ARTICLE

Intellectual Humility Without Open-Mindedness: How to Respond to Extremist Views

Katie Peters[1], Cody Turner[2] and Heather Battaly[1]

[1]University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, USA and [2]University of Massachusetts System, Boston, MA, USA
Corresponding author: Heather Battaly; Email: heather.battaly@uconn.edu

Abstract
How should we respond to extremist views that we know are false? This paper proposes that we should be intellectually humble, but not open-minded. We should own our intellectual limitations, but be unwilling to revise our beliefs in the falsity of the extremist views. The opening section makes a case for distinguishing the concept of intellectual humility from the concept of open-mindedness, arguing that open-mindedness requires both a willingness to revise extant beliefs and other-oriented engagement, whereas intellectual humility requires neither. Building on virtue-consequentialism, the second section makes a start by arguing that intellectually virtuous people of a particular sort—people with "effects-virtues"—would be intellectually humble, but not open-minded, in responding to extremist views they knew were false. We suggest that while intellectual humility and open-mindedness often travel together, this is a place where they come apart.

> The threat from right-wing terrorism in the United States—and Europe—appears to be rising. Of particular concern are White supremacists and anti-government extremists . . . . (Jones 2018)

As the epigraph suggests, we have a problem. Extremism and the expression of extremist views—like White supremacy and election-denial—are on the rise, particularly online (Jensen et al. 2018). One part of this problem is epistemic. We *know* these extremist views are false, evidentially unsound, and epistemically dangerous. What should we do about this? How should we respond *epistemically*?

   One might think the last thing we should do is reflect on our own intellectual shortcomings and re-think our own views. The last thing we should do is be intellectually humble, if that involves, as Leary et al. (2017: 340) have suggested, "recognizing that a particular personal belief may be fallible, accompanied by an appropriate attentiveness to limitations in the evidentiary basis of that belief and to one's own limitations in obtaining and evaluating relevant information." The worry is that

attending to shortcomings in our *own* evidence and re-thinking our *own* views might cause us to lose our knowledge when it is needed most (Hannon and Kidd 2022). If anything, it seems we should turn our attention and effort *outward* instead of inward: to ameliorate the deeply flawed reasoning of advocates of extremist views either by directly engaging with them or (if that is inadvisable) by fixing the structures in our shared epistemic environment by some other means. Or, so the argument goes.

Is this argument *right* that we should direct our effort outward instead of being intellectually humble? Our proposal is that part of it is right, and part of it is wrong. It is right that we shouldn't respond to extremist views, that we know are false, by re-opening inquiries into whether our own beliefs on the matter are true. We shouldn't be *open-minded*. But, it is wrong to equate intellectual humility with open-mindedness, and wrong to conclude that we shouldn't be *intellectually humble* or reflect on any of our epistemic limitations.

In contrast with the argument above, we contend that intellectual humility and open-mindedness are distinct and can come apart even though they often travel together. The bulk of the below aims to defend that proposal by focusing on ideologically extremist views (Cassam 2022) that *we know are false*. Our claim is that we *can* be intellectually humble in responding to such views, without being open-minded about them.

We also begin to argue that intellectual humility has a part to play in responding *appropriately* to such views, whereas being open-minded about them does not. In that vein, the argument above gets something else right: at best, intellectual humility would only be part of a much broader answer about how to epistemically respond to extremist views that we know are false—an answer that also includes looking outward. Even though the argument above wrongly advocates looking outward *at the expense* of intellectual humility, it is right that we should do something about the epistemic environment we all share. We shouldn't just abandon that environment and write-off advocates of extremist views, leaving them to their own devices. We think intellectual humility helps us see why, by cautioning us against the assumption that people with extremist views are irredeemable.

We proceed as follows. The opening section makes a case for distinguishing the concept of intellectual humility from the concept of open-mindedness. Building on Whitcomb et al.'s (2017) limitations-owning account of intellectual humility, and Battaly's (2018a) account of closed-mindedness, it argues that open-mindedness requires both (1) other-oriented engagement and (2) a willingness to revise extant beliefs, whereas intellectual humility requires neither. Employing the framework of virtue-consequentialism (Sosa 2007), section two makes a start on arguing that intellectually virtuous people of a particular sort—people with *effects-virtues*—would respond to extremist views that they know are false in ways that are intellectually humble but not open-minded. We conclude with objections and next steps.

1. Two differences between intellectual humility and open-mindedness

While the philosophical and psychological literature has produced a substantial body of work on open-mindedness (e.g., Baehr 2011a; Carter and Gordon 2014; Costa and McRae 1992; Fantl 2018; Kwong 2016; Riggs 2019; Stanovich and Toplak 2023), and a surfeit of analyses of intellectual humility (e.g., Alfano et al. 2021; Porter et al. 2020; Tanesini 2021; Whitcomb et al. 2017; Worthington et al. 2017), it has said relatively little about the differences between them (save Hoyle and Davisson 2023; Krumrei-Mancuso and Worthington 2023; Pritchard 2019; Spiegel 2012; Taylor 2016). Some analyses of intellectual humility even assume it (partly) consists of an open-minded tendency to take

the ideas of others seriously or to re-consider one's beliefs. It isn't just the psychological construct adopted by Leary et al. (2017) that does this, other constructs that measure intellectual humility via items for openness to belief-revision do so as well (e.g., Krumrei-Mancuso and Rouse 2016).[1] The other-oriented philosophical analyses of Priest (2017) and Pritchard (2019, 2020) make a similar move, not because they both construe intellectual humility as partly constituted by a willingness to revise beliefs (Pritchard's does; Priest's doesn't), but because they both construe it as partly constituted by a tendency to engage seriously with the ideas of others.[2] Below, we argue that intellectual humility is distinct from open-mindedness insofar as it does not partly consist in or conceptually entail open-mindedness. In so doing, we highlight two crucial differences: whereas open-mindedness partly consists of (1) a disposition to engage with the ideas of others and (2) a willingness to revise one's own beliefs, intellectual humility does not. We then identify several ways in which we can be intellectually humble in responding to extremist views that we know are false without being open-minded about those views. We note that all of what we say is entirely consistent with expecting a positive empirical correlation between intellectual humility and open-mindedness. The point is that it's one thing to claim that intellectual humility partly consists in or conceptually entails open-mindedness and quite another to claim that intellectual humility is positively correlated with open-mindedness. We deny the former and embrace the latter.

1.1. Open-mindedness

Let's begin with our proposed account of open-mindedness. What does it consist of? Following Baehr (2011a, 2011b), Riggs (2019), and the standard view in virtue epistemology, we assume open-mindedness is a disposition or trait, though we don't assume it is a virtue (more on this below). We likewise assume that (at a minimum) open-minded people are *not* closed-minded in Battaly's (2018a) sense. Open-minded people do *not* tend to dismiss relevant ideas and evidence that conflict with their own beliefs. In contrast, when competing ideas and evidence cross their paths, they tend to engage seriously with them (Baehr 2011b: 151). They tend to "hear them out," make an effort to understand them and evaluate them on their merits. They neither dismiss nor ignore the competing ideas and evidence that they encounter. Accordingly, we can begin with the following suggestion:

> (OM1) Open-mindedness is a tendency to: engage seriously with relevant ideas and evidence that compete with one's extant beliefs, when one encounters them.

What is wrong with this initial suggestion? For starters, it isn't sufficient for open-mindedness, since it allows those who hide from encounters with competing ideas to be open-minded. As Medina has forcefully argued, people who "need not to know"—i.e., who are willfully ignorant of competing ideas and deliberately wall themselves off—are *closed*-minded rather than open-minded (Medina 2013: 34). Clearly, this applies to people who intentionally hide in like-minded echo chambers (Nguyen 2020). But, in our view, people who unwittingly get stuck in epistemic bubbles suffer a similar fate due to no fault of their

---

[1] Leary et al.'s General Intellectual Humility Scale includes items such as "I reconsider my opinions when presented with new evidence" (Leary et al. 2017: 795); openness to belief-revision is one of the four factors of Krumrei-Mancuso and Rouse's (2015) Comprehensive Intellectual Humility Scale.

[2] For Pritchard (2020: 403) intellectual humility involves both "being willing to change one's mind if necessary" *and* "being open to points of view different from one's own"; Priest (2017) argues that intellectually humble people "tend to take the ideas . . . of others seriously."

own. One of the insights of feminist virtue theory (Daukas 2019; Dillon 2012) is that our environments impact our traits, and can do so despite our intentions; our environments can prevent us from having some traits and set us up to have others, e.g., they can make us epistemically unjust even while we are desperately trying not to be (Fricker 2007: 37). In short, the point is that to be open-minded, it won't be enough to seriously engage with relevant competing ideas *when one encounters them*. To be open-minded, one must encounter them. More specifically, one must be in an environment that affords opportunities to encounter them in the first place. And, once in such an environment, one must encounter them and engage seriously with them. Accordingly, people who fail to encounter competing ideas, and thereby fail to engage seriously with competing ideas, *won't* be open-minded, at least in their current environment. For this reason, we think people who hide in echo chambers or are stuck in epistemic bubbles aren't open-minded, the former because they intentionally eschew opportunities to encounter competing ideas, and the latter insofar as they are stuck in environments that don't afford them such opportunities—they unwittingly fail to encounter competing ideas.

