

PEOPLE LISTEN TO PEOPLE WHO LISTEN:  
INSTILLING VIRTUES OF DEFERENCE

Kristoffer Ahlstrom-Vij

University of Kent, Canterbury

**Abstract:** We often fail to defer to sources who know what they're talking about. When doing so consistently, we fail to manifest a *virtue of deference*. This is because epistemic virtues are dispositions that promote epistemic goals, and knowledge is an epistemic goal. The present paper makes two points about how to *instill* this virtue. First, virtues of deference can be instilled by promoting compliance with requests on the part of good sources to be listened to, since listening is conducive to believing. Second, recent research in social psychology on the relationship between justice and compliance suggests that one way to promote compliance with such requests is by having the relevant sources manifest a virtue of their own, namely that of *procedural justice*, which involves as a crucial component being prepared to listen.

**Keywords:** Epistemic virtue, deference, procedural justice, compliance, consequentialism

## 1. Introduction

When we listen to someone and believe what we are being told because they're saying it, we can be said to be *deferring* to that someone.<sup>1</sup> In many cases, deferring to others is a good idea. For

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

example, when it comes to medical matters, I defer to my GP, because she knows what she is talking about. And when it comes to climate change, I defer to climate scientists, because they are best placed to answer the relevant questions.

What makes it a good idea for me to defer in the above cases is that the relevant sources know what they're talking about in domains within which I'm largely uninformed. Why is that a good idea? I will follow Alvin Goldman in taking knowledge is identical to true belief.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, *to know what one is talking about is to speak the truth.*<sup>3</sup> For the hearer to be *uninformed* is for her to be in *error* or *ignorant*. For example, I might be positively in error (i.e., believe something false) about the causes of climate change, while simply ignorant (i.e., not believe what's true) on the relevant medical matters prior to asking my GP. In either scenario, when deferring to the sources in question under the relevant circumstances, I will learn something, and thereby become (more) informed. That's why it's a good idea to defer to people who speak the truth about things about which I'm either ignorant or in error.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, Section 2 will suggest that being *disposed* to defer to sources who know what they're talking about in contexts where you're uninformed is not only a good idea but also an *epistemic virtue*. This is because there is a *consequentialist* notion of epistemic virtue, on which virtues simply are dispositions that promote epistemic goals, and knowledge is an epistemic goal. In Section 3, it will be argued that one way to *instill* the virtue of deference is by promoting *compliance* with the requests on the part of the relevant kind of sources to be listened to. Section 4 argues that one way to promote compliance with such requests is by having those sources manifest a virtue of their own: that of *procedural justice*. Finally, section 5 responds to a number of objections.

## 2. Consequentialist Virtue

Let us start by getting clearer on what it is for something to be a virtue. For purposes of this paper, I will focus on a *consequentialist* notion of virtue, on which virtues simply are dispositions that promote goals or ends. This is the notion of virtue that we find in John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*.<sup>5</sup> While Mill thereby had a virtue *theory*, he was not a virtue *ethicist*. In order to qualify as a virtue ethicist, one typically has to define what makes an action right in terms of virtue. For example, a virtue ethicist might hold that I should refrain from lying simply because lying is *dishonest*,<sup>6</sup> or because refraining from lying is what the virtuous person would do or recommend.<sup>7</sup> That's not how Mill thinks about virtue, nor is it how he thinks about right action. Since he is a consequentialist, Mill defines right action in terms of the goods generated, and the same goes for virtues, which are simply dispositions that promote moral goods or ends. As he puts it, 'actions and dispositions are only virtuous because they promote another end than virtue'.<sup>8</sup> Since Mill is a hedonist, he takes the end (or good) in question to be happiness, understood 'pleasure and the absence of pain'.<sup>9</sup>

Consider an example: Let's assume that you're someone who's disposed to help people you perceive to clearly be in need. For example, when you see someone fall on the street, you'll help him or her up and make sure that he or she is alright. Provided that your perceptions on the matter are not completely off—i.e., you tend to *perceive* people to be in need when and only when they actually *are* in need—that seems the virtuous thing to do. A virtue ethicist might explain why that is so with direct reference to virtue, for example by saying that it's the kind of thing that a virtuous person would do. Mill, by contrast, would explain it by saying that being disposed to help people in need in this manner is conducive to happiness. And the same would

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

go for other pro-social dispositions, such as being generous towards others—that disposition, too, would constitute a moral virtue on Mill’s theory, provided that it promotes happiness.

