Epistemic Partialism and Taking Our Friends Seriously

Abstract: Two doxastically significant demands of friendship have been discussed in recent literature, a demand to be epistemically partial and a demand to take our friends seriously. Though less discussed than epistemic partialism, I suggest that the demand to take our friends seriously is motivated by similar cases and considerations, and can avoid key objections to epistemic partialism that have been raised. I further suggest that it does justice to what we care about in friendship, and thus is to be preferred.

Keywords: friendship, partiality, ethics of belief

Epistemic Partialism and Taking Our

Friends Seriously

 Imagine that you have a good friend who is giving a poetry reading.[[1]](#endnote-2) You care about them and want to support them, so you turn up to a poetry reading they are giving one day. Unfortunately, you find that their poetry is the kind of work that you’d usually be unimpressed by and judge to be immature, unimaginative, or unsubtle. Despite this, many people have the intuition that in this case the fact that the poet is your friend rather than a stranger makes a difference to how you ought to think about the poem. Why might this make a difference?

In the recent literature on friendship, at least two doxastically significant requirements of friendship have been posited which might explain this difference. First, many philosophers have found epistemic partialism appealing.[[2]](#endnote-3) This is the idea that being a good friend constitutively involves having *positively biased* beliefs about one’s friends or positively biased belief-forming mechanisms. Epistemic partialists typically take cases such as the above to motivate their case. Separately, the suggestion has been made that friendship constitutively involves taking one’s friends seriously.[[3]](#endnote-4) This is the idea that being a good friend involves taking the other’s perspective and interests to potentially alter the epistemic and practical options with which one is confronted. There is some overlap between these ideas; both, for example, will ultimately suggest that we should often end up agreeing with our friends or thinking positively about those things they care about. The requirement to take our friends seriously can also explain the idea that we should treat the friend’s poetry differently to the stranger’s.

Many of the same intuitions thus lie behind the two posited requirements of friendship. Despite this, I will suggest in this paper that the requirement to take our friends seriously is a much more plausible requirement of friendship. Not only, will I suggest, can it avoid some of the standard objections to epistemic partialism, it also does greater justice to the wider significance of interpersonal engagement with our friends’ perspectives.

I will begin in §1 by outlining these two theories of the epistemic demands of friendship and sketching some important similarities and differences between them. Since they are similar, the view that friendship requires taking our friends seriously can account for some key intuitions underlying epistemic partialism. I will suggest in §2 that the differences between them allow the requirement that we take our friends seriously to avoid some key objections raised against epistemic partialism. Finally, in §3 I will suggest that the demand to take our friends seriously involves a requirement to engage with our friends perspectives, and that this is an independently plausible requirement. I will thus conclude that friendship requires us to take our friends seriously, but not to be positively epistemically biased towards them.

1. Contrasting Epistemic Partialism and Taking our Friends Seriously

What exactly are these two posited requirements of friendship? I’ll begin by looking at epistemic partialism. Epistemic partialism is the idea that friendship, or at least being a *good* friend, is partly *constituted* by having epistemically unjustified positive beliefs about one’s friends (direct partialism), or by forming positively biased beliefs-forming mechanisms about one’s friends (indirect partialism). Friendship, partialists think, constitutively involves some kind of positive epistemic bias towards one’s friends, and to fail to be (at least somewhat) positively biased in one’s beliefs is to fail to be a good friend.