Granted, there is more than one way to encounter relevant competing ideas and evidence: by crossing paths with those generated by *other* agents, and also by thinking them up *ourselves*. But, in our view, people who *only* encounter and engage seriously with relevant competitors they generate themselves aren't sufficiently open-minded either. Of course, they will be *more* open-minded than people who fail to encounter and engage seriously with any relevant competitors at all. But in environments that afford ample opportunities to encounter and engage seriously with the relevant competing ideas of *others*, failures to do so will be failures of open-mindedness.[3] Case in point: the White supremacist who intentionally walls himself off from our arguments against his beliefs is (in doing so) *failing* to be open-minded, even if he manages to generate and engage seriously with some relevant competing ideas on his own. Even if he is disposed to engage seriously with a sub-set of relevant competitors—those he generates himself— he *isn't* disposed to engage seriously with relevant competitors more broadly, and it is the latter disposition that is partly constitutive of open-mindedness, and that figures in (OM1).

To frame this differently, the above emphasizes interacting with the relevant competitors of *other* agents for good reason. Returning to the insights of feminist epistemology, none of us can generate all of the relevant competitors to our ideas ourselves (much less generate all the relevant competing evidence).[4] Happily, we don't need to, since once we get outside our own epistemic bubbles and echo chambers, our shared epistemic environment in the real world affords us ample opportunities to encounter and engage with the relevant competitors of others. If, as argued above, our failures to do so would be failures of open-mindedness, then there is an important sense in which open-mindedness is (1) partly *other*-oriented and partly constituted by *other*-oriented engagement. We think this marks a key difference between open-mindedness and intellectual humility, and return to it below. For now, suppose we eliminate the offending conditional in (OM1) and make its other-orientation explicit, bringing us to:

---

[3]Desert-island environments that isolate an agent from others likewise limit the degree of open-mindedness the agent can attain by limiting the relevant competitors they can encounter. See the point above about insights of feminist epistemology.

[4]Generating competing evidence can require years of work, teams of people, and empirical studies. Some competing evidence (e.g., experiences of sexism) might even be epistemically privileged. Note that our account is designed for humans (not omniscient beings) in the actual world.

(OM2) Open-mindedness is a tendency to engage seriously with relevant ideas and evidence that compete with one's extant beliefs including those supplied by other agents.

But, this still isn't sufficient for open-mindedness, since one can engage seriously with a broad range of relevant competitors, including those supplied by other agents while remaining closed-minded. To engage seriously with competing ideas and evidence, one must evaluate them on their merits by, e.g., asking relevant questions, evaluating whether arguments for them are valid or strong, offering relevant rebuttals and counter-evidence, and so forth. But, one can do all of these things while remaining closed-minded. Borrowing an example from Battaly (2018a: 280), imagine a conspiracy theorist who listens to you, correctly represents your view, and offers relevant counter-evidence, but only because she wants to change *your* mind and not because she is willing to revise her belief. This conspiracy theorist isn't interested in re-opening her own inquiry: she isn't being *open*-minded; she is only engaging seriously with your ideas because she wants to change them. This shows us that open-mindedness is also partly constituted by (2) a *willingness to revise one's beliefs*, and more specifically, by a willingness to revise one's beliefs due to one's tendency to engage seriously with relevant competitors (rather than due to some extraneous factor). We think this marks a second key difference between open-mindedness and intellectual humility. Accordingly, suppose we adopt:

(OM3) Open-mindedness is a tendency to engage seriously with relevant ideas and evidence that compete with one's extant beliefs including those supplied by others, and a willingness to revise one's extant beliefs due to one's tendency to engage seriously with relevant competitors.

This still isn't quite right. The problem with (OM3) is that it restricts the scope of open-mindedness to cases in which we already have beliefs, and further restricts its locus to ideas and evidence that compete with those beliefs. But, the first thing to note is that we needn't already have beliefs about a topic to be open- or closed-minded in the way we approach it. Suppose, for instance, that we are inquiring into a topic for the first time, and haven't yet formed any beliefs about it. We can still be open- or closed-minded in the range of ideas and evidence we consider. Second, we can also be open- or closed-minded in the questions we ask about it, the methods we use to explore it, the sources and traditions we consult, and so forth. Accordingly, the locus of open- and closed-mindedness isn't exhausted by ideas and evidence and should be expanded to include what Battaly (2018a) terms "intellectual options," e.g., questions, methods, and sources. In short: in addition to excluding agents who are closed-minded about ideas and evidence that compete with their extant beliefs, our analysis needs to exclude agents who are closed-minded with respect to these other intellectual options, both in cases where they have extant beliefs and in cases where they don't. With that in mind, we propose the following as a working analysis of open-mindedness:

(OM*) Open-mindedness is a tendency to engage seriously with relevant intellectual options including those supplied by other agents, and where applicable a willingness to revise one's extant beliefs due to one's tendency to engage seriously with relevant intellectual options.

Note that in cases where we already have extant beliefs about a topic, including cases in which we reject extremist views, we won't be open-minded unless: (1) we *engage*

seriously with others at least insofar as they are sources of relevant competitors to our beliefs; and (2) we are *willing to revise our beliefs*, and more specifically, willing to revise them due to our tendency to engage seriously with relevant competitors.

1.2. Intellectual humility

Let's turn to intellectual humility and what it consists of. Following Whitcomb et al. (2017), we assume that intellectual humility is a disposition or trait that needn't be an intellectual virtue (see below). We further assume that (at a minimum) intellectually humble people are *not* arrogant, at least insofar as they *don't* overlook or downplay their own cognitive limitations, e.g., their ignorance and gaps in knowledge, their cognitive mistakes, and their deficits in cognitive skills. Quite the contrary, intellectually humble people are attentive to and own their cognitive limitations (Whitcomb et al. 2017).

Roughly, intellectually humble people are *attentive to* their cognitive limitations in the sense that their limitations come to mind; i.e., they aren't oblivious to their limitations. But, attentiveness won't be sufficient for intellectual humility, since agents whose cognitive limitations come to mind can still be in denial about them (i.e., refusing to believe they have them), complacent about them (i.e., refusing to care about them), or even hostile about them. Accordingly, intellectually humble agents must also *own* their cognitive limitations, where which characteristically involves: admitting them to themselves (rather than denying them), caring about them and taking them seriously (rather than being complacent), and feeling dismay or regret (rather than hostility) about them (Whitcomb et al. 2017: 517–519). In short, we follow the limitations-owning analysis of Whitcomb et al. (2017), whereby:

> (IH*) Intellectual humility is a tendency to be attentive to and own one's intellectual limitations.

Notably, owning one's limitations doesn't require *success* in changing them or having control over them. But, it does require *caring about* them and taking them seriously by *trying* to change (or mitigate) them. Accordingly, we can own limitations (e.g., implicit biases) that can only be changed gradually, and that (e.g., color-blindness) can't be changed at all. In our view, agents own limitations like these by admitting, *caring about*, and *trying* to change or mitigate them (e.g., via recommended strategies), even if they haven't succeeded in changing or mitigating them.

There are two crucial points to note about intellectual humility (IH*) as we understand it. First, it consists of a *self*-oriented, *intra*-personal, or *inwardly*-directed disposition, rather than an *other*-oriented, *inter*-personal, or *outwardly*-directed disposition. To explain, intellectual humility is a disposition toward one's *own* cognitive limitations. It is a stance one can take (or fail to take) toward cognitive features *oneself* (Whitcomb et al. 2017; Tanesini 2021). We think this is the right way to understand intellectual humility since we can't be intellectually humble about *someone else's* cognitive limitations.[5] That is a category mistake. For instance, I can't be intellectually humble about President Biden's errors in reasoning. I can be (e.g.) empathetic or understanding about Biden's errors, or (e.g.) disappointed, frustrated, or annoyed by them. But, I can't be intellectually humble about them because (I recognize that) they aren't *mine* to be humble about. In short, intellectual humility is a stance we can take

---

[5]Granted, one can *mis*-attribute someone else's limitations to oneself due to excessive humility. But, one can't be intellectually humble about cognitive limitations one *does* attribute to others.

(or fail to take) toward our *own* limitations or what we view as extensions of them; it isn't a stance we can take (or fail to take) toward the limitations of *others*.

