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On the Virtue of Epistemic Justice and the Vice of Epistemic Injustice

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Abstract

In this paper, I develop an account of epistemic justice as a character-based intellectual virtue that a truth-desiring agent would want to possess. The agent who possesses this virtue is just towards other knowers in matters pertaining to epistemic goods and this involves a regard for agents as knowers. Notably, the virtue of epistemic justice has a unique position among virtues: epistemic justice is presupposed by every other intellectual virtue, while remaining a standalone virtue itself.

Correspondingly, I also offer an account of the vice of epistemic injustice as an epistemically dis-valuable trait of character. The agent who possesses this trait is unjust towards other knowers in matters pertaining to epistemic goods and this involves a disregard for agents as knowers. Most importantly, I highlight that the vice of epistemic injustice is entailed by every other epistemic vice, though it remains a distinct vice.

KEYWORDS: Epistemic justice & injustice; intellectual virtue & vice; virtue & vice epistemology.

I. | INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Think back to the time someone tried to deceive you and steal your bank information via e-mail (i.e., email phishing). Imagine being repeatedly passed over for promotion when you are clearly the most deserving candidate (e.g. the most experienced and most qualified) among your peers for this position. Picture lending a large sum of money to a friend only for you to later find out they never intended to return it, though they promised they would. All the cases above have a common underlying feature: they are instances of injustice. These examples all relate to the virtue of justice in the sense that this virtue is absent from the character of the person who commits acts of injustice. The virtue of justice has a long history in philosophy, dating back to the philosophical thought of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Although usually seen as the primary virtue of institutions (see e.g. Rawls 1971: 3), the virtue of justice is also considered to be an important moral virtue for individuals (LeBar 2020). Simply put, at an individual level, the moral virtue of justice involves the disposition and motivation to act in a just manner.

Let us now consider cases in which the committed injustice is primarily of an epistemic kind. Imagine sharing your breakthrough idea about how to solve the Gettier problem (see Gettier 1963) with your colleague, only for them to steal it and present it as their own in a well-known journal. Think of a white male police officer who does not believe your statement because they are prejudiced towards your race and/or sex. Consider the case of a sexual harassment victim who cannot communicate their experience to others, or even make sense of it, because the harassment took place “prior to the time when we had this critical concept” (Fricker 2007: 7). The two latter cases are examples discussed by Miranda Fricker, who was the first to develop the concept of epistemic injustice. For Fricker (2007: 1), epistemic injustice involves “a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower” (rather than through some kind of distributive unfairness). Fricker (2007) analyzes two kinds of epistemic

injustice: (i) testimonial injustice and (ii) hermeneutical injustice. The former relates to the example of the white male police officer previously discussed and “occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word” (Fricker 2007: 1). Hermeneutical injustice relates to the sexual harassment victim example discussed above and “occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” (Fricker 2007: 1).

Fricker’s presentation and analysis of the concept of epistemic injustice has had quite a significant impact in contemporary analytic epistemology and prompted the production of numerous papers on this topic. In these recent papers, scholars discuss and evaluate Fricker’s understanding of the concept of epistemic injustice—with some trying to come up with other kinds of epistemic injustices, besides the initial two identified by Fricker (see e.g. Maitra 2010; Medina 2012; Dotson 2014; Pohlhaus 2014; Davis 2016; Peet 2017; Buckwalter 2019; Anderson 2020; McGlynn 2021; Dunne and Kotsonis 2022). Following a virtue epistemology framework, as well as Fricker’s analysis of the concepts of epistemic justice and injustice, my aim in this paper is to give an account of the intellectual virtue of epistemic justice and the intellectual vice of epistemic injustice.¹ Although there has been much discussion of the concepts of epistemic justice and injustice, there have been surprisingly few studies that attempt to develop an account of the virtue and vice corresponding to these terms. In addition, most existing accounts follow the idea that justice is the primary virtue of institutions and societies² and explore the intellectual virtue of epistemic justice on a collective rather than an

¹ Throughout this paper, I am using the terms “intellectual virtues/vices” and “epistemic virtues/vices” interchangeably.