Sarah Stroud (2006) and Simon Keller (2004, 2018) propose the canonical form of epistemic partialism. Stroud suggests that just as one can owe one’s friends practical partiality (helping them out when they need it, and so on), so too one can *owe* one’s friends epistemic partiality. She sets forward her view as follows:

[F]riendship 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. (Stroud 2006, p. 499)

Most philosophers agree that we practically owe things to our friends that we do not owe to strangers.[[4]](#endnote-5) Stroud suggests that this extends beyond the practical realm to the epistemic one: friendship can place demands on our beliefs themselves. Specifically, she claims that we can owe our friends certain epistemically unjustified positive beliefs (or that we form our beliefs about them in an unreliably positive way). She writes:

[F]riendship involves, if not a blind spot, at least less than perfect vision where your friends’ sins and flaws are concerned; the good friend’s set of beliefs is to that extent necessarily out of kilter. As a good friend, your belief set is slanted: you actually believe your own spin. (Stroud 2006, p. 513)

In other words, Stroud suggests that what is epistemically owed to one’s friends is a kind of bias, a positive ‘spin’ on their actions and abilities that is not suggested by the evidence itself and may well not reflect reality. In the poetry case, for example, it might involve selectively attending to and exaggerating the positive features of the poem, excusing or ignoring the bad features, and so on.

Keller also talks about friendship as involving bias (Keller 2004, p. 347-8). Both Stroud and Keller therefore suggest that the demands of friendship systematically clash with plausible epistemic demands on us (Keller 2004, p. 330, Stroud 2006 pp. 499-500, 514). They suggest that epistemology demands that we believe in accordance with the evidence (or at least that we believe things that are consistent with the evidence), whereas friendship demands that we form our beliefs in an *epistemically unjustifiable* skewed way. As good epistemic agents, we should have unbiased beliefs, whereas as good friends we should (at least sometimes) have positively biased beliefs. As a good friend, one can and sometimes should ignore or minimise negative evidence about one’s friends, instead focusing on and exaggerating the positive evidence one has about them.[[5]](#endnote-6)[[6]](#endnote-7)

The second posited requirement is the requirement that we take our friends seriously. At a first glance, this requirement can appear to be quite similar to epistemic partialism. As with epistemic partialism, the suggestion is that friendship can place doxastically significant demands on us. According to proponents of this view, being a good friend to another person involves taking their interests, commitments and perspective seriously. Being friends with someone thus changes the options which confront one: things that might not otherwise seem like options (whether morally, aesthetically or practically) become salient as options because of the friendship. This is not, of course, to say that the good friend need ultimately choose or even see value in the things that their friend values or is committed to. However, taking one’s friend seriously involves those things the friend values and is committed to becoming salient to oneself as serious possibilities. To take something seriously as an option involves serious engagement and exploration of it, and therefore one is likely to discern and appreciate any value that the views and commitments in fact have.

Friedman (1989, 1993) provides a helpful discussion of the idea that friendship demands that we take our friends seriously. She claims that taking one’s friends seriously means that the things that motivate and guide one’s friends become ‘living options’ for oneself (1993, p. 200). She writes:

Friendship provides us with an inclination or invitation to take our friends seriously and to take seriously what our friends care about. Supposing that, at the beginning of my relationship with a friend, I did not share with my friend all her values or principles; then friendship beckons me to consider those unshared values or principles as new moral possibilities for myself and to consider my previously held values and principles in a new light – admittedly without predetermining what will result from the consideration. (Friedman 1993, p. 193)

There are two important points to note here. The first is that friendship requires not that one think positively about one’s friends, their projects, or their commitments, but that one has an *invitation* to do so.[[7]](#endnote-8) On this view, friendship thus requires one to *consider* the options one’s friends care about, to think about what could be said in favour of them, and so on. As such, taking one’s friend seriously is likely to lead one to a greater understanding of them and the things they value. This greater understanding will in many cases lead one to appreciate positive features of the friend, their commitments and their perspective that might otherwise not have been salient. The second important point is that because taking one’s friends seriously provides *only* an invitation, it is fully compatible with not ultimately being persuaded. One can thus ultimately disagree with views (or projects and so on), and even find them entirely wrong-headed, whilst taking them seriously.[[8]](#endnote-9)

 In the poetry case, for example, taking one’s friend seriously would involve an open-minded engagement with one’s friend’s perspective on the poem. It might require considering what it is that the friend sees in the poem, and attempting to imaginatively engage with their outlook on it. This would be likely to result in one having a more positive belief about the poem than one otherwise would; such imaginative engagement would be likely to lead one to see anything positive that is there to be seen in the poem, positive features that might ordinarily be missed.[[9]](#endnote-10) Of course, one might ultimately still think that the poem is very poor, but one would at least come to understand one’s friend’s attitude to poetry, their aesthetic aims, the nature of their literary ambitions, and so on. This is in contrast to the epistemically partial friend, who insofar as their beliefs are guided by their friendship, would *necessarily* conclude with a more positive assessment of the poem than they would if their beliefs were epistemically justifiable.