Mill famously thought that happiness is not just one end among many. He holds ‘that pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things [...] are desirable either for pleasure inherent in themselves or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the absence of pain’.<sup>10</sup> But Mill does not thereby deny that there are cases in which we value virtue in itself, irrespective of its promotion of happiness. To the contrary, utilitarians, according to Mill, ‘not only place virtue at the very head of the things which are good as means to the ultimate end, but they also recognize as a *psychological* fact the possibility of its being, to the individual, a good in itself, without looking to any end beyond it’.<sup>11</sup> However, here as elsewhere, we must distinguish between *valuing* something for its own sake, and something being *valuable* for its own sake. For example, I might value money for its own sake, but it doesn’t follow that money is valuable for its own sake. Arguably, money is only valuable *instrumentally*, and specifically on account of the things that it enables us to buy. And the same, Mill would argue, goes for virtue: while we might *value* it for its own sake, it doesn’t follow from us doing so that it’s *valuable* for its own sake. To Mill, only happiness is valuable for its own sake.

Mill also is not denying that virtues can be accompanied by certain *motivations*. For example, in Aristotle, it might be a motivation to do the virtuous thing for the sake of *to kalon*, i.e., the fine, noble, or beautiful.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, someone attracted to Mill’s virtue theory does not need to deny that virtues tend to be *acquired* in certain ways (if indeed they are), e.g., through experience. What Mill would deny is simply that these things are *necessary* for someone

possessing virtue. All that is required for virtue possession is the relevant disposition promoting happiness.

So far, we have talked about *moral* virtue. But by taking Mill's theory of moral virtue as our model, we may develop a consequentialist theory of *epistemic* virtue, which we in turn may apply to dispositions to defer. Elsewhere, I have defended the idea that true belief is not only an epistemic goal but *the* epistemic goal.<sup>13</sup> If true belief is the epistemic goal, then provided I don't already believe what's true in the relevant domain, I will achieve that goal in so far as I defer to people who know what they're talking about, i.e., who speak the truth. Moreover, if I'm positively *disposed* to defer thus—i.e., if I tend to listen to people who know what they're talking about in domains where I'm uninformed—I possess a *virtue of deference*. If by contrast I tend to listen to people who *don't* know what they're talking about, on account of speaking falsely, I can be said to possess a *vice of deference*, and the vice of *gullibility* in particular.<sup>14</sup>

A word is in order about what is and is not implied by taking virtues (and vices) to be *dispositions*. Dispositions behave in the manner of *functions*. For example, if I'm disposed to believe what people tell me, then it will under relevant circumstances be the case that, if people tell me that *p*, I will tend to believe that *p*. In other words, testimonial input will, together with facts about my psychology, tend to generate beliefs corresponding to that output. In this case, the disposition is the psychological component of the function. Such dispositions might be stable across time, including while not subjected to any input. For example, if disposed to trust others, I will be so disposed even while asleep (and, as such, not receiving any testimony). That said, the temporal stability is not a necessary feature of dispositions. I might develop a severe form of paranoia that will lead me to trust no one. Later, I might be cured of my paranoia. Here, we have a case where a disposition disappears and then reappears over time.

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Thinking about dispositions on the model of functions should also make clear that, even in cases where some set of dispositions remains constant over time, the corresponding virtues might not. Consider, again, my disposition to trust others. For that disposition to amount to a virtue, it would need to make me tend to attain true belief. If I happen to be more or less constantly surrounded by people telling me the truth, then it will. However, if my situation changes to a less epistemically hospitable one, then my disposition might cease to be a virtue, since it might now have me listen to people who *don't* know what they're talking about. Indeed, it might even turn into a *vice*, if it operates in a manner that drives me deep into error or ignorance. This is to say that, while dispositions might in many cases be stable across time (although that's not a necessary feature of dispositions), and virtues are dispositions, it doesn't follow that virtues are stable over time. As we have seen, the reason is that virtues might not be stable across *environments*, and a person might find herself in different environments at different *times*.<sup>15</sup>

We should not think of this instability as a problem. To the contrary, in so far as we are interested in *instilling* epistemic virtues—certainly a concern of virtue theory going back all the way to Aristotle—what virtues we possess at any given moment better be something that can be made to change. On the above consequentialist model, such a change can be brought about either by changing the person's psychological dispositions, or by changing her environment. (In the sections that follow, I will focus on the latter, when considering how our social environment plays a role in triggering the activation of some dispositions rather than others.) Moreover, as in the case of moral virtue, accepting such a consequentialist theory of epistemic virtue doesn't require denying (a) that we, as a matter of psychological fact, might value epistemic virtues independently of that to which they are conducive; (b) that epistemic virtues might often be accompanied by certain motivations, e.g., a motivation to attain true belief for its own sake; or

(c) that epistemic virtues tend to be acquired in particular ways. Accepting the theory would simply involve maintaining that neither motivations nor any particular mode of acquisitions is *necessary* for possessing epistemic virtue, and to hold that us valuing something for its own sake does not *necessarily* make it intrinsically valuable.