Nor does intellectual humility, in and of itself, require engagement with others. As an inwardly-directed and self-oriented disposition, IH* does not *require* (1) a disposition to engage with others or with the intellectual options they supply. We think this, too, is the right way to understand intellectual humility, since there is nothing internally inconsistent or self-defeating about an isolated inquirer who is nevertheless intellectually humble. Adapting an example from Tanesini, a scientist who finds herself isolated and alone, with nobody to consult, can still be intellectually humble in conducting the lines of inquiry she carries out on her own. She can recognize that she "has made a mistake when an experiment produces results that are not credible," and can own her flawed experimental design by changing it (Tanesini 2016: 82).[6] In other words, intellectual humility is something an isolated agent can have when conducting inquiries by herself.[7] It *can* manifest in behaviors that are solely intrapersonal.

But, while intellectual humility doesn't itself *require* engagement with others, in contexts where one is already engaging with others for independent reasons, it *can* be manifested in interpersonal behaviors. To explain, in situations where we are *already* engaging with others—perhaps because we are already in a conversation—intellectual humility can be manifested in interpersonal behaviors like admitting one's limitations to others and deferring to others (in addition to intrapersonal behaviors like admitting them to oneself). In our view, though tendencies to perform these interpersonal behaviors aren't required for having IH*, since we needn't be in contexts of engagement to have it, they can be manifestations of IH* given that (and because) the context is already one of engagement. Here, the point is that while IH* *can* be manifested in interpersonal behaviors, it needn't be, and doesn't by itself entail interpersonal behaviors.

Intellectual humility can also be *causally* connected to other-oriented engagement. Engaging can be a "downstream" product of intellectual humility, e.g., when one seeks out others to gain knowledge as a result of *intra*personally admitting one's own ignorance (Krumrei-Mancuso and Worthington 2023). It can likewise be an "upstream" contributor to intellectual humility. We might even *causally need* to engage open-mindedly with others to become aware of our stealthy limitations, in which case we should expect open-minded engagement to be part of the standard causal story of the development of IH* (Baehr 2022). But, this doesn't mean open-minded engagement is partly *constitutive* of intellectual humility; it just helps us *develop* intellectual humility.

One might object to our *intra*personal view of intellectual humility on the grounds that arrogance is *inter*personal. The thought is that if "arrogance is essentially an interpersonal matter" (Tiberius and Walker 1998: 381), then humility should be, too. Else, one risks the compatibility of humility and arrogance. Additionally, intrapersonal views like ours risk mistaking arrogance for a self-oriented disposition and precluding other-oriented manifestations of it—such as interrupting others and treating them with disdain. In reply, we do think arrogance consists of a self-oriented disposition to either be oblivious to one's limitations or under-own those that come to mind (e.g., by refusing to believe one has them, failing to take them seriously, or getting angry about them). Accordingly, we think arrogance doesn't itself *require* interpersonal behaviors like

---

[6]Tanesini 2021 construes acceptance of limitations as self-oriented and recognizes that intellectual humility and open-mindedness are distinct qualities (that are positively correlated).

[7]Arguably, an agent can even have intellectual humility on a desert-island, whereas isolation limits her ability to be open-minded. Our isolated agent might even acknowledge that her environment limits her ability to be open-minded, thereby owning a limitation that results from her environment.

interrupting others. Our isolated scientist could just as easily be arrogant in conducting her inquiries. She could be oblivious to, or in denial about, her errors, or unwilling to take the flaws in her design seriously. She could "stand in perfect isolation, absolutely indifferent to the behaviors of others, and yet be arrogant" (Tanesini 2016: 82). We note that interpersonal accounts of humility and arrogance struggle to include cases like these. But, while arrogance *needn't* be interpersonal, we think it *can* be manifested in interpersonal behaviors, provided that one is already in a context of engagement. The person who is already engaging with others can manifest arrogance by, e.g., talking over them, dominating the conversation, expecting others to defer, or getting angry when they don't. They can manifest arrogance by being haughty.[8] So, arrogance can, but needn't, be manifested in interpersonal behaviors. In this way, our account can explain the arrogance of the isolated individual *and* the arrogance of the braggart who dominates our conversations. Further, this means that IH* and interpersonal arrogance are incompatible in contexts of engagement—one can't simultaneously be IH* and interpersonally arrogant, given that one is already in a context of engagement.[9]

Summing up our view thus far: unlike open-mindedness, intellectual humility as IH* does not by itself entail or consist in (1) *other-oriented engagement*. The second crucial point is that IH* doesn't by itself require or consist in (2) a *willingness to revise beliefs* either, or so we'll try to show below.[10] By way of preview, Section 1.3 addresses a number of important ways that we can respond to extremist views with intellectual humility. For instance, it reminds us that we can be IH* in responding to extremist views by owning our tendencies to jump to conclusions about extremists, and owning the limitations in our powers to persuade them. But it argues that since these are cases of being humble about *extremists* and about *our own skills*, rather than about *extremist views themselves*, it isn't surprising that these humble responses can co-exist with refusals to revise our beliefs about extremist views. To show that IH* doesn't entail a willingness to revise our beliefs about *extremist views*, we narrow the target further. We argue that we can be IH* about our beliefs about *extremist views* by owning the limitations in our knowledge that they are false while being unwilling to revise our beliefs that they are false.

1.3. Intellectual humility without open-mindedness to extremist views

There are several ways in which we can be intellectually humble in responding to extremist views without being open-minded to those views and, specifically, without being willing to revise our beliefs that those views are false. This section focuses on five such ways.

(I) Beginning with a suggestion from Whitcomb et al. (2021), we can be intellectually humble by owning our tendencies to jump to conclusions about advocates of extremist views, and we can do so without being open-minded to their views. Since even rank-and-file Democrats and Republicans tend to jump to unsupported conclusions about one another (Pew Research Center 2022), it would be surprising if we didn't also draw unsupported conclusions about advocates of extremist views. For instance, following Whitcomb et al. (2021), suppose we are inclined to infer that White supremacists are irredeemable and inhuman. That tendency would be an intellectual limitation since the

---

[8]See also Roberts and Wood 2007: 236–256. Tanesini (2016 and 2021: 98–110) distinguishes haughtiness from arrogance, arguing that the former is other-oriented and the latter is self-oriented.

[9]Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising questions about arrogance.

[10]Unsurprisingly, IH* doesn't require or consist in a willingness to revise beliefs *due to a tendency to engage seriously with relevant competitors*. But, crucially, nor does it require or consist in a willingness to revise beliefs *simpliciter*.

conclusion that all White supremacists are beyond salvage outstrips our evidence. (By comparison, the conclusions that White supremacy is false, that White supremacists are dangerous racists whose biases produce their false beliefs, and that some of them won't change are supported by ample evidence.) Accordingly, one way to be intellectually humble is to own our tendency to jump to conclusions about extremists.

To illustrate this way of being intellectually humble, consider Daryl Davis, a Black musician who has convinced approximately two dozen Klan members to change their minds and leave the Ku Klux Klan. As documented in the film *Accidental Courtesy* (Ornstein 2016), Davis engages with individual Klan members and their beliefs by using counter-evidence to argue against their views. He does this because he sees the Klan members he approaches as deeply biased but redeemable people who are capable of listening to arguments, learning from them, and changing their minds. (He doesn't approach Klan members he thinks won't change.) Now, it is possible that Davis was never inclined to jump to unsupported conclusions about Klan members to begin with. But, the more likely story is that he owned such inclinations—he responded with intellectual humility—and as a result, learned to prevent himself from regarding Klan members as irredeemable (Whitcomb et al. 2021). Davis' case is controversial, not because we question whether he *is* intellectually humble in his response to White supremacy, but because we question whether his intellectual humility is excessive (servile) rather than virtuous.

Whether excessive or virtuous, our present point is that his response is intellectually humble without being open-minded to extremist views. Davis owns the aforementioned limitation while remaining unwilling to revise his belief that White supremacy is false. As Davis attests in the film, he categorically rejects the "separatist ideology" of the Klan and their belief in White supremacy. Accordingly, he does not respond to their extremist views open-mindedly, since doing so would require *both* engaging with others who offer relevant competitors to his beliefs *and* being willing to revise his beliefs. Though Davis engages seriously with the arguments of Klan members, he is not willing to revise his belief that White supremacy is false. Davis isn't trying to figure out what *he* should believe about White supremacy; instead, he's trying to convince Klan members to change *their* minds.

(II) Taking a second cue from Whitcomb et al. (2021), agents can own the limitations in their powers to persuade extremists, without being open-minded about extremist views. What does it look like to own limitations in one's powers of persuasion? To give some examples, an agent might recognize that he isn't quick-enough-on-his-feet and isn't skilled enough to rebut the arguments of extremists in real time or prevent the conversation from getting hijacked. One way to own such limitations is to resolve against directly engaging. Alternatively, an agent might admit to himself that he is bad at anticipating the objections extremists raise, and resolve to do more research before engaging.