There are some clear similarities between these two purported requirements of friendship. Firstly, both suggest that friendship inherently involves a doxastically significant requirement. In the one case, this is a requirement to be positively biased towards one’s friends, and in the other, it is a requirement to treat their beliefs and commitments as options: to give serious consideration to their interests, perspective and so on. Secondly, in many cases the two requirements will have the same result; both taking our friends seriously and being epistemically partial will often result in having more positive beliefs than one otherwise would about one’s friend and their projects.

As a result, some very similar cases can motivate either requirement. Our intuition that in many particular cases the good friend would attend to their friend different to a stranger, and that their beliefs might ultimately differ, could be explained by either requirement. Further, some of the considerations adduced in favour of epistemic partialism are in fact ambivalent between it and a requirement to take our friends seriously. Keller, for example, talks about the importance of *openness* in friendship, and states:

By this I mean that the fact that one’s friend believes something, or sees the world in a certain way, will sometimes be taken by the other as a reason to adopt or entertain that same way of looking at the world. (Keller 2004, p. 342)

There is quite a gap between taking one’s friend’s beliefs or perspective as a reason to *adopt* that belief (i.e., as a reason for belief) and simply taking it as a reason to *entertain* the belief. Insofar as friendship requires only that one entertain the belief, this consideration could instead be invoked in favour of the idea that friendship requires us to take our friends seriously. Elsewhere, Keller writes:

[G]ood friendship characteristically requires that you make a special effort – effort that you needn’t make with regard to just anyone – to see value in your friends’ projects before you decide (and say) that you think them misguided. (Keller 2004, pp. 334-335)

Again, this generally plausible thought might lead one to accept a requirement to take our friends seriously rather than a requirement to be epistemically partial to our friends. Both seem able to account for this intuition. There is thus much in common between the two purported doxastic requirements of friendship.[[10]](#endnote-11)

However, whilst the requirement that we take our friends seriously does not inherently rule out epistemic partialism towards our friends, neither does it require it; though similar, the two claims are distinct. First and foremost, the requirement to take our friends seriously does not suggest that insofar as we are friends any bias is *required* in assessing our friends’ perspectives, and is thus compatible with plausible mainstream epistemic norms. It is compatible with taking one’s friends seriously that their views are ultimately rejected, and that one’s beliefs about them are wholly unbiased. Secondly and relatedly, though complying with the requirement to take our friends seriously will often lead to having more positive beliefs about the friend and their projects than one would otherwise have, this consequence is *indirect* and *contingent*. This is in stark contrast to the requirement of epistemic partialism, where this consequence is *direct* and *necessary,* or a part of the demand itself. Finally, whereas epistemic partialism requires only positively biased beliefs from the friend, the requirement to take our friends seriously can involve wider attitudes such as cares, hopes and fears. Although the two requirements are thus motivated by some similar cases and often have the same consequences, they are nonetheless importantly different.[[11]](#endnote-12)

1. Standard Objections to Epistemic Partialism

Epistemic partialism has been controversial, with many philosophers doubting that friendship really imposes such demands upon us. In this section, I will argue that the demand that we take our friends seriously avoids many of the standard objections that epistemic partialism faces. Moreover, I will suggest that these objections to epistemic partialism naturally point towards an alternative requirement such as the requirement to take our friends seriously.

