consists of a disposition to draw illicit inferences to some entitlement, such as the entitlement to pronounce authoritatively on a topic without due expertise. But the arrogant person draws inferences from their social status, whereas the hubristic person infers special entitlements from the exalted capacities whose possession and mastery they presuppose. (Obviously, arrogance and hubris can feed one another: a person might suppose they enjoy an elevated status due to their presumed exalted capacities). Indeed, on one recent influential account, what I'm calling hubris emerges as a sub-vice of arrogance. Dennis Whitcomb, Heather Battaly, Jason Baehr, and Daniel Howard-Snyder (2017) characterise arrogance in terms of 'over-owning one's strengths', which includes 'the dispositions to over-estimate one's strengths', which would make epistemic hubris – a radical overestimation of one's epistemic strengths – a sub-vice of arrogance.

In the case of dogmatism, Roberts and Wood identify this as a disposition to respond irrationally to attempts by others to engage them in epistemic activity – derogating or otherwise resisting others' efforts to inform or criticize them, say. But this form of the vice of dogmatism entails *misuse* rather than *misestimation* of one's capacities: the dogmatist might be perfectly cognizant of the scope and strength of their epistemic abilities—they just fail to exercise them, whereas the hubristic person acts as they do because they take themselves to be so fantastically epistemically equipped that they have no need of the instruction or critical engagement of others. Although one need not be hubristic to be dogmatic, these two vices can be mutually amplifying.

I propose that there is a conceptual space for a distinct vice of epistemic hubris, understood as a radical deficiency of humility (cf. Kidd 2015, 2016b). It is often most clearly visible in the sorts of epistemic ambitions an inquirer adopts or regards as available to them. I may be hubristic if my guiding ambitions are ones beyond the capacities currently or prospectively available to me. A stronger form of hubris would be an individual making claims that could only be made with confidence if one could perform epistemic tasks beyond the abilities of even a large community, such as, such as reconstructing and assessing alternative ways that history and culture could have gone (cf. Kidd 2016c).

I suspect that hubris is often mislabeled, contributing to its absence from our lists of the vices. When Kant criticizes 'dogmatists', such as Leibniz, the objection was not that they

refused to engage with an important set of objections. It was, rather, that their metaphysical ambitions presupposed a capacity to describe the way the world is 'in itself', independent of human sensibility and conception. In so doing, explains Cooper (2002: 159), philosophers, such as Leibniz, 'credited human beings, impossibly, with the capacity to transcend the limits of understanding, to gain access to things-in-themselves.' Since this is, at least within the terms of Kant's transcendental idealism, an epistemic capacity we lack, their fault is actually *hubris*.

Interestingly, the vice of epistemic hubris does not appear within the writings of the early modern English natural philosophers. This is puzzling for three reasons. First, concerns with hubris are obviously pertinent to the guiding concern to determine what epistemic powers human beings do or could, into the future, possess. Second, a culture of epistemic modesty inevitably builds in an especial concern with failures to achieve and exercise that virtue. If hubris marks the most radical deficiency of humility, then it ought to be central to their concerns. Third, the practical ability to properly prosecute the emerging projects of natural science presupposed having a sense of what would count as attainable epistemic ambitions. Given these reasons to expect a concern with hubris to emerge within early modern English natural philosophical vice epistemology, its absence stands in need of explanation.

VII. HUMAN NATURE AND EPISTEMIC HUBRIS

I propose that the absence of hubris can be explained in the deep sense by considering in closer detail a crucial feature of the prevailing postlapsarian anthropology. The vice of hubris always presupposes a certain conception of what our epistemic capacities are – of the range of our capacities, their strength and scope, and the possibilities (if any) of their being altered, whether of degradation or enhancement. Conceptions of the vice of hubris are always coupled or indexed to a conception of our epistemic situation in the wider order of things. The hubristic agent is one who – absurdly, futilely – presupposes their 'being able to escape the constraints which their creaturely condition might be thought to impose' (Cooper 2002: 169). But it should be clear that the form and fixity of these constraints, the sorts of epistemic limits they 'impose', and the extent (if any) to which they might be transcended, can only be articulated via a sophisticated account of our 'creaturely condition' – Kant's transcendental idealism, say. If so, then it seems possible that some conceptions of our epistemic situation

may be able to sustain a stable conception of the vice of hubris – they may be incomplete, for instance.

. But what was not known, during this period, was what the scope and strength of our epistemic capacities would be once they had been disciplined, cured, or cultivated. It was clear to the early modern natural philosophers that our capacities as they stand were in an inauspicious condition – 'defective', 'weak', vicious, corrupted. But there was no such confidence about the 'upper limits' of our epistemic capacities in their fully developed state, for the simple reason that, for the entirely of our postlapsarian existence, they were corrupted by our inherited original sin and then by failures of self-discipline and the failings inherited from our social systems.