Importantly, agents can do this without being open-minded to extremist views. To illustrate, consider Allison Gornik, who helped to convince Derek Black ("godson" of Klan spokesman David Duke) to change his mind about White supremacy (Saslow 2018). When Gornik and Black met in college, Black was a radio host for the Klan and the creator of Stormfront's online content for children. Black's subsequent renunciation of White supremacy and his departure from the Klan have been widely attributed to his debates with Gornik and other college friends (Saslow 2018). Gornik's case is illustrative of owning limitations in one's powers of persuasion without being open-minded to extremist views. Below, she reports not knowing how to argue against Black's views in their initial discussions:

"I talked to [Derek] about his . . . beliefs," Allison wrote . . . . "I'd like to be able to argue against them, and as of right now I can't do that effectively at all." (Saslow 2018: 129)

"A lot of it with Derek was asking him, 'Why is this what you believe?' Because I didn't have a background in racial science, and I didn't know how to make these arguments either." (Conti 2018)

Gornik owned these limitations in her powers to persuade Black by admitting them and trying to resolve them. When she encountered arguments of Black's that she couldn't rebut, she looked for rebutting evidence, which she subsequently shared with Black. Throughout, Gornik remained stalwartly opposed to White supremacy—she wasn't willing to revise her *own* beliefs on the matter; she engaged with Black in an effort to change *his* mind. Accordingly, her response wasn't open-minded, since open-mindedness requires a willingness to revise one's beliefs in addition to engagement.

Granted Gornik, like Davis, did engage; moreover, the ways that she owned her limitations presupposed that she would continue to engage. Rather than owning her limitations by resolving to *step back* from discussions with Black—viz., by resolving to *dis*engage—she conducted extensive research on her own time in order to refute his arguments during their engagements. As we argue in Section 2, there are some conditions in which we should not engage directly with advocates of extremist views, even if there are others in which we should. Whether or not Gornik was right to own her limitations in the ways she did (which is an open question), our present point is that she owned them without being open-minded about White supremacy.

While these are both important ways of being intellectually humble in responding to extremist views, it shouldn't be surprising that they can co-exist with refusals to revise our beliefs about extremist views. This is because they are cases of being humble about *extremists* and about *our own skills*, rather than about *extremist views themselves*. To explain, for all we know, people like Davis, who humbly prevent themselves from concluding that "advocates of extremist views are inhuman," may be willing to revise their beliefs about *extremists* (Fantl 2018: 162). And people like Gornik, who humbly own the limitations in their powers of persuasion, may be willing to revise their beliefs about *their own argumentative powers*. To show that IH* doesn't entail a willingness to revise our beliefs about extremist views, we must narrow our target to cases where we humbly own the limitations in our beliefs about *extremist views* while being unwilling to revise them. Below, we suggest three ways of doing this, all of which are ways of owning the limitations in our knowledge that extremist views are false.

(III) We have *many* arguments and *masses* of evidence against extremist views like White supremacy and election-denial. Our evidence is both broad and deep. Suppose we are assessing the comparative strength of our arguments against these views. In so doing, we can recognize and admit that some of our arguments aren't quite as strong as others (Hannon and Kidd 2022). And, we can care about these limitations and take them seriously by (e.g.) trying to avoid relying on these comparatively weaker arguments, and by trying to proportionately reduce confidence in our beliefs that White supremacy and election-denial are false. In doing these things, we humbly own the limitations in our evidence for our knowledge that White supremacy and election-denial are false. Now arguably, we can do these things *without being willing to revise our beliefs* that White supremacy and election-denial are false. First, let's assume that we would need to reduce our confidence in these beliefs in order to be willing to revise them. Importantly, we don't have direct control over reducing our confidence in these

(or any other) beliefs. Our view of owning accommodates this: though owning requires *caring about* our limitations, taking them seriously, and *trying* to change or mitigate them, it doesn't require *success* in changing or mitigating them. Accordingly, we can own these limitations by *caring about* and *trying* to proportionately reduce our confidence in our beliefs that White supremacy and election-denial are false, even if we don't succeed in proportionately reducing our confidence in these beliefs—even if we don't reduce our confidence at all. Consequently, we can own the limitations in our evidence for our beliefs that White supremacy and election-denial are false *without* being willing to revise these beliefs. Second, let's further assume that in order to be willing to revise well-supported beliefs like these, we would need to significantly reduce our confidence in them—minor reductions in confidence wouldn't be enough. Accordingly, even if owning *did* require success in changing or mitigating one's limitations, and thus *did* require a proportionate reduction of confidence in one's beliefs that White supremacy and election-denial are false, that proportionate reduction would be minor and insignificant. It wouldn't be significant enough to trigger a willingness to revise these beliefs, since there would still be so very many good reasons for us to endorse them.

(IV) Relatedly, our knowledge that White supremacy is false and Trump didn't win the 2020 election are the products of reliable belief-forming processes, including various forms of induction, deduction, perception, and testimony. In assessing these processes, we can recognize and admit that they are fallible—they don't always produce true beliefs. And, we can care about and try to mitigate that limitation by *trying* to proportionately reduce our confidence in these target beliefs. In other words, we can humbly own the limitations in the processes that led to our knowledge that White supremacy and election-denial are false. And, *mutatis mutandis*, we can do this without being willing to revise our beliefs that White supremacy and election-denial are false. First, we can own these limitations in our processes without succeeding in proportionately reducing our confidence in the target beliefs. Second, even if owning required a proportionate reduction, it wouldn't be significant enough to trigger a willingness to revise these beliefs since the processes that generated them are still reliable.

(V) Finally, we can presume that our degree of confidence in our beliefs that White supremacy and election-denial are false is quite high. Still, we can recognize and admit that we may hold these beliefs with less than 100% confidence (if we do). In Leary's words, we can recognize that "a particular personal belief may be fallible" (2017: 340). We can likewise care about and try to mitigate this limitation; i.e., we can humbly own this limitation in our degree of confidence in our target beliefs. But, *mutatis mutandis*, we can do this without reducing confidence in these beliefs and without being willing to revise them.

We propose (III)–(V) as cases of intellectual humility without open-mindedness.[11] These are cases in which we humbly own the limitations in our knowledge that various extremist views are false, without being willing to revise our beliefs that those extremist views are false. Granted, we haven't fully analyzed what it means to be willing to revise beliefs. We note that epistemologists disagree about whether one would need to (significantly) lower one's confidence in strongly held beliefs in order to be willing to revise them: e.g., Fantl (2018) seems to endorse this requirement, whereas Pritchard (2019, 2021) denies it. While we have followed what we take to be Fantl's view, we won't

---

[11]Perhaps these agents aren't engaged in inquiry, since they aren't trying to figure out what to believe. But, this doesn't show *intellectual humility* is partly constituted by a willingness to revise beliefs. At best, it shows that *inquiring into a topic* is partly constituted by a willingness to revise beliefs.

be adjudicating this dispute here.[12] Our claim is that *if* being willing to revise strongly held beliefs requires (significantly) lowering one's confidence in them, then one can be intellectually humble about strongly held beliefs without being willing to revise them. We take (III)–(V) to demonstrate this because, in our view, owning doesn't entail success in lowering confidence in one's beliefs, and even if it did, our reliability, evidence for, and confidence in our beliefs that these extremist views are false are all so strong that we could own their minor shortcomings (e.g., their fallibility) without significantly lowering our confidence.[13]

   If we are correct that owning doesn't entail success in mitigating limitations, then any minor adjustments we might make to our confidence wouldn't be *manifestations* of humility, but *causal consequences* of it. Importantly, this also applies when agents are both intellectually humble and open-minded about beliefs they do *not* know, e.g., that X will win the next election. In our view, their willingness to revise such beliefs doesn't *manifest* their humility, though it can be a *causal consequence* of it, e.g., when owning their limitations *leads* them to sufficiently reduce confidence in their beliefs, triggering a willingness to revise them. Notably, such humility might *not* lead agents to be willing to revise their beliefs, e.g., when one humbly acknowledges and cares about the weakness of one's reasons for a belief, but has an "emotional, psychological, or some other "block" that prevents them from being open" to revising it (Spiegel 2012: 35)—or, as we would put it, prevents them from sufficiently reducing confidence in their beliefs. This phenomenon indicates that humbly owning a belief by owning "limitations in the evidentiary basis of that belief" (Leary et al. 2017: 340) is one thing, while being willing to revise it is another (see Krumrei-Mancuso and Worthington 2023; and Whitcomb et al. 2017). Agents can do the former without doing the latter.