Philosophers discussing epistemic partialism have raised many different worries about it. In this section, I will focus my discussion on three core objections to epistemic partialism that have been raised: that it provides the wrong kind of reason for belief; that it gives the wrong interpretation of the phenomenology of friendship; and that epistemic partialists ignore respects in which having accurate beliefs about one’s friends is desirable. I will suggest that the demand that we take our friends seriously avoids all three concerns.

First, one key objection to epistemic partialism, at least in its direct form, is that considerations such as friendship would be the *wrong kind of reason* for belief (Enoch 2016, p. 32; Arpaly and Brinkerhoff 2018, pp. 40-41). That is, it has been suggested that only *evidence* provides us with reason to believe that something is the case, and the fact that a friend would feel encouraged and supported by a given belief does not provide any evidence for the truth of the belief.[[12]](#endnote-13) It is thus concluded that friendship cannot provide reasons for belief. Enoch compares this to a case where someone offers to pay one to hold a certain belief (2016, p. 32): the money may provide one with *some* kind of reason, but it is not a reason to think that the claim is true, and many have thought it provides a practical reason (a reason to act in a way that is likely to induce the belief, for example) rather than an epistemic reason (a reason to believe).[[13]](#endnote-14)

The requirement that we take our friends seriously clearly avoids this worry, since it is a requirement to do something practical rather than a requirement to believe (albeit an epistemically significant requirement to do something practical). On this view, friendship is a reason to approach one’s friend, their commitments and perspective in a way that is open to their being valuable, and that seeks out any value that might be there, but it is not a direct reason to believe anything at all. It thus avoids worries about being the wrong kind of reason for belief, since it is not a requirement to believe anything of one’s friends.[[14]](#endnote-15) What’s more, considerations such as friendship seem like the right kind of reason to take (certain) practical actions, so the thought that friendship might alter the practical reasons confronting one seems generally plausible.

Secondly, another objection that has been raised against epistemic partialism is that it depends upon the wrong interpretation of the phenomenology of friendship (Kawall 2013, pp. 358-9; Enoch 2016, pp. 41-42). That is, partialists are plausibly right that we want our friends to think well of us, and that we would be disappointed if we found out that they did not. But critics have suggested that partialists are wrong to conclude that it is a requirement of friendship that we think well of our friends. Rather, they suggest that this shows that we want the evidence to reflect well on us. We want our friends to see us in a positive light because we want that to be how things actually stand, and we want our friends to be responsive to the evidence of that. We do not merely want our friends to hold positively biased beliefs in an attempt to be supportive despite having evidence to the contrary. That is, these critics suggest that the intuition that we want our friends to think well of us is explained by the fact that we want to *possess* positive qualities and for our friends to be responsive to the evidence reflecting this, rather than being explained by a distinctive requirement which we place on our friends.[[15]](#endnote-16) As Enoch puts it: “if your friends wants you to believe well of him *based on the evidence*, if this is what he cares about, then what he seems to want is that *the evidence support* the belief that he did not act shamefully” (Enoch 2016, p. 42).

The idea that we want our friends to be responsive to us, and to evidence about us, seems at least as phenomenologically plausible as the idea that we want our friends to think well of us (see Crawford 2019, Mason 2021 and Dormandy 2022). In friendship we want to be *seen*, to be *known*, to be *understood*. We feel validated by others’ recognition of and appreciation of our good qualities. Indeed, we may be validated even by friends’ recognition of our *bad* qualities. The awareness that our friends see our flaws and love us anyway seems like an important aspect of friendship, and things like gentle teasing can be a key part of establishing intimacy.[[16]](#endnote-17) This deep understanding of our friends seems like a key part of the intimacy of friendship. But epistemic partialists ignore or bypass this, suggesting that our desire for our friends to think well of us is independent of our other desires, independent of our desire to be seen and known, something which we value in isolation.

