Softening the Stalemate

In order for the Church model to have optimal influence on psychological science, we encourage moving away from assuming an all-knowing perspective so that the model can be applied to a world where there are competing truth claims and motivations for holding religious beliefs and convictions. People tend to prefer their own view of God, and most also believe their own view of God is in line with the available evidence. Because of this, we reach a stalemate quickly—which happens to correspond to the intractable religious disagreements and conflicts we see in real life. In order to soften the stalemate, people must engage in dialogue not simply by exchanging reasons and arguments for their beliefs, but also by being willing to understand and be open to another's perspective on how to constitute and evaluate the evidence.

We have presented what we see as challenges to the Church model gaining traction within psychological science. There may be a perspective from which it is theoretically possible to judge how strongly one ought to weigh the evidence behind particular beliefs, but we are further from that possibility in domains related to religious beliefs and convictions than, for example, beliefs regarding the likelihood that someone committed a crime. In closing, we admit that the highly contextual nature of our model may have substantial weaknesses that will limit its influence within many philosophical circles, and we would be interested in understanding these weaknesses and possible ways to shore them up.

Part 3b: Trenches, Evidence, and Intellectual Humility

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It seems as though I might have been happier with Davis and Hook's understanding of intellectual humility (IH) than they were with mine! In their response, they leveled six complaints against my account of IH, which I think can be roughly categorized into two general worries:

1. The worry that my account of IH does not fit with the real world or have application "in the trenches." (See their first and second complaints.)
2. The worry that my account overemphasizes "evidence" to the exclusion of other plausible facets of IH. (See their third, fourth, fifth, and sixth complaints.)

Contrary to the first worry, I will suggest that the complexities and limitations of my account actually enjoy an *admirable* fit with the real world—and that demanding *less* from an account of IH does not account better for what we find in the trenches. And contrary to the second worry, I will note that Davis and Hook seem to have misunderstood my view.

The Trenches

Life in the trenches, in the real world, is messy. It's complex. Properly understood, virtues are often going to be *extremely* difficult to viably measure across personality types, social dynamics, cultural contexts, and so on. In giving an abstract and complex view of the virtue of IH, it seems to me that *I am actually tracking the complexity we find in the trenches, in the real world.* When Davis and Hook

complain that my account of IH is too complex to be easily measured, my first response is, "That's life in the trenches!" We shouldn't always expect virtues to yield easy measurements. Sure, we can give a simple definition of IH so that it yields easy measurements, but *if ease of measurement is what's driving our definitions, then there is a real chance our definitions won't fully capture the virtue.* Even if there is some insurmountable hurdle blocking a straightforward means of measuring IH as I've described it, that doesn't mean that there isn't plenty of extremely valuable measurement work to be done.

For example, we might think that intellectual humility largely corresponds with the absence of dogmatism; as such, developing a straightforward measure along these lines would be extremely valuable and relevant. But, as I've highlighted in my previous statements, we'd simply be remiss if we tried to conflate IH with the absence of dogmatism. If we are going to try to develop an account of intellectual humility that applies across contexts, cultures, personalities, and belief types—from the belief that $2 + 2 = 4$ to religious beliefs—then we are simply going to *need* an open-ended and sufficiently abstract account to work with.[40] And even though this might mean that my account of IH mirrors the intractability of some disagreements (e.g. religious disagreements), *it can nevertheless help explain why such disagreements are so intractable*. In the end, I consider it a *virtue* of my account that it provides a broad enough framework of IH that it can apply across a full range of cases and track the complexities and stalemates of life "in the trenches."

Evidence

In my opening statement, I argued that intellectual humility is the virtue of accurately tracking what one could non-culpably take to be the positive epistemic status of one's own beliefs. Davis and Hook seem to think that *positive epistemic status* merely amounts to some strict notion of *evidence*. But I explicitly tried to block such an interpretation. I explicitly left the notion of positive epistemic status open (letting "a thousand flowers blossom"), and I certainly did not limit myself to a strict notion of evidence. By leaving my understanding of positive epistemic status open, my account is extremely adaptable; indeed, it is adaptable to whatever we find we need in the trenches—whether it's evidence, social epistemology, character virtues, and/or whatever. So when Davis and Hook repeatedly highlight dynamics of IH that go beyond some strict sense of evidence, this is simply in no obvious way problematic for my account.

Conclusion

In my opening statement I elucidated an intuitive and widely applicable account of IH, and I explained how it is at least conceptually possible to be both dogmatic and intellectually humble. And in their response, Davis and Hook very helpfully sketched some challenges my account of IH might face in the psychological or clinical arena. Thankfully, however, I think these challenges can be met or dissolved. And while I certainly strive for intellectually humility in my beliefs regarding IH and religious commitments, I do not think I have any reason yet for thinking that my original views enjoy any less positive epistemic status.

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40. And to be sure, contrary to Davis and Hook's second complaint, there is an important difference between something being open-ended and sufficiently abstract and it being "undefined."

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Author Biography

Ian M. Church is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Hillsdale College, and he is a co-author (with Peter Samuelson) of Intellectual Humility: An Introduction to the Philosophy and Science (2017). He earned his PhD from the St Andrews-Stirling Joint Programme in Philosophy. His research focuses on virtue epistemology, the analysis of knowledge, epistemic luck, fallibilism, disagreement, the interface between epistemology and ethics, religious epistemology, and the philosophy of psychology and cognitive science. Before his PhD, Dr. Church earned his MLitt from the St Andrew-Stirling Joint Programme in Philosophy and his BA in philosophy and rhetoric & composition English at Ball State University.