² I do not disagree that the virtue of justice is important for institutions and societies in general, but merely seek to examine this trait at the level of individuals as well. After all, institutions and societies

individual basis (see e.g. Anderson 2012; Baird and Calvard 2019). My motivation for developing an account of the virtue of epistemic justice and the vice of epistemic injustice does not simply stem from an attempt to close this gap in the literature. Rather, my account serves as a basis from which to argue that the virtue of epistemic justice is presupposed by all other intellectual virtues and that the vice of epistemic injustice is entailed by all other kinds of epistemic vices. My arguments concerning the unique positions of both the virtue of epistemic justice among intellectual virtues and the vice of epistemic injustice among intellectual vices highlight novel ways of studying virtues/vices that are of significant value for virtue epistemology and character education.

To achieve the goals of this paper, I proceed in the next section to develop an account of the virtue of epistemic justice (section II.a) and an account of the vice of epistemic injustice (section II.b). I argue that the intellectual virtue of epistemic justice is a character trait that a truth-desiring agent would want to possess and consists of a motivational component and a competency component. In addition, I highlight that the intellectual vice of epistemic injustice is an epistemically dis-valuable trait of character that can be understood as being fundamentally characterized by the presence of imperfect epistemic motivations and/or as a character trait that obstructs the acquisition, transmission, and retention of knowledge. Then, in section III, I discuss the relationship between the virtue of epistemic justice and other intellectual virtues (section III.a) and the relationship between the vice of epistemic injustice and other epistemic vices (section III.b). I argue that intellectual virtues must not conflict with the virtue of epistemic justice and that epistemic vices necessarily entail the vice of epistemic injustice. In section IV, I conclude by highlighting the value of my account of the virtue of epistemic justice

are comprised of individual agents, and the traits of these agents make up the behavior of collective entities.

and the vice of epistemic injustice for contemporary virtue epistemology and character education.

II. | THE VIRTUE OF EPISTEMIC JUSTICE AND THE VICE OF EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

a) | A virtue responsibilist account of the virtue of epistemic justice

In this section, I propose an account of the virtue of epistemic justice from a responsibilist view of virtue.³ I argue that the trait of epistemic justice can be understood as a character-based epistemic virtue characterized by certain motivational and behavioral dispositions. Briefly put, virtue responsibilists (e.g. Code 1984; Montmarquet 1993; Zagzebski 1996; Roberts and Wood 2007; Baehr 2011) conceive of intellectual virtues as acquired and enduring character traits that consist of “habits of intellectual action and intellectual motivation” that make for an excellent thinker (Battaly 2008: 648).⁴ Open-mindedness and intellectual courage are two well-known examples of intellectual virtues, according to the responsibilist understanding of this concept.

The character trait of epistemic justice is characterized by a disposition to act justly towards other knowers in matters pertaining to epistemic goods, involving a regard for agents as knowers. The disposition to act justly is an intuitive component of our concept of “being an epistemically just person”. For instance, we would not consider the agent who steals the ideas

³ Nonetheless, it should be noted that an analysis of the trait of epistemic justice through a virtue reliabilist perspective (see e.g. Sosa 2007; Greco 2010; Pritchard 2021), although outside the scope of this paper, is possible and might also be of value.

⁴ Still, it should be noted that there is much theoretical diversity in character-based virtue epistemology. For more on this see e.g. Baehr 2008.

of others and presents them as their own to be an epistemically just person. Besides behavioral dispositions, the virtue of epistemic justice also involves certain epistemic motivations. The agent is predisposed to act justly because she has the desire to do so, and because she has a love for epistemic goods.⁵

The threshold for a person to possess the trait of epistemic justice is high, and this confirms the intuition that truly intellectually virtuous agents are a somewhat rare occurrence.⁶ On the one hand, some agents seem to possess this trait and are, in the vast majority of cases, just in their dealings with other knowers (i.e., they refrain from causing epistemic harm to others). On the other hand, most of us seem to lack this trait, given the fact that we are often unfair in our epistemic exchanges (think for example of cases of testimonial injustice caused by prejudice—most of us seem prone to allowing our prejudices to interfere with our evaluation of other people’s statements). Epistemic justice is not an easy trait to acquire. It requires effort (e.g. realizing and combating the prejudices that interfere with the acquisition of epistemic goods) and dedication for one to be epistemically just. This is the reason why the trait of epistemic justice requires an individual to be motivated by their desire to acquire epistemic goods. If a person is not deeply interested in acquiring the truth about matters, they will not be in a position to safeguard against cases of epistemic injustice that hinder the acquisition of epistemic goods.