The requirement that we take our friends seriously avoids this worry. As I have discussed, taking our friends seriously will lead to thinking more positively about our them *only* in cases where this is suggested by the evidence. Positive beliefs about our friends are not taken by this requirement to be good in isolation, regardless of the evidence. Moreover, this requirement provides something which we plausibly do care about in its own right, something that is plausibly not contingent on a deeper desire. Taking our friends seriously involves responsiveness to them and to evidence about them. Being taken seriously by our friends seems to be something we desire for its own sake; it seems to be distinctive of a kind of valuable interpersonal relationship.

Thirdly, some critics of epistemic partialism, specifically in its indirect form, have noted that positive beliefs about our friends are not uniformly desirable or attractive (Kawall 2013, p.357, p.360; Arpaly and Brinkerhoff 2018, p. 43). There are, they suggest, many cases in which having positively biased beliefs about one’s friends would be bad for the friend – and the friendship. For example, someone who does not recognise their friends’ flaws and failings will likely offer them bad advice or foolish encouragement and will often fail to offer them help and support when they need it. These are surely undesirable ways for good friends to act. The idea that it would be desirable for our friends to form positive belief-forming dispositions about us thus depends upon drawing on a narrow selection of cases, since in wider cases such a disposition can lead to actions that seem to involve a failure of friendship.

Unlike epistemic partialism, the requirement to take our friends seriously does not entail that we should be positively biased about our friends. It is thus compatible with the thought that doing so would often be harmful to them, and to the friendship. Since on this view there is no necessary connection between taking our friends seriously and thinking positively about them, the worry that many positively biased actions harm the friend or the friendship is avoided.

The requirement that we take our friends seriously thus answers all three worries about epistemic partialism. The worry about epistemically partial beliefs depending on the wrong kinds of reason suggests that friendship can provide only practical reasons, not reasons to believe. The worry about giving the wrong interpretation of the phenomenology of friendship suggests that the desire for our friends to think well of us cannot be something we care about in isolation. The worry about unduly positive beliefs being harmful in some circumstances suggests that friendship cannot demand a general positive bias. The requirement that we take our friends seriously meets all these desiderata: it is a practical demand of friendship; it does not isolate the epistemic demands of friendship; and it does not demand a general positive bias. Though motivated by similar cases to epistemic partialism, the demand that we take our friends seriously thus avoids these key objections to it.[[17]](#endnote-18)

1. Taking Our Friends Seriously and Interpersonal Engagement

Thus far I have suggested that the requirement to take our friends seriously is in some respects similar to the requirement to be epistemically partial to our friends, and that it is motivated by many of the same cases and intuitions. I have suggested, however, that it is nonetheless a distinct requirement and that it avoids some key objections to epistemic partialism. As such, there is reason to prefer the requirement that we take our friends seriously to epistemic partialism. In this final section, I wish to further strengthen the case for the requirement to take our friends seriously by suggesting that it is not an *ad hoc* response to the initial intuitions. Rather, it captures some of the things we intuitively care about in friendship, and thus it is an independently plausible requirement (independent, that is, of the cases that might motivate either requirement). In particular, I will suggest that it requires engagement with and sharing of our friends’ perspectives, and that this is something we have independent reason to care about. Since this plausible requirement (a) captures some of what we care about in friendship and (b) explains the particular intuitions motivating either requirement whilst (c) avoiding the objections that epistemic partialism faces, I suggest that it is a much more plausible requirement of friendship.

To begin with, note that whereas epistemic partialism is a specifically doxastic requirement, the requirement that we should take our friends seriously is much broader than this. In taking another person seriously, we do not only form beliefs about them and the world but a wide array of attitudes about and with them. The requirement to take our friends seriously is a requirement to find out how they see things, to explore their perspectives, and to examine what could be said for seeing things in their way. Engagement and interaction with the friend and their perspective are not merely incidental to this requirement but constitute what is required. Coming to understand them is not merely incidental to taking them seriously; it is part of what it is to take them seriously. This kind of engagement with another’s perspective is plausibly a valuable kind of thing. Moreover, this will often lead to perspectives that are not merely positively biased but *shared*. Sharing a perspective with someone can forge an important kind of connection between people, and the willingness to take the first step towards doing so (by taking the perspective seriously) is something we value about friendship.