It should be stressed that defending a consequentialist notion of epistemic virtue is not to suggest that that is the only legitimate notion of epistemic virtue. There might be other, equally legitimate notions of virtue, including ones rooted in the Aristotelian tradition.<sup>16</sup> The only thing implied by a commitment to said consequentialist notion is that it is at the very least *among* the legitimate notions of epistemic virtue.<sup>17</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the proof is in the eating of the pudding. Hopefully, the sections below constitute a convincing case in terms of the kinds of things that we can do with such a consequentialist notion, when it comes to thinking about how we might help each other become more informed by listening to people who know what they're talking about. This is not to suggest that we cannot do these things with reference to other notions of virtue, such as Aristotelian notions.<sup>18</sup> It is hopefully the case that there are many things we can do, and many epistemological frameworks we can use, for purposes of generating and spreading epistemic goods. The present investigation outlines one worthwhile thing we can do, without thereby suggesting that it is the *only* thing we can do.

### **3. Virtue Through Compliance**

There are a number of questions we may ask about the virtue of deference. As already noted, the one that will be addressed below is the following: How can we *instill* that virtue? In the previous section, we noted that the possession of a virtue is a function of both the psychology of the person and of her environment. In what follows, I will focus on the possibility of triggering the

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

activation of certain dispositions by changing the person's *social* environment in particular. This focus is motivated by a problem of discrimination. Often, it is going to be hard for the individual to determine exactly *when* to defer. This problem will be particularly pressing in cases where the expertise (real or putative) of the sources lies outside of the expertise of the person considering whether to defer, such as in the case of a layperson considering what expert to consult on some matter.<sup>19</sup> If a person that's uninformed on the relevant matters tends to defer to sources who know what they're talking about, she instantiates the *virtue* of deference. When we ask the question of how to *instill* that virtue, and our focus is on her social environment in particular, we are putting the onus, not on the individual agent to figure out how to discriminate between good and bad sources, but on good sources to bring about deference by instilling the relevant virtue in individuals. Differently put, we are asking: What can good sources do in order to see to it that people become disposed to defer to them on the relevant matters, and as such manifest the virtue of deference?

The answer provided in what follows is that we may do so through a particular form of compliance. The idea behind this answer is that what sources are doing is, in effect, providing a request together with a piece of information. Consider, for example, a professor teaching an introductory class in ethics, telling her students: '*Listen, all utilitarians are consequentialists, but not all consequentialists are utilitarian.*' When students listen to her, they are complying with her request to be listened to. Moreover, such compliance promotes deference, given the empirical assumption that listening is conducive to believing what one is being told. This assumption is compatible with us sometimes failing to believe what we are being told, as long as getting us to listen still serves to increase the chances that we will believe what we are being told. So, the relevant empirical assumption is this: while we cannot be made to *believe* things, we can be

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

made to *listen*, and trust that there is an imperfect but still robust enough connection between listening and believing the content of what's said for listening to increase the chances of belief.

It might be objected that, even if we assume that we can be brought to defer by being brought to listen, bringing us to defer to the sources we should be deferring to—i.e., to those who know what they're talking about—is really only half the problem of us not always deferring in ways that we should. The other half is that of also bringing us *not* to defer to bad sources, i.e., sources who *don't* know what they're talking about. Notice, however, that the two halves of the problem are not independent of one another. In particular, the more successful good sources are with respect to bringing us to defer to them, the more successful they will be with respect to bringing us *not* to defer to bad sources. This is so under the assumption that there is a practical limit to how many sources we can defer to. Given such a limit, increased success in bringing us to defer to good sources will, in effect, also promote the goal of bringing us to *only* defer to such sources. In other words, good sources can work to 'crowd out' bad sources, given practical limitations on how many sources we can defer to.<sup>20</sup>

If the question of how we can instill the epistemic virtue of deference can be addressed in terms of the question of how to bring about compliance with requests for good sources to be listened to, our question now becomes how to promote the relevant form of compliance. The suggestion developed in the next section is that there is a kind of *procedural justice*<sup>21</sup> that, if practiced by (good) sources, will achieve two things. First, it will increase the extent to which we *consult* them on the relevant matters. Second, it will increase the rate of *compliance* with their requests for us to listen to them, which will be correlated with us believing what we are told, under the assumption that listening is conducive to believing. In the next section, we will look at the evidence supporting this claim, as well as at the relevant kind of justice.