There is an important distinction to be drawn between the ultimate and the immediate goals of epistemic virtues (Baehr 2013). On the one hand, the ultimate goal of every intellectual

⁵ This relates to the motivational component of intellectual virtues, which is understood by virtue responsibilists as a necessary condition for intellectual virtues (see, e.g. Zagzebski 1996; Baehr 2016).

⁶ For example, Aristotle says that being virtuous is “a rare thing, a proper object of praise, and something fine” (see *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 1109a20–35, translation by Broadie and Rowe 2011).

virtue is the improvement of one's epistemic standing (see e.g. Watson 2015: 276)⁷. On the other hand, the immediate goal of an intellectual virtue is unique to every virtue and relates to its characteristic activity. For instance, in the case of the virtue of open-mindedness, the immediate goal is to approach others' ideas, viewpoints, and beliefs with an open mind. In turn, this immediate goal is conducive to the pursuit of the ultimate goal common to all intellectual virtues—i.e., the acquisition of epistemic goods. Following Baehr's (2013) distinction, the motivational component of the trait of epistemic justice can be understood as involving both an immediate and an ultimate goal. The former goal, which is unique to the trait of epistemic justice, is being fair in one's dealings with other knowers in what concerns epistemic goods. The ultimate goal of epistemic justice is the improvement of one's epistemic standing. The agent who possesses the virtue of epistemic justice is driven to act as a result of this dual motivation.

Still, a person being motivated to act due to their desire for epistemic goods is a necessary but not sufficient condition for them to be epistemically just. Following Baehr's (2016) competence criterion of intellectual virtues, it seems that an intuitive component of our concept of "being an epistemically just person" is that this person is also competent in the characteristic activity of the trait in question, i.e., acting in an epistemically just manner. After all, we would be reluctant to describe someone as epistemically just if that person were motivated to act justly but nonetheless lacked the competence to do so effectively. Consider, for example, a white male philosopher who borrows other people's ideas and, despite being motivated to give credit to the right people, nonetheless, because of his absentmindedness, keeps attributing those ideas

⁷ In this paper, I follow Watson's (2015: 276) understanding of 'epistemic standing'. According to Watson, "an individual's epistemic standing is broadly taken to encompass all of her true beliefs, knowledge and understanding". She also adds that "by aiming at improvement in epistemic standing, the intellectual virtues are seen to aim at cognitive contact with reality".

to the wrong people. If this were to happen often, we would not be inclined to say that this philosopher is an epistemically just agent. He would possess the motivation to act justly but lack the competency to do so. This is similar to our attribution of other kind of epistemic virtues. For instance, we would not ascribe the virtue of open-mindedness to a person who is motivated to act in an open-minded manner, but nonetheless lacks the ability to do so.

Having argued that epistemic justice can be understood as a character-based intellectual virtue, my aim here is also to show that it can be understood as an overarching intellectual virtue encompassing the various kinds of virtues of epistemic justice identified by other scholars. For instance, Fricker discusses the virtues of testimonial justice and hermeneutical justice. According to her, in the case of the former, “the hearer who possesses this virtue reliably neutralizes the impact of prejudice in her credibility judgements” (Fricker 2007, 86), while the latter involves “an alertness or sensitivity to the possibility that the difficulty one’s interlocutor is having as she tries to render something communicatively intelligible is due not to its being a nonsense or her being a fool, but rather to some sort of gap in hermeneutical resources” (Fricker 2007: 169). Both these virtues fit neatly into my account of the overarching virtue of epistemic justice. In both cases, the agents who possess them are motivated and competent in acting justly towards other knowers in matters pertaining to epistemic goods. The same is true for other kinds of virtues of epistemic justice, such as the virtue of epistemic inclusion (the agent who possesses this trait includes other agents in epistemic matters, thus facilitating a contribution to knowledge production [see Dotson 2014]) and the virtue of interpretive justice (the agent who possesses this trait interprets the speaker’s intended message correctly [see Peet 2017]). All these virtues are included in my account of the virtue of epistemic justice. The benefit of grouping all virtues of epistemic justice under one concept will become apparent in section III, where I will argue that the virtue of epistemic justice is presupposed by all intellectual virtues. The short account of the virtue of epistemic justice