This uncertainty about the scope and strength of our epistemic capacities had an important consequence for early modern English vice epistemology. This vision of human nature could lend identity and intelligibility to a certain range of vices, namely those which presuppose our pervasive epistemic infirmities. Certainly, this is the main feature of early modern English vices such as credulity, dogmatism, and obstinacy – all failures of epistemic conduct arising from insufficient responsiveness to our 'weak' and 'defective' capacities. But that same conception could not sustain a vice such as hubris, for in the absence of a shared understanding of the actual scope and limits of our epistemic capacities, it was impossible to make meaningful charges of hubris. Conceptions of the vice of hubris are always indexed to a certain anthropological or metaphysical conception – an account of our epistemic capacities and situation that enables judgements about what would count as hubristic conduct. In the absence of a complete anthropological conception that specified the 'upper limits' of our powers, the conceptual space for a vice of hubris could not be filled.

We clearly see this pervasive uncertainty about the status and upper limits of our epistemic capacities in Locke's writings, most visibly and explicitly in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In the opening 'Epistle to the Reader', he explains the original inspiration for his epistemological project as being a conversation with friends, early in 1671, about matters of morality and revealed religion. Unfortunately, little to no progress was made, with criticisms on every side, which suddenly inspired in Locke a crucial insight:

> After we had a while puzzled our selves, without coming any nearer a Resolution of those Doubts which perplexed us, it carne into my Thoughts, that we took a wrong

> course; and that, before we set our selves upon Enquiries of that Nature, it was necessary to examine our own Abilities, and see, what Objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with (2008: 4)

The insight was that the inquiry had begun without any a clear understanding of the sufficiency of their epistemic capacities for the task at hand. The group had implicitly presumed that their 'Abilities' were 'fitted' to deal effectively with the matters in hand. Locke's realization was that the sufficiency of human epistemic capacities must itself be made an object of sustained inquiry, a point reiterated throughout the *Essay*:

> If we can find out those Measures, whereby a rational Creature put in that State, which Man is in, in this World, may, and ought to govern his Opinions and Actions depending thereon, we need not be troubled, that some other things escape our Knowledge (*Essay* §1.1.6)

We see here three related points. First, an uncertainty about the potential upper limits or 'Measures' of our epistemic capacities. Second, a sense of epistemic modesty in the explicit affirmation that some things do – and might perhaps forever – 'escape our Knowledge'. Third, a reference to an anthropological conception, which Locke refers to as an account of 'the State, which Man is in'. Since that conception was premised on our natural and acquired epistemic infirmities, it makes perfect sense that Locke's concern is with the vices of humility and of discipline – dogmatism and laziness, the main themes of the *Essay* and 'Of the Conduct of the Understanding'. Those are the vices that can be most effectively indexed to an anthropological conception inclusive of a profound sense of our infirmities. It was easier to give identity and intelligibility to vices of infirmity in a cultural and intellectual climate dominated by a vision of human beings as epistemically corrupt, infirm, weak, defective, vicious. In this climate, focus and concern naturally shifted towards vices that articulated our infirmities.

Let me sum up: early modern English natural philosophy was animated by an abiding sense of the pervasiveness of innate and acquired human epistemic failings and deficiencies, a tradition whose fullest expression is Locke's essay 'Of the Conduct of the Understanding'. Although shaped by a whole constellation of cultural, religious, and intellectual

developments, what seems central was a postlapsarian conception of human beings as 'fallen' creatures, whose epistemic capacities were damaged, severely if not irreparably, by the Fall. But the underlying anthropological conception was incomplete, since it emphasized the currently imperfect scope and strength of our capacities in their current uncultivated form – but not their potential future status, once properly cultivated and restored. Since that conception was incomplete, it could not provide a basis for articulation of a vice of hubris, even though it reflected epistemological concerns with the limits of knowledge and proper conduct of the understanding central to the concerns of the period. This confirms the prediction that conceptions of the vice of hubris always presuppose some deeper conception of our epistemic capacities and situation. When no such deep conception is available, it will not be possible to articulate a conception of the vice of hubris.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

This paper argued for an historical vice epistemology, informed by the methods and results of historical scholarship, which afford novel and valuable concepts, examples, and insights, not least access to precursor explorations of epistemic vices and failings and their relations to political theory, natural science, and other areas of intellectual and cultural activity. More importantly, historical case studies provide examples of deep conceptions of epistemic vice, with one candidate being epistemic hubris, itself grounded in an underlying anthropological and metaphysical vision of humans' epistemic situation within the order of things.

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Endnotes

[1] The The earliest paper devoted specifically to epistemic vice that I know of is Swank (2000).

[2] I am grateful to Alessandra Tanesini for these references.

[3] See, for instance, Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 152, and Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 68. I give a fuller account of these claims in Kidd (MS).

[4] Aquinas, Augustine, and the wider Christian theological context are detailed at length in Harrison (2007), a book to which I am much indebted in this section.