   Crucially, we have focused on *extremist* views that we know are false because they make the hunting easy. If we are going to find cases of IH* without OM* anywhere at all, we are going to find them in examples like (III)–(V), in which the beliefs in question are already known, and either amply supported by evidence, generated by reliable processes, or held with a high degree of confidence. To find additional cases of IH* without OM*, we advise starting with other amply-supported, reliably-produced beliefs of ours that we know, and then expanding the search to include hinge beliefs about which one might have a "block" that prevents one from being willing to revise them. If our arguments prove viable, then intellectual humility and open-mindedness *can* come apart, even if the cases in which they *do* come apart tend to be rarefied, and they usually travel together.

   Throughout, we have tried to describe the *traits* of open-mindedness and intellectual humility in normatively neutral terms, on the assumption that they *needn't* be intellectual virtues. Following the pluralist trend in virtue epistemology, we acknowledge that there is more than one way for a trait to be an intellectual virtue. Roughly, a trait will be a Reliabilist *effects*-virtue insofar as it tends to produce a preponderance of good epistemic effects, e.g., true beliefs (see, e.g., Sosa 2007). Importantly, Reliabilist effects-virtues aren't exhausted by hard-wired faculties and acquired skills. Character traits like open-mindedness and intellectual humility will be Reliabilist *effects*-virtues if they are reliable—if they tend to produce a preponderance of true beliefs or other good epistemic effects (see, e.g., Baehr 2011b: 52–54, 60–62; Sosa 2015: 48). Whereas, for character traits

---

[12]Arguably, on Pritchard's (2021) view, it is only after agents hear good counter-evidence and when actual belief-revision is called for that they count as being willing to revise their beliefs. But, we think agents can be willing to revise their beliefs even when they shouldn't actually revise them.

[13]We are unaware of any studies in psychology that address whether agents can be intellectually humble about their beliefs while being *unwilling* to revise them. But see Colombo et al. (2020), Hook et al. (2017), and Price et al. (2015) which explore related claims.

like open-mindedness and intellectual humility to be Responsibilist *character*-virtues, they must be partly constituted by good epistemic motives (e.g., for truth), and good judgment (*phronesis*) in epistemic contexts (see, e.g., Baehr 2011b; Zagzebski 1996). While the traits of open-mindedness and intellectual humility are often virtues of both sorts, they can fail to be virtues of either sort. They fail to be character-virtues when the agent is badly motivated (e.g., caring only about "looking smart") or exercises bad judgment by being "so open-minded that their brains fall out" or so humble that they (e.g.) obsessively focus on their limitations. And, they fail to be effects-virtues when they produce a preponderance of bad epistemic effects.

Below we *begin* to argue that being open-minded in response to extremist views might produce a preponderance of bad epistemic effects, whereas, being intellectually humble might avoid that fate.[14] Put differently, we begin to argue that intellectually virtuous people (here, people with effects-virtues) might respond humbly but not open-mindedly to extremist views they know are false, in which case we should do the same. With this in mind, Section 2 amasses some support for the claim that responding open-mindedly to extremist views can produce bad epistemic effects, whereas responding humbly can avoid those bad effects. In our view, the effects of open-minded and intellectually humble responses can diverge because only the former require us (1) to *engage with others* and (2) to be *willing to revise our beliefs*. We do not pretend to canvass all of the epistemic effects of such responses. Nor do we attempt to draw definitive conclusions about whether responding open-mindedly would indeed produce a *preponderance* of bad epistemic effects or whether responding humbly not (as this is an empirical matter). Our goal is to provide initial reasons for taking such a view seriously since it is often overlooked in the literature.

We noted above that the trait of IH* does not require success in changing or mitigating one's limitations. Accordingly, one might wonder whether IH* is even a candidate for effects-virtue, given the latter's focus on successful effects.[15] In our view, IH* *is* a candidate for effects-virtue, since a quality needn't *require* the production of good effects in order to *produce* good effects (see Baehr 2011b: 52–54). IH* will be an effects-virtue just as long as it *produces* a preponderance of good effects.[16] So, while it is true that successfully changing or mitigating one's limitations is not *required* for owning them via IH*, one will sometimes—perhaps often—be able to change or mitigate one's limitations, increasing one's strengths and knowledge and thereby producing good epistemic effects. And, even in cases where one is unable to change or mitigate one's limitations, one might still produce the good epistemic effect of knowing what one's limitations are.

2. How to respond to extremist views: building a case for IH* without OM*

Responding open-mindedly to extremist views can produce bad epistemic effects. These include bad epistemic effects on *us*, as agents who know the extremist views are false, as

---

[14]While our arguments are restricted to people with *effects*-virtues, and while we focus on the bad epistemic *effects* of responding open-mindedly to extremist views, we think such responses are also excessive, manifesting bad judgment. Readers who are skeptical of virtue-consequentialism are welcome to think of our arguments along those lines.

[15]We thank an anonymous referee for this point.

[16]Whitcomb et al. (2021) argue that the *trait* of intellectual humility needn't be a virtue, since the *trait* needn't be driven by motives for epistemic goods or exhibit good judgment. In short, they think the trait of intellectual humility can, but needn't, be a character-virtue. Above, we are concerned with the conditions under which the trait of IH* would be an effects-virtue. Character traits are candidates for Reliabilist effects-virtues, as Sosa (2015) and Baehr (2011b) have argued.

well as bad epistemic effects on *advocates of extremist views*, and on the broader *epistemic environment*. We argue that responding humbly can avoid these bad epistemic effects.

2.1. Responding open-mindedly to extremist views

We already know that (e.g.) Trump didn't win the 2020 election, and that White supremacy is false. Given that we know these things, what are the possible effects on *us* of responding open-mindedly to views to the contrary? Do we risk losing our knowledge? Might our confidence in our convictions drop? Might we amass epistemic opportunity costs? We argue that even if we aren't at risk for outright knowledge-*loss*, our confidence in our convictions might drop, and we might incur epistemic opportunity costs.

To respond open-mindedly to extremist views, we would need to do two things: (1) engage with extremist views that compete with our beliefs, *and* (2) be willing to revise our beliefs that the extremist views are false. And, we would need to do these things despite our knowledge that the extremist views are false. Let's grant that unless we are in a hostile epistemic environment, responding open-mindedly to extremist views isn't likely to result in the outright *loss* of our beliefs or in changing our minds. Nor is it likely to result in the outright *loss* of justification or knowledge.[17] Even so, responding open-mindedly to extremist views in non-hostile environments might distort our confidence (and, perhaps, our degree of justification) in our beliefs; it might lower our confidence (and justification) when it shouldn't be lowered.[18] Why might it do this? The short answer is that even if OM*'s "revision" requirement wouldn't put us at risk for lowering our confidence, its "engagement" requirement would. Arguably, OM*'s revision requirement does put us at risk for lowering our confidence—we would need to lower our extremely high degree of confidence in our belief that (e.g.) White supremacy is false in order to consider revising it (see Section 1.3). But, even if we set that point aside, the repetition and fluency effects of engaging with extremist views might still weaken our conviction that they are false. Empirical research (Begg et al. 1992) suggests that frequent exposure to a claim can increase both fluency in processing it and confidence in the truth of the claim while decreasing confidence in claims that conflict with it. Accordingly, regular engagement with extremist views might weaken confidence in our beliefs that they are false. Repeated exposure to (e.g.) racist views like White supremacy might also prime us to have higher levels of confidence than we should in false claims about Black persons (e.g., that most mass shootings in the US have been committed by Black men).[19] In short, repeated engagement with extremist views might saddle us with distorted confidence (and justification) in two ways: too little confidence in our beliefs that they are false, and too much confidence in claims that are consistent with them.

Adding insult to injury, we might also waste epistemic resources by engaging with extremist views. By spending our time engaging with extremist views that we already *know* are false, we can incur epistemic opportunity costs. We might have been spending that time on more valuable intellectual endeavors, and on our own projects and questions, rather than questions that have already been asked and answered at length.

---

[17]Battaly (2018b) argues that in hostile epistemic environments we might lose belief, justification, and knowledge due to ubiquity of exposure.

[18]It might lower our confidence without outright erasing it. As Fantl (2018) argues, our confidence shouldn't be lowered because we *know* that the extremist views in question are false and *know* that there must be something wrong with arguments in favor of them.

[19]See *The Violence Project* database https://www.theviolenceproject.org/mass-shooter-database/. On priming effects, see Levy (2017).

Accordingly, responding open-mindedly to extremist views can have bad epistemic effects on *us* as knowledge-possessing agents. We may retain our knowledge that extremist views are false, but at the cost of lowered confidence in our beliefs, missed epistemic opportunities, and an increased susceptibility to believing false claims consistent with extremist views.