offered in this section paves the way for that argument and is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all the different features of the virtue of epistemic justice.

b) | A motivationalist and an obstructivist account of the vice of epistemic injustice

Like every character-based virtue, virtues of epistemic justice have certain corresponding vices. For instance, the person who possesses the vice of testimonial injustice is characterized by their inability to control the impact of their prejudices in their credibility judgments (Fricker 2007). Similarly, the agent who possesses the vice of interpretive injustice often attributes to the speaker a message other than the one the speaker intended to convey (Peet 2017). In this subsection, I will group all vices of epistemic injustice under the overarching vice of epistemic injustice. To explain the vice of epistemic injustice, I will offer an account of this trait from both a motivationalist and an obstructivist stance on intellectual vice.⁸

There are two main competing approaches to understanding intellectual vice in contemporary analytic epistemology: (i) motivationalism and (ii) obstructivism. As the name of the former suggests, motivationalism is the viewpoint that understands intellectual vice as being fundamentally characterized by the presence of bad epistemic motivations (Tanesini 2018: 350; Battaly 2017: 226), or at the very least by the absence of good epistemic ones (Zagzebski 1996; Montmarquet 2000; Baehr 2010). That is, motivationalism maintains that the agent who possesses epistemic vice always lacks good epistemic desires (i.e., the agent is not interested in acquiring epistemic goods) and that in some cases the agent is even driven to act by their explicit hostility towards epistemic goods (i.e., the agent intentionally promotes epistemic falsehoods).

⁸ For more on the history of intellectual vice as a concept, see Kidd 2018 and Kotsonis 2021.

Contra motivationalism, obstructivism maintains that intellectual vices are not necessarily characterized in terms of imperfect epistemic motivations, but by their epistemic consequences (Crerar 2018; Cassam 2016, 2019). In other words, this approach argues that an agent could possess epistemic vices despite having good epistemic motivations. Cassam (2016, 2019), who recently coined the term obstructivism and developed this theory, focuses on the consequences of epistemic vice (Cassam 2019: 11), understanding them as “blameworthy, or otherwise reprehensible character traits, attitudes or ways of thinking that systematically obstruct the gaining, keeping or sharing of knowledge” (Cassam 2019: 1).

How is one to understand the overarching trait of epistemic injustice, given the two main competing views on intellectual vice? If one were to follow the motivationalist approach, one would conclude that epistemic injustice is characterized by imperfect motivational states. The person who possesses this trait is led to act unjustly towards others in matters pertaining to epistemic goods (and this involves a disregard for agents as knowers), due to their lack of interest in epistemic goods or their explicit hostility towards epistemic goods. For instance, the white male philosopher who does not cite the source of a particular idea, and instead presents it as his own, is clearly led to act by imperfect motivational states. Either he does not care enough about the truth to attribute this idea to the person who came up with it or he has an explicit desire to promote falsehoods. In the case of testimonial injustice, the person who commits this injustice could again be seen as simply not caring enough about the truth to overcome any intervening prejudices, or as giving in to their prejudices and consciously promoting falsehoods. Notably, epistemic injustice such as testimonial injustice, interpretive injustice, and lack of epistemic inclusion can be characterized in terms of imperfect epistemic motivations. One cannot possess the corresponding traits of these injustices without also

possessing imperfect epistemic motivations⁹. One could inflict epistemic injustices on other agents in matters pertaining to epistemic goods, despite having good epistemic motivations, but it could be argued that in order to possess this vice, one needs to do so systematically. The person who does so systematically is necessarily driven by imperfect epistemic motivations, because if she truly cared about epistemic goods, she would understand that her actions bring about epistemic injustices and would thus strive to act differently.