The same is not true of epistemic partialism. In some cases, the demand that we have positively biased beliefs about our friends (or biased belief-forming mechanisms) would best be met by somewhat disengaging with the friend’s perspective. For instance, in the poetry case the best way to think positively about the friend’s poem might plausibly be to ignore the unsubtle imagery that they are most proud of, and simply not to think about what they might see in the painfully trite metaphors. In such cases, engaging with the friends’ perspective would plausibly get in the way of forming positively biased beliefs. Epistemic partialism does not therefore inherently contain any requirement to engage with one’s friend’s perspective.[[18]](#endnote-19)

Moreover, a perspective is not only constituted by beliefs: it also encompasses an array of wider attitudes and emotions.[[19]](#endnote-20) Seeing things in a certain light involves not only beliefs about the thing, but also affective and motivational states. For example, seeing a poem as profoundly moving does not merely involve the belief that it is moving but actually being moved by it, possibly admiring it as a result, being motivated to return to ponder it and so on. Taking a friend seriously will thus not only involve engagement with their beliefs, but also engagement with their wider affective and motivational perspective (and the possibility of coming to share this broader perspective). It involves, that is, openness to caring about things that they care about, openness to being motivated to act on things they’re motivated to act on, and so on.

This is in keeping with our everyday ways of talking about being ‘taken seriously’. In everyday situations, the complaint that one is not being taken seriously is often not merely the complaint that one’s views are being unduly rejected. It can also be a complaint about the other person’s wider attitudes, indicating that they are failing to duly care about one or the issue in question, or that they are trivialising or mocking it and so on. When hoping that a friend takes one’s poetry seriously, one usually cares about the positivity of their beliefs, but not only about this. One might want them to feel emotionally involved, and to explore the poetry with emotional seriousness rather than a casual, disengaged air, for example. The requirement that we take our friends seriously thus suggests a much broader engagement with their perspective than the merely doxastic aspects of it, and this wider engagement seems to be an important part of what we expect from friends and value in friendship.

The requirement to take our friends seriously is thus independently well-motivated as a requirement of friendship. Even setting aside the cases that could be used to motivate either epistemic partialism or the requirement to take our friends seriously, it remains an attractive requirement on friendship. This is because it also explains other things that we care about, such as affective and motivational forms of engagement from our friends.

At this point, an epistemic partialist might object. After all, they do not regard epistemic partialism as the *only* requirement for friendship. They might thus respond that they too think that engagement with the other’s perspective is required for good friendship and claim that good friends will not only engage with one another’s perspective, they will also be epistemically partial to one another. That is, they might simply say that *both* requirements are requirements on friendship, and in this way gain the explanatory benefits of both requirements.

However, since many of the initial cases and considerations used to motivate epistemic partialism could instead be explained by the requirement to take our friends seriously, positing both requirements here seems to be unmotivated. There is no need to introduce a further epistemic requirement (epistemic partialism) if a broader, independently plausible requirement (to take our friends seriously) already explains the intuitions in question. This is especially so if the proposed extra requirement is highly controversial, as epistemic partialism is. Considerations of simplicity thus favour positing a single, broad requirement if one can be found that explains the relevant intuitions – and I have suggested that it can.[[20]](#endnote-21)

Conclusion

To conclude, I have argued that the requirement to take our friends seriously can account for many of the intuitions motivating epistemic partialism, and that it avoids some of the key criticisms that it faces. I have also suggested that the requirement to take our friends seriously is an independently plausible requirement of friendship. Together, these give reason to think that being a good friend requires taking one’s friend seriously but not being epistemically partial to them. Finally, I wish to note that this requirement, though *doxastically* weaker than epistemic partialism, is nonetheless in other respects stronger, since it requires not only that we sometimes alter our beliefs, but also that we emotionally engage with our friends.