Importantly, responding open-mindedly to extremist views may also have bad effects on the epistemic character of *advocates of extremist views*. To explain, responding open-mindedly can signal to advocates that they are not just epistemic agents, which they are, but epistemic agents whose level of credibility on the topic merits a willingness on our part to revise our beliefs, which they are not. Put differently, responding open-mindedly can grant advocates a credibility excess, wrongly signaling to them that their credibility warrants re-opening our own inquiry into the topic. As Medina (2013: 60) has argued, credibility excess can facilitate vices like intellectual arrogance in those on whom it is bestowed.

Finally, responding open-mindedly to extremist views can also produce bad effects on the broader *epistemic environment*. Here, we focus primarily on responding online. Responding open-mindedly to extremist views online can disseminate falsehoods to third-party viewers, saddle them with repetition and priming effects, and signal to them that advocates of extremist views are credible sources on the topic, though they are not.

First, open-mindedly engaging with advocates of extremist views online can facilitate the spread of misinformation to third-parties, and increase the availability of misinformation in the environment, making it easier to encounter. Depending on how influential the knowledge-possessing agent is (e.g., how many followers they have), the sheer act of engaging, instead of ignoring, advocates of extremist views can algorithmically boost their views, leading to the spread of falsehoods and the pollution of the epistemic environment. Second, open-mindedly engaging with advocates of extremist views can also platform them. That is, it can generate the impression in third-party observers that extremist views are worth taking seriously, and their advocates are credible sources. As Levy (2019) argues, platforming can create higher-order evidence in favor of the claims of the person platformed and their credibility as a source. Put differently, responding open-mindedly could spread credibility excess and begin to cement it in the environment. Third, all of this might spread negative priming and repetition effects to third-parties, leading to the acquisition of false beliefs in at least some, and, reduced confidence in the falsity of extremist views in others.

Clearly, we haven't canvassed all the potential effects of responding open-mindedly to extremist views and more work remains. Since we haven't explored whether responding open-mindedly might also produce some good epistemic effects, we aren't in a position to draw conclusions about the *preponderance* of effects it might produce. Still, we hope to have amassed initial inductive support for the view that responding open-mindedly can produce some bad epistemic effects, a point that is often overlooked in the literature. Relatedly, we might wonder whether Daryl Davis's *engagement* with Klan members, even though it wasn't open-minded, might have produced bad epistemic effects for Davis, his interlocutors, and the epistemic environment (Ferkany 2019: 410).

2.2. Responding to extremist views with intellectual humility but not open-mindedness

Let's turn to responding to extremist views with intellectual humility but not open-mindedness. One might worry that responding humbly to extremist views would be just as bad for *us,* for *advocates of extremist views,* and for the *epistemic environment* as responding open-mindedly, since it would also risk producing the bad effects above. But

we think intellectually humble responses can avoid these bad epistemic effects because they require neither (1) engagement with extremist views and their advocates, nor (2) any willingness to revise our beliefs.

For starters, intellectually humble responses may not put *us* at risk for repetition and priming effects, for incurring epistemic opportunity costs, or for lowering our confidence in our beliefs that extremist views are false. To explain, because IH* is self-oriented and directed toward our *own* limitations, we can respond humbly to extremist views without regularly engaging with them or their advocates. An agent needn't regularly engage with White supremacy, or White supremacists, to realize that *she* is likely to cast them as irredeemable monsters or that *she* is largely ignorant about the argumentative moves they make, or that *her* processes and beliefs are fallible, and some of *her* evidence is comparatively weaker. She might come to these realizations through reflection on the fallibility of human reason, or on her own poor reasoning and ignorance, after only limited exposure to White supremacy. Nor need she repeatedly engage with White supremacy or White supremacists to own these cognitive limitations. She can acknowledge and care about her limitations by admitting them to herself and developing plans to try to address them, none of which requires such engagement. Importantly, owning her limited abilities in persuasion might even tell *against* direct engagement with advocates of extremism, especially in cases where her limitations in this regard are numerous and the risks of platforming are high.

Since humble responses don't require repeatedly engaging with extremist views or their advocates, they can avoid the negative repetition and priming effects addressed above. They can likewise avoid any reductions of confidence (and justification) in the falsity of extremist views that might result from repetition effects (see Hannon and Kidd 2022). Humble responses can also avoid the epistemic opportunity costs of repeated engagements, freeing up resources for more worthwhile epistemic projects. Humble responses that succeed in avoiding these negative effects may even produce some positive effects for *us*, including self-knowledge about our own limitations, and knowledge about the status of advocates as human epistemic agents (not monsters).

But importantly, even if intellectually humble responses *can* avoid these negative effects, not all humble responses *will*. Only virtuously humble responses will avoid them; excessively humble (servile) responses won't. With that in mind, let's revisit the case of Allison Gornik, who owned the limitations in her powers to persuade Derek Black by conducting extensive research on White supremacy. Gornik engaged frequently and extensively with Black, and with other sources of White supremacy and conducted research on her own time. Accordingly, she is a candidate for repetition and priming effects, and for having less confidence than she should in the falsity of White supremacy. She is also a candidate for epistemic opportunity costs, given the immense time and effort she devoted to preparing arguments and engaging with Black. Does that mean she was excessively, rather than virtuously, humble in the way she owned her limitations?

That is a live question, whose answer depends on the *preponderance* of effects her response produced, including effects for her, Black, and the environment. Though we won't be drawing any conclusions about the preponderance of effects of humble responses, it is worth pointing out that Gornik's case would be hard to judge. Even if the epistemic effects *for Gornik* were predominantly negative, given the magnitude of her burden, the overall *preponderance* of epistemic effects might still have been positive. Black did change his mind (Saslow 2018) and is now an advocate against White supremacy and racism, so the epistemic effects for him and the broader environment might have been positive. But, Gornik's way of owning limitations also prioritized engagement with Black, which platformed him, putting fellow students at risk for negative repetition and priming effects. While it is unclear whether Gornik's humble

response produced a *preponderance* of good or bad effects, and unclear whether it was virtuous or excessive, we can say this much. Though there will be some cases in which we should own our limitations while continuing to engage directly with advocates of extremist views—e.g., when our limitations are few and we are likely to persuade them to change their minds with minimal negative impact overall—there will be many other cases in which we should own our limitations while *opting out* of direct engagement—e.g., when our limitations are numerous, we are unlikely to succeed, and the risks of negatively impacting ourselves and the environment are high. Does opting out of direct engagement mean we should write-off advocates of extremist views, leaving them to their own devices?

With that question in mind, let's explore some potential effects of humble responses on *advocates of extremist views*. As illustrated above, intellectual humility can help prevent us from jumping to the conclusion that they lack the capacity to reason and learn. It can help prevent us from regarding *them* as irredeemable while allowing us to categorically reject *their views*. It can help us block the inferential leap from denying what they say to denying their epistemic agency (Gunn 2023). In helping to prevent us from drawing such conclusions and helping us see advocates of extremist views as epistemic agents, responding humbly can support virtues like intellectual beneficence. Roughly, this virtue directs our attention outward toward helping other epistemic agents gain epistemic goods. While the virtue of intellectual beneficence won't always advise us to help other epistemic agents, much less advocates of extremist views (since the risks of bad effects will sometimes be too high), it will *sometimes* advise us to help advocates, in cases where the costs of doing nothing to counteract extremist views would be even higher. More specifically, intellectual beneficence will sometimes advise us to help advocates through direct (typically private) engagement, but due to its risks, will more often advise us to help advocates indirectly through improvements to our shared epistemic environment. These can take the form of (e.g.) structural changes to content algorithms that reduce echo chambers and the spread of falsehoods (Rini 2017), and increased access to education and critical thinking (McIntyre 2018). In short, humble responses can support the virtue of intellectual beneficence by helping us acknowledge the epistemic agency of advocates of extremist views. Together, intellectual humility and beneficence can help prevent us from simply writing them off, even in cases where direct engagement would be inadvisable.

What about cases where beneficence advises direct engagement? Here, we might worry that responding humbly but not open-mindedly would only make things worse for advocates of extremist views—causing their views and epistemic vices to become even more entrenched. As Fantl (2018: 169) notes: "It is rational to want to be unreceptive to those whose minds are closed against you. If your interlocutor and audience were fully aware of your closed-minded attitudes toward their arguments, it would make sense for them to want to be unreceptive to you." That is, it would make sense for them to respond in kind by doubling-down on their beliefs rather than being willing to change their minds. In reply, responding humbly might help us avoid these effects because it can help us see and engage with advocates as epistemic agents who have the capacity to learn. It can help us acknowledge their epistemic agency, which in turn might give advocates a reason to acknowledge us as agents and eventually become willing to change their minds.[20] Together with beneficence, it can help us demonstrate that we care both about maintaining knowledge ourselves and about helping other epistemic agents gain knowledge, which explains why we aren't willing to change our minds and why we are engaging with advocates. Megan Phelps-Roper 2017, who

---

[20]Relatedly, see Battaly (2021), McCormick (2023), Smith (2023).

attributes her departure from the Westboro Baptist Church to her conversations with friends online, captures this point in her 2017 TED talk: "My friends on Twitter didn't abandon their beliefs or their principles, only their scorn. They channeled their infinitely justifiable offense and came to me with pointed questions tempered with kindness and humor . . . . They approached me as a human being and that was more transformative than two full decades of outrage." Phelps-Roper's friends weren't open-minded, but they were (presumably) intellectually humble in coming to see her as an epistemic agent and in owning their tendency to conclude otherwise. Phelps-Roper responded by recognizing their agency, and (eventually) by being willing to change her mind.