My argument, so far in this subsection, has been that, following motivationalism, one could characterize the vice of epistemic injustice in terms of imperfect epistemic motivations. Still, one could object that prejudices can affect what individuals do or believe in ways completely opaque to them (Brownstein and Saul 2016). A subject could maximally care about the truth while at the same time be unaware of the effects of prejudices on what they believe. Hence, one could argue that an agent could possess the vice of epistemic injustice even if they have perfect epistemic motivations. In addition, according to Medina's view on metaignorance (Medina 2013a, 2013b), one could be ignorant about the fact that they are ignorant of a piece of knowledge that they should know. Therefore, this phenomenon of metaignorance, which Medina explains to a large extent in terms of identity group membership, seems also to go against the idea that epistemic injustice can be accounted in terms of epistemic motivations – viz., one could care about the truth but remain ignorant of their ignorance. Overall, this objection is informed by studies (e.g. Mills 2007; Alcoff 2015; Harding 2015) that suggest that social location, rather than an individual's lack of desire to acquire epistemic goods, explains why subjects commit epistemic injustice.

⁹ Other kinds of epistemic injustice (e.g., hermeneutical injustice, epistemic appropriation) are not the outcome of imperfect epistemic motivations (at least not directly) but the result of societal structures (see Fricker 2007; Bayruns García 2019; Crerar 2016; Davis 2018).

However, in reply to this objection, I argue that if a subject has perfect epistemic motivations – viz., they have the outmost regard for epistemic goods and the unending desire to acquire such goods that is characteristic of virtuous agents – they will do everything in their power to acquire epistemic goods and will be able to overcome obstacles imposed on them by their social location. This includes uncovering and doing away with any prejudices that might get between them and epistemic goods. In this regard, I follow Fricker (2007: 86) who remains optimistic about our ability to control the impact of our prejudices. In addition, my argument finds support in Medina’s (2013a: 50) view that metaignorance can be tackled and our social sensitivity and responsible agency can be improved if we are exposed to alternative viewpoints and are “very observant about how our cognitive and affective structures work together, or fail to work together”. This motivation to remain vigilant of our ignorance seems to ultimately stem from our epistemic desire to be in cognitive contact with reality. This leads us again back to the importance of perfect epistemic desires and their tremendous motivational force.

Most importantly, however, one does not need to agree with me on this point for the overall argument of the paper to work. This idea that perfect motivations are not enough to do away with prejudices and ignorance is not a problem for my argument, but an objection to the motivationalist view on epistemic vice (and defending motivationalism lies outside the scope of this paper). If one is reluctant to characterize the vice of epistemic injustice in terms of imperfect epistemic motivations, then they can simply follow the alternative view on epistemic vice – viz., Cassam’s (2019) understanding of epistemic vice as obstructing epistemic inquiry, and as not necessarily requiring imperfect epistemic motivations (see also Crerar 2018). In

what follows, I proceed to show how obstructivism would cash out the vice of epistemic injustice in consequentialist terms.¹⁰

Following obstructivism, the vice of epistemic justice can be understood as systematically obstructing the gaining, keeping, and sharing of knowledge (and as not necessarily stemming from imperfect epistemic motivations). Going back to the example of the philosopher, the agent who does not cite the source of an idea and instead presents it as their own is actively obstructing the transmission of knowledge—as a matter of fact, they are explicitly promoting falsehoods (i.e., they are presenting someone else’s ideas as their own). In the case of testimonial injustice, the person who systematically commits such injustices is again obstructing the transmission of knowledge—e.g., their prejudices do not allow them to acquire the truth. Like motivationalism, obstructivism can also be employed to account for various kinds of epistemic injustice such as testimonial injustice, interpretive injustice, and lack of epistemic inclusion. Overall, the characteristic activity of the overarching vice of epistemic injustice (i.e., acting in an epistemically unjust manner) brings about negative epistemic consequences.