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 This much-discussed case is taken from Keller (2004; 331-333). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. See, among others, Keller (2004, 2018), Stroud (2006), Hazlett (2013), and Piller (2016) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. See Friedman (1989, 1993), Elder (2014), and Mason (2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. See, among others, Cottingham (1986), Jeske (1997), Cocking and Kennett (2000) and Jollimore (2000) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. The idea that such evidence can be treated in an *epistemically* *unjustifiable* way distinguishes this idea from the notion of moral encroachment (e.g. Basu 2019). See also Rioux (2021). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. An odd consequence of this view seems to be that optimists would thereby be *pro tanto* better friends than pessimists. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. Friedman of course also puts this in terms of an *inclination* to think positively about them. I set this aside, because it is consistent with a higher degree of positive bias than mere invitation is. Moreover, I think that the idea that one’s friends’ projects and commitments influence which things are living options for oneself requires only an invitation to care about those things, and not an inclination to do so. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. I am here focusing on friendship, but it is plausible that being taken seriously is also important to us in cases where we are not friends with the other person but are involved in another kind of significant interpersonal relationship. For example, we plausibly take this to be important in familial and romantic relationships which may not count as friendships. However, it is plausibly also limited to those we have close interpersonal relationships with: we do not normally consider it to be important, let alone required, for others to engage with us, our commitments, and our perspectives simply as such. One might think that opera is bizarre without engaging with it much at all, and thereby dismiss it, for example, and this seems ethically acceptable despite the fact that many people find value in it. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. This idea is central to Jollimore’s (2011) discussion of the epistemic value of love. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. Keller’s discussion of the rap concert (2004, 342), for example, is also amenable to explanation in terms of a requirement to take our friends seriously. He connects this to Cocking and Kennett’s (1998) discussion of the importance of openness to mutual interpretation and direction in friendship. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. I take this distinction to be in the spirit of the contrast Enoch (2016: 31-2) draws between ‘epistemic’ requirements and merely ‘epistemically significant’ ones. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. Of course, there are many respects in which our epistemic situation regarding our friends *is* typically different to that regarding strangers, and we therefore often do have extra evidence regarding our friends’ character etc. See Hawley (2014, 2036-8) and Goldberg (2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. Gertken and Kiesewetter (2017) provide an overview of the distinction between right and wrong kinds of reason. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. *Indirect* epistemic partialism also avoids these worries, of course. The third worry is a specific worry for indirect partialists. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. In general, we might also worry that what we *want* from our friends need not correlate with the genuine obligations of friendship. Not all desires or wants correlate with legitimate normative expectations. However, I will assume for the purposes of this paper that our desires concerning our friends at least reveal *something* about normative reality. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. Yao (2020) suggests that there is an important role for such love in overcoming shame. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Brinkerhoff (2022) suggests that friendship places cognitive demands on us, but that these are demands on our attention. This view can also avoid the criticisms of epistemic partialism that I discuss above, but I think it does less well at integrating the importance of our beliefs and cognitive patterns with the significance of interpersonal engagement, which I discuss in section 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Of course, the partialist might nonetheless regard engagement with one’s friends’ perspectives as a good thing – but this would be a distinct requirement of friendship. I address this response at the end of this section. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. For more on what constitutes a perspective, see Sliwa (forthcoming), who suggests that it is a “a complex set of interconnected cognitive, affective, and motivational dispositions”. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. In addition, the requirement to take our friends seriously helps see why friendship *may* lead to positive beliefs in some cases, but by no means in all of them (something Stroud and Keller, for example, agree with). For epistemic partialists, it is somewhat unclear why this should be the case, since there is no obvious way of weighing up requirements of friendship and requirements of epistemic agency. The requirement that we take our friends seriously, by contrast, has an easy time of explaining why good friendship will sometimes, but only sometimes, lead to positive beliefs about our friends: the evidence will not always point that way.

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