Relatedly, we might worry that responding humbly in direct engagements with advocates of extremist views would produce the same negative effects for advocates as responding open-mindedly. In reply, humble responses that are transparently closed-minded can avoid these negative effects because they needn't assign advocates a credibility excess. Because they aren't open-minded, humble responses enable us to regard advocates of extremist views as epistemic agents *without* regarding them as credible sources about the matters at hand. They can thus avoid assigning credibility excesses to advocates and can avoid the negative effects on advocates that credibility excesses might cause.

Finally, let's turn to some potential effects of humble responses on the *epistemic environment*. Here, as above, the differences between humble and open-minded responses matter. Because humble responses don't require engaging with advocates of extremist views, they can avoid platforming them and spreading their views, avoiding repetition and priming effects on third parties. Owning the limitations in our powers of persuasion can even help us identify cases where we shouldn't engage—e.g., where our limitations are numerous, and we are unlikely to prevent the conversation from being hijacked.

But, what about cases where beneficence advises direct engagement, even online? Could humble responses still avoid the negative effects of platforming? Perhaps, if the humble agent is able to "responsibly platform" the advocate; i.e. if they have the requisite argumentative skills to head off the negative environmental effects associated with platforming. Of course, exactly which cases these are would be difficult to judge and one's argumentative limitations would need to be quite minor. But the main reason it is possible for humble, but not open-minded, responses to "responsibly platform" stems from the fact that humility does not entail a willingness to revise one's beliefs. Provided that the humble agent clearly and transparently communicates her unwillingness to revise her own beliefs and her aim to change the minds of advocates, she can avoid giving third-party observers the impression that advocates are credible sources. In bringing her argumentative powers to bear on the engagement, she also has the potential to refute the extremist views in question while minimizing their dissemination and repetition and priming effects on third parties.

We have suggested that responding open-mindedly to extremist views that we know are false can produce bad epistemic effects and that these bad effects can be avoided by responding humbly. Clearly, more work would need to be done to show that people with effects-virtues *would* respond humbly but not open-mindedly to extremist views that they know are false. But if that claim could be established, and if the behavior of people with effects-virtues is normative for our own behavior, then we, too, should respond to extremist views with intellectual humility but not open-mindedness.[21]

---

[21]See Colombo et al. (2020: 362).

3. Next steps

We close by offering eight key objections to our arguments and sketching the replies we would pursue to further defend them. (1) We suggested (roughly) that we shouldn't respond open-mindedly to extremist views, and that open-mindedness (OM*) only applies to views that are relevant. But, aren't extremist views irrelevant? (2) Does our (rough) suggestion that we be closed- rather than open-minded in responding to extremist views imply that we should stop being open-minded altogether? Or, does it imply a weaker claim that we shouldn't perform open-minded actions in a particular context? (3) We argued that responding open-mindedly to extremist views can produce bad epistemic effects. But, wouldn't a *virtuously* open-minded person ignore extremist views? Wouldn't engaging with extremist views be *excessively* open-minded?

In reply to (1), while the extremist views in question are neither true nor epistemically justified, they are nevertheless relevant because of how pervasive they are in the contemporary epistemic landscape. Since extremist views are widespread online in the digital age, they are unfortunately relevant. Regarding (2), we are not suggesting that a general disposition to be closed-minded would be an effects-virtue or that we should stop being open-minded altogether. Rather, we are merely building a case for closed-minded action in a specific context, viz., when we know that an extremist view is false. We think open-mindedness may have been crucial for coming to know that the extremist view was false in the first place, and may also be crucial for coming to know that we are in a context in which we should now be closed-minded about an extremist view. So, we are not rejecting dispositional open-mindedness, but merely building a case for closed-mindedness about extremist views we know to be false. Briefly, with respect to (3), our view is that one can't be *virtuously* open-minded unless one is first open-minded, viz., unless one manifests the trait of OM*. But ignoring extremist views doesn't manifest the trait of OM*. Quite the contrary, ignoring extremist views manifests the trait of closed-mindedness (see Ahlstrom-Vij 2013: 103–104).

(4) Does our view apply to all ideologically extremist views, or just to White supremacy and election-denial? For instance, would it apply to ideologically extremist views like those of the Garrisonian abolitionists and to ideologically extremist views like flat-earthism that aren't morally repugnant? (5) What happens if we can't reply to a misleading defeater advanced by (e.g.) a White supremacist? If we were to respond closed-mindedly, would that cause us to lose our knowledge that their view is false? (6) Isn't our argument dangerous? Won't extremists think that they know that (e.g.) White supremacy is true, and couldn't they follow our (rough) recommendation to be closed-minded? Relatedly, how do *we* know that we are in a situation that might call for intellectual humility but not open-mindedness? How do we know the extremist view in question is a false one?

In response to (4), our argument doesn't apply to ideologically extremist views that are true, like Garrisonian Abolitionism, and does apply to flat-earthism, which is not morally repugnant. Ultimately, our argument applies to views *we know are false*, even if they aren't ideologically extreme or morally repugnant. Here, we focus on ideologically extremist views because they make the hunting easy: in looking here, we are likely to encounter views that we know are false. Further, we focus on ideologically extremist views like White supremacy and election denial, rather than flat-earthism, because these views are more prevalent. Regarding (5) and the dogmatism paradox, the jury is out on whether responding closed-mindedly to the misleading defeater of an advocate would cause us to lose our knowledge that their view is false (Kripke 1972). But, even if it did, the effects of responding open-mindedly might still be worse. In reply to (6), extremists might think that they know that (e.g.) White supremacy is true, but they are wrong—White supremacy

is false, the belief that they know it is false, and the belief that they are in a situation in which we recommend closed-mindedness is false. How do *we* know all of these things? The virtue epistemologist's answer is that we know when we are, and when we aren't, in situations that might call for closed-mindedness by exercising intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness. As noted above, open-mindedness might be required for coming to know that an extremist view is false in the first place, as well as for knowing that one is in a situation that calls for closed-mindedness about an extremist view.

(7) We have said that intellectual humility and open-mindedness often travel together in practice, even if we can draw conceptual distinctions between them. But since they can be driven by the same motivations (for epistemic goods), won't it be difficult for agents to separate the two?[22] Won't it be difficult for them to distinguish intellectual humility from open-mindedness in the first place, and then to exercise one without the other? Can we give agents any practical advice about how to do so? Finally, (8) Are we being irresponsible in focusing on the role of individuals in responding to extremism? Shouldn't we focus on structural changes?

Regarding (7), we have three pieces of practical advice for agents like Davis and Gornik who are trying to distinguish humble and open-minded responses, and then exercise the former but not the latter. First, since these agents are already engaged, they will need to focus on whether they are unwilling to revise their beliefs that extremist views are false. Second, they will need to be transparent about, and explain, their unwillingness to revise in a way that acknowledges the epistemic agency of their interlocutors. Accordingly, we advise recognizing the agency of one's interlocutors while resisting the urge to re-open one's own inquiry. This may not be easy, since the motivations that drive intellectually humble actions – e.g., motivations for epistemic goods—often push us to also re-open our own inquiries, even though the latter *isn't* advisable in these cases. To resist that urge, our third piece of advice is to remember that we have masses of evidence against extremist views like White supremacy, and shouldn't reduce our confidence in the belief that it is false. Finally, in reply to (8), it is crucial that we make structural changes in response to the proliferation of extremist views. We have suggested that intellectual beneficence has a role to play in motivating structural changes. But we have also acknowledged that individuals can, and have, found themselves with extremist interlocutors, in which case we hope to have provided some tools that can help them 1) avoid bad epistemic effects for themselves, without 2) making advocates and the epistemic environment worse.[23]

Competing interests. The authors have no competing interests.

References

Ahlstrom-Vij K. (2013). *Epistemic Paternalism*. London: Palgrave.

Alfano M., Lynch M.P. and Tanesini A. (eds.) (2021). *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Humility*. New York: Routledge.

Baehr J. (2011a). 'The Structure of Open-Mindedness.' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* **41**(2), 191–213.

Baehr J. (2011b). *The Inquiring Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baehr J. (2022). 'Limitations-Owning and the Interpersonal Dimensions of Intellectual Humility.' *Scientia et Fides* **10**(2), 69–82.