¹⁰ As already noted, the obstructivist viewpoint was developed as an alternative to motivationalism and the view that all epistemic vices are characterized in terms of imperfect epistemic motivations. As I have argued that motivationalism does a good job of explaining the vice of epistemic injustice in terms of imperfect epistemic motivations, one might object that this precludes me from examining this vice from an obstructivist viewpoint, because I have negated one of its principles (namely that one need not have imperfect epistemic motivations in order to possess a vice). Although true, I believe that accepting this principle is not a prerequisite for one to examine the vice of epistemic injustice from an obstructivist viewpoint. This vice can be understood as involving both imperfect epistemic states and as obstructing knowledge-acquisition.

The overarching vice of epistemic injustice leads the person who possesses it to act unjustly towards others in matters pertaining to epistemic goods. Given what has already been discussed, one could understand the overarching vice of epistemic injustice either as involving certain non-perfect epistemic motivations or in terms of the negative epistemic consequences it systematically brings about. One could even make the case for a hybrid account and argue that the vice of epistemic injustice always involves certain imperfect epistemic motivations *and* systematically obstructs the transmission and acquisition of knowledge. For example, the unjust philosopher who systematically presents others' ideas as his own is motivated to act out of his desire to promote epistemic falsehoods (or his lack of interest in epistemic goods) and his actions systematically bring about negative epistemic consequences.

Before concluding this section, it might also be important to note that although the vice of epistemic injustice includes various instances of epistemic injustice, this should not be taken to imply that the person who possesses this vice necessarily commits various types of injustice. For instance, the person who frequently commits testimonial injustices (e.g. a white male police officer whose prejudices interfere with his ability to evaluate the truthfulness of testimonies) need not necessarily commit other kinds of epistemic injustices for us to be justified in attributing to them the vice of epistemic injustice.

III. | EPISTEMIC JUSTICE AND EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE: THEIR RELATION TO OTHER VIRTUES AND VICIES

a) | The relation of epistemic justice to other intellectual virtues

Having offered an account of the virtue of epistemic justice in the previous section (section II.a), I now examine how this trait relates to other intellectual virtues. As I will argue later (section IV), shedding light on the unique position of epistemic justice among the virtues is of both theoretical and practical import. But even if there were no other benefits to be drawn from

such an account, acquiring a better understanding of the virtue of epistemic justice and its relation to other virtues is itself of significant value.

Being epistemically just is a necessary condition for the possession of any character-based intellectual virtue. Consider, for instance, the case of the virtue of intellectual courage. The agent who possesses this virtue has “the willingness to conceive and examine alternatives to popularly held beliefs, perseverance in the face of opposition from others (until one is convinced one is mistaken), and the Popperian willingness to examine, and even actively seek out, evidence that would refute one’s own hypotheses” (Montmarquet 1987: 484; see also Alfano 2013: 129–30; Kidd 2019).¹¹ For an agent to be considered intellectually courageous, they must necessarily be just towards others in matters pertaining to epistemic goods (with this involving a regard for agents as knowers). For example, if one frequently commits testimonial injustice in an attempt to justify one’s own viewpoint, then this agent would not be considered intellectually courageous. The agent is committing an epistemic injustice to others because they lack the courage to examine evidence that might refute their own beliefs. In other words, being epistemically just is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for one to possess the virtue of intellectual courage. A person cannot be intellectually courageous if they are epistemically unjust. The motivation for acting in accordance with the virtue of intellectual courage stems partly from a disposition to act justly towards others in matters pertaining to epistemic goods (and this leads one, for example, to be intellectually courageous in the face of opposition). The disposition to be just originates from the virtuous person’s high regard for epistemic goods. Having a high regard for epistemic goods leads one to treat those goods with respect and to be just in epistemic dealings.

¹¹ Montmarquet (1987) understands the concept of intellectual courage as encompassing a group of virtues, rather than as one general virtue. This is not the case for more recent analyses of the virtue of epistemic courage (e.g. Alfano 2013; Kidd 2019).