Battaly H. (2018a). 'Closed-Mindedness and Dogmatism.' *Episteme* **15**, 261–282.

Battaly H. (2018b). 'Can Closed-Mindedness be an Intellectual Virtue?' *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* **84**, 23–45.

Battaly H. (2021). 'Engaging Closed-Mindedly with your Polluted Media Feed.' In M. Hannon and J. de Ridder (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology*, pp. 312–324. New York: Routledge.

Begg I.M., Anas A. and Farinnaci S. (1992). 'Dissociation of Processes in Belief: Source Recollection, Statement Familiarity, and the Illusion of Truth.' *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* **121**(4), 446–458.

Carter J.A. and Gordon E.C. (2014). 'Open-Mindedness and Truth.' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* **44**(2), 207–224.

Cassam Q. (2022). *Extremism*. New York: Routledge.

Colombo M., Strangmann K., Houkes L., Kostadinova Z. and Brandt M.J. (2020). 'Intellectually Humble, but Prejudiced People. A Paradox of Intellectual Virtue.' *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* **12**, 353–371.

Conti A. (2018). 'How to Talk Someone out of White Nationalism.' *Vice*. https://www.vice.com/en/article/3ked5w/i-saved-my-schools-notorious-racist-from-white-nationalism. Accessed July 28, 2023

Costa P.T. and McRae R.R. (1992). 'Normal Personality Assessment in Clinical Practice: The NEO Personality Inventory.' *Psychological Assessment* **4**(1), 5–13.

Daukas N. (2019). 'Feminist Virtue Epistemology.' In H. Battaly (ed), *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, pp. 379–391. New York: Routledge.

Dillon R. (2012). 'Critical Character Theory.' In S.L. Crasnow and A.M. Superson (eds), *Out from the Shadows*, pp. 83–114. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fantl J. (2018). *The Limitations of the Open Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ferkany M.A. (2019). 'The moral limits of open-mindedness.' *Educational Theory* **69**(4), 403–419.

Fricker M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gunn H. (2023). 'Listening for Epistemic Community.' In Q. Cassam and H. Samarzija (eds), *The Epistemology of Democracy*. New York: Routledge.

Hannon M. and Kidd I.J. (2022). 'Political Conviction, Intellectual Humility, and Quietism.' *Journal of Positive Psychology* **18**(2), 233–236.

Hook J. N., Farrell J.E., Johnson K.A., van Tongeren D.R., Davis D.E. and Aten J.D. (2017). 'Intellectual Humility and Religious Tolerance.' *Journal of Positive Psychology* **12**(1), 29–35.

Hoyle R.H. and Davisson E.K. (2023). 'Forms of Intellectual Humility and their Associations with Features of Knowledge, Belief, and Opinions.' In V. Ottati and C. Stern (eds), *Divided*, pp. 101–119. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenson M., James P., LaFree G., Safer-Lichtenstein A. and Yates E. (2018). 'The Use of Social Media by United States Extremists.' National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_PIRUS_UseOfSocialMediaByUSExtremists_ResearchBrief_July2018.pdf. Accessed Aug 6, 2023.

Jones S. G. (2018). *The Rise of Far Right Extremism in the United States*. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Kripke S. (1972). *Philosophical Troubles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Krumrei-Mancuso E.J. and Rouse S.V. (2016). 'The Development and Validation of the Comprehensive Intellectual Humility Scale.' *Journal of Personality Assessment* **98**(2), 209–221.

Krumrei-Mancuso E.J. and Worthington E.L. (2023). 'Links Between Intellectual Humility and Open-mindedness: Does Strength of Belief Matter?' In V. Ottati and C. Stern (eds), *Divided*, pp. 81–110. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kwong J. (2016). 'Open-mindedness as Engagement.' *Southern Journal of Philosophy* **54**(1), 70–86.

Leary M. R., Diebels K.J., Davisson E.K., Jongman-Sereno K.P., Isherwood J.C., Raimi K.T., Deffler S.A. and Hoyle R.H. (2017). 'Cognitive and Interpersonal Features of Intellectual Humility.' *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* **43**(6), 793–813.

Levy N. (2017). 'The Bad News about Fake News.' *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* **6**(8), 20–36.

Levy N. (2019). 'No-Platforming and Higher-order Evidence, or Anti-Anti-No-Platforming.' *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* **5**, 487–502.

McCormick M.S. (2023). 'Engaging with Fringe Beliefs: When, Why, and How.' *Episteme*. Doi: 10.1017/epi.2023.33.

McIntyre L. (2018). *Post-Truth*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Medina J. (2013). *The Epistemology of Resistance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nguyen T. (2020). 'Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles.' *Episteme* **17**(2), 141–161.

Ornstein M. (Director). (2016). *Accidental Courtesy*. Atlanta, GA: Sound and Vision.

Pew Research Center. (2022). 'As Partisan Hostility Grows, Signs of Frustration with the Two-Party System.' https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/08/09/as-partisan-hostility-grows-signs-of-frustration-with-the-two-party-system/. Accessed July 25, 2023.

Phelps-Roper M. (2017). 'I Grew Up in the Westboro Baptist Church. Here's Why I Left.' TED Talk. https://www.ted.com/talks/megan_phelps_roper_i_grew_up_in_the_westboro_baptist_church_here_s_why_i_left?language=en.

Porter T., Elnakouri A., Meyers E.A., Shibayama T., Jayawikreme E. and Grossman I. (2020). 'Predictors and Consequences of Intellectual Humility.' *Nature Reviews Psychology* **1**, 524–536.

Price E., Ottati V., Wilson C. and Kim S. (2015). 'Open-Minded Cognition.' *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* **41**(11), 1488–1504.

Priest M. (2017). 'Intellectual Humility: An Interpersonal Theory.' *Ergo* **4**(16), 1–18.

Pritchard D. (2019). 'Disagreement, Intellectual Humility, and Reflection.' In W. Da Silva Filho (ed), *Thinking about Oneself*, pp. 59–71. Cham: Springer.

Pritchard D. (2020). 'Educating for Intellectual Humility and Conviction.' *Journal of Philosophy of Education* **54**(2), 398–409.

Pritchard D. (2021). 'Intellectual Humility and the Epistemology of Disagreement.' *Synthese* **198**, S1711–1723.

Riggs W. 2019. 'Open-mindedness.' In H. Battaly (ed), *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, pp. 141–154. New York: Routledge.

Rini R. (2017). 'Fake News and Partisan Epistemology.' *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* **27**(2), 43–64.

Roberts R.C. and Wood W.J. (2007). *Intellectual Virtues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Saslow E. (2018). *Rising Out of Hatred*. Palatine, IL: Anchor Books.

Smith G. (2023). 'You Know You're Right: How Intellectual Humility Decreases Political Hostility.' *Political Psychology* **44**(6), 1319–1335.

Spiegel J.S. (2012). 'Open-mindedness and Intellectual Humility.' *Theory and Research in Education* **10**(1), 27–38.

Sosa E. (2007). *A Virtue Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sosa E. (2015). *Judgment and Agency*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stanovich K.E. and Toplak M.E. (2023). 'Actively Open-minded Thinking and its Measurement.' *Journal of Intelligence* **11**(2), 27.

Tanesini A. (2016). 'Calm Down, Dear: Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing, and Ignorance.' *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* **90**(1), 71–92.

Tanesini A. (2021). *The Mismeasure of the Self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Taylor R.M. (2016). 'Open-Mindedness: An Intellectual Virtue in the Pursuit of Knowledge and Understanding.' *Educational Theory* **66**(5), 599–618.

Tiberius V. and Walker J.D. (1998). 'Arrogance.' *American Philosophical Quarterly* **35**(4), 379–390.

Whitcomb D., Battaly H., Baehr J. and Howard-Snyder D. (2017). 'Intellectual humility: owning our limitations.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **94**(3), 509–539.

Whitcomb D., Battaly H., Baehr J. and Howard-Snyder D. (2021). 'The puzzle of humility and disparity.' In M. Alfano, M.P. Lynch and A. Tanesini (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Humility*, pp. 72–83. New York: Routledge.

Worthington E.L., Davis D.E. and Hook J.N. (eds.) (2017). *Handbook of Humility*. New York: Routledge.

Zagzebski L.T. (1996). *Virtues of the Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Katie Peters is a Ph.D. Candidate in Philosophy at the University of Connecticut. Her specialties include Moral Responsibility, Feminist Philosophy, Virtue and Vice Epistemology, and Philosophy of Extremism.

Cody Turner is a postdoctoral research fellow on AI and Human Cognition at the Applied Ethics Center and the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. His specialties include Philosophy of Technology, Digital Ethics, Virtue Epistemology, and Philosophy of Mind.

Heather Battaly is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Connecticut. Her specialties include Virtue and Vice Epistemology.