The virtue of epistemic justice is a fundamental component of every character-based intellectual virtue. Consider, for instance, intellectual virtues such as inquisitiveness (see e.g. Watson 2015), open-mindedness (see e.g. Baehr 2011) and intellectual humility (see e.g. Hazlett 2012). All these virtues presuppose that the agent is just in epistemic matters. The person who possesses the virtue of inquisitiveness is just in her search for the truth and does not inflict epistemic injustices on others (e.g. she does not systematically and/or purposefully hinder someone else's inquiry for the truth in order to acquire epistemic goods herself). The open-minded person is just towards other knowers concerning epistemic goods and it is partly due to this disposition that she is able to keep an open mind (e.g. she refrains from committing epistemic injustices that would cloud her judgment of other people's viewpoints). The intellectually humble person is able to recognize their epistemic weaknesses and does not commit epistemic injustices (e.g. testimonial injustices) by refusing to recognize their own limitations.

Still, although the intellectual virtue of epistemic justice is part of every other intellectual virtue, it nonetheless remains a distinct standalone virtue. It is an epistemically valuable character trait which has certain unique motivational and behavioral dispositions. The epistemically just agent is driven to act out of her desire to promote epistemic justice (i.e., the immediate goal of this virtue) and her epistemic drives (i.e., the ultimate goal of every virtue). In addition, the virtue of epistemic justice has its own characteristic activity, i.e. acting justly in matters pertaining to epistemic goods—a characteristic activity which also differentiates it from other virtues.

In this short subsection, I have highlighted the unique position of epistemic justice among virtues and argued that intellectual virtues must not conflict with the virtue of epistemic justice. It is true that, in a sense, the virtue of epistemic justice unites all virtues because it is a fundamental feature of them all. However, my position should not be understood as arguing

for the “unity of virtues” thesis—i.e., that possession of one virtue implies possession of all other virtues. As already noted, being epistemically just is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the possession of other intellectual virtues. For instance, the intellectually courageous person is not simply just in matters pertaining to epistemic goods. They need to have other dispositions as well (e.g. the courage to seek evidence that would refute their viewpoint) in order to be considered courageous.

b) | The relation of epistemic injustice to other intellectual vices

Following my previous argument, according to which the virtue of epistemic justice is entailed by every other intellectual virtue, it seems intuitive to also argue that the vice of epistemic injustice is necessary for the possession of every other intellectual vice. In the vast majority of cases, one inflicts epistemic injustice on other knowers through the characteristic activity of each epistemic vice. This relates to Cassam’s (2019) conceptualization of epistemic vice as obstructing the acquisition and transmission of knowledge. This obstructive nature of epistemic vice can be understood as an epistemic injustice that one commits by not allowing oneself or others to acquire, retain, and transmit knowledge. My argument concerning the unique position of epistemic injustice among intellectual vices can be examined from a motivationalist viewpoint of vice, too. According to motivationalism, the agent who possesses epistemic vice necessarily possesses imperfect epistemic motivations. It is because of these imperfect epistemic motivations that agents often end up inflicting epistemic injustice on others (by not caring about epistemic goods and/or by actively spreading falsehoods).

To illustrate my argument, I will here examine how the corresponding vices of the intellectual virtues discussed in the previous subsection (III.a) relate to the intellectual vice of epistemic injustice. Epistemic courage has two corresponding vices: epistemic cowardliness (deficiency-vice) and epistemic rashness (excess-vice). The agent who has one of these two

traits necessarily also often exhibits the vice of epistemic injustice. On the one hand, the epistemically coward agent lacks the courage to examine alternatives to their beliefs and this often makes them unjust towards other knowers in matters pertaining to epistemic goods. For example, the white male police officer who lacks the courage to consider evidence that refutes their belief that black people are untrustworthy is bound to commit testimonial injustice and give deflated levels of credibility to black witnesses. On the other hand, the epistemically rash agent defends their views even when these are proven wrong and this often makes them unjust towards other knowers in matters pertaining to epistemic goods. For instance, the white male police officer who defends his belief that black people are untrustworthy, even when faced with unquestionable evidence showing this belief to be wrong, is bound to commit testimonial injustice and to give deflated levels of credibility to black witnesses.

The corresponding vices of inquisitiveness (i.e., lack of inquisitiveness), open-mindedness (i.e., closed-mindedness) and intellectual humility (i.e., intellectual arrogance) also presuppose that the agent who has these traits possesses the vice of epistemic injustice. The agent exhibits the vice of epistemic injustice the moment they act in accordance with the imperfect epistemic motivations that characterize these traits and perform the characteristic activities that are unique to each of them. Let us consider the above vices and their relation to epistemic justice in turn. A lack of inquisitiveness is characterized by a lack of interest in epistemic goods. This lack of interest obstructs the acquisition of epistemic goods. This trait brings about epistemic injustice for both the agent who possesses it and for others. It deprives both parties of the opportunity to engage in meaningful epistemic inquiry. For instance, the agent who lacks epistemic inquisitiveness is not motivated to pay attention to what is being said and might end up attributing to the speaker a different message from the one they intended to convey. Closed-mindedness can also be understood as involving the systematic infliction of epistemic injustice. The closed-minded person is unwilling or unable to “engage (seriously) with relevant

intellectual options” (Battaly 2018: 262). It is due to their closed-mindedness that a person is unfair to others by not giving the appropriate level of credence to what the other party is saying. One cannot be closed-minded and remain epistemically just. Being closed-minded necessarily entails that one is unjust to others in matters pertaining to epistemic goods. The same is the case for the intellectually arrogant person. The agent is not able to recognize their own epistemic limitations, which leads them to refuse to listen to others who may be experts (or at least more knowledgeable than they are) in a specific field. Consider, for example, the case of a white male arrogant politician who refuses to listen to a Nobel physicist on a topic relating to physics, persisting that their opinion is the right one. Through the trait of intellectual arrogance, the individual is epistemically unjust to others (by refusing to listen to those who are clearly experts).

As in the case of epistemic justice, although the trait of epistemic injustice is a necessary component of all intellectual vices, it nonetheless remains a stand-alone intellectual vice in itself. The agent who possesses this vice has certain imperfect epistemic motivations that lead them, in most cases, to obstruct the acquisition and retention of knowledge.¹² The vice of epistemic injustice also has its own unique characteristic activity: the agent is disposed to act unjustly in matters pertaining to epistemic goods. My discussion here should not be taken to support a “unity of vices” thesis—just as my discussion in the previous subsection was not meant to put forward a “unity of virtues” thesis. The possession of a singular vice does not necessarily entail that a person possesses all epistemic vices. Rather, my argument here is that if one possesses any intellectual vice besides epistemic injustice, then one necessarily also

¹² Here I am adopting the hybrid version of motivationalism and obstructivism for understanding the vice of epistemic injustice.

possesses epistemic injustice. In other words, epistemic injustice is a common underlying feature of every other intellectual vice.

IV. | CONCLUDING REMARKS

My arguments concerning the unique position of the virtue of epistemic justice among intellectual virtues and the unique position of the vice of epistemic injustice among intellectual vices highlight novel ways of studying virtues/vices that are of significant theoretical and practical import. In terms of theory, my account shows a new way in which scholars can attempt to account for intellectual virtues and vices—one that understands character-based virtues in terms of epistemic justice and injustice. This approach to the study of virtue and vice has the benefit of linking research in the concepts of epistemic justice/injustice with virtue epistemology, thus encouraging the exchange of ideas between these two areas of research. In addition, the practical importance of the unique positions of both epistemic justice among virtues and epistemic injustice among vices is readily apparent in areas such as character education. By providing education in epistemic justice, one contributes to the growth of intellectual virtues while simultaneously guarding against the possession of intellectual vice. The agent who refrains from committing epistemic injustices also refrains from acting in accordance with character-based epistemic vice. Moreover, by readily promoting epistemic justice, the agent exhibits a necessary component of every other intellectual virtue. In other words, the virtue of epistemic justice can serve as the focus of character education, through which educational practitioners can efficiently teach intellectual virtue and discourage the growth of vice.

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