#### 4. The Virtue of Procedural Justice

As already noted, the hypothesis to be defended in the remainder of the paper is that there is a kind of procedural justice that, if practiced by sources who know what they're talking about, will increase not only the extent to which they are consulted on the relevant matters, but also the rate of compliance with their requests for hearers to listen to them. Under the assumption that listening is conducive to believing, this will in turn be correlated with hearers believing what they are being told. But why consider this hypothesis at all plausible? And what is the relevant notion of justice? Let us consider each question in turn.

The main source of support for the hypothesis comes from Tom Tyler and colleagues' research into the why people follow the law. On a traditional picture, people follow the law because of a fear of sanctions. However, in a landmark study, Tyler showed that fear of sanction is not the only or even the most important factor behind why people follow the law.<sup>22</sup> An equally if not more important factor is people considering the relevant authorities *legitimate*. To be legitimate is to be deserving of deference, and to be perceived as legitimate is to be perceived as being thus deserving. Consequently, perceived legitimacy is a property that, 'when it is possessed, leads people to defer voluntarily to decisions, rules, and social arrangements'.<sup>23</sup> More specifically, as perceived legitimacy goes up, so does compliance.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the central factor determining whether people conceive of an authority as legitimate is the extent to which they take that authority to be *just*.

This brings us to the second question above, regarding the content of the relevant notion of justice. The relevant kind of justice is *procedural* justice, specifically as it pertains to four components:

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

The first component pertains to being provided with an opportunity to state one's case. Let us refer to this condition as *input*. According to Tyler, '[p]eople have a tremendous desire to present their side of the story and value the opportunity in and of itself'.<sup>25</sup> As such, being given an opportunity to state one's case has a significant positive effect on perceived justice, even when we are aware that we have no influence over the authority's actual decision on the matter (e.g., about whether we are to be fined, sentenced, etc.).<sup>26</sup>

The second component corresponds to the fact that, while people do not require that their input be reflected in the ultimate decision, they must be able to infer that what has been said at the very least has been considered.<sup>27</sup> Let us refer to this condition as *consideration*. As discussed by Tyler, the relevant condition is fairly weak: in many cases, simply explaining that the input was considered but, unfortunately, could not influence the decision is sufficient for satisfying the consideration condition.

The third component is that one's input has been evaluated in a way that is sensitive only to the facts of the matter, and not to the authority's personal preferences or prejudices. Let us refer to this as *factuality*.

The fourth component involves the relevant authority having made an effort to satisfy the above conditions—i.e., *input*, *consideration* and *factuality*—as opposed to simply having gone through the motions. Let us refer to this component as *effort*.

If people feel that they have been treated in a just manner—which is to say that they feel that the *input*, *consideration*, *factuality* and *effort* conditions just outlined have been satisfied—that will lead them to consider the authority more legitimate, as well as increase their compliance with the laws laid down by that authority. In fact, perceptions of justice can give rise to a

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

feedback loop, in that, when authorities are viewed as legitimate, their actions are more likely to be seen to be just.<sup>28,29</sup>

The following are two extensions of these results that are relevant presently:

First, the relationship between perceived justice, perceived legitimacy, and compliance is not unique to the legal domain; it applies to *rule-following* more generally. For example, employee perceptions regarding the justice of corporate policies, and the resulting perception of the legitimacy of their employers, tracks employee compliance with corporate policies,<sup>30</sup> as well as cooperative behavior more generally, including compliance with rules in the absence of explicit requests for compliance or threats of sanctions.<sup>31</sup> The same goes for non-corporate employees, such as police officers and members of the military, who, too, are significantly more inclined to comply with attempts to regulate their performance in so far as they deem their employers just, and thereby legitimate.<sup>32</sup>

Second, perceived legitimacy is not only relevant to our tendency to comply with communicated rules or norms—i.e., doing what we are being told to do—but also to our willingness to engage in *consultation*, i.e., seeking advice on what is to be done in the first place. For example, on the question of *whom* to consult, people report being more prone to consult professionals regarding retirement saving and investment strategies who they perceive to be just than professionals who they do not perceive to be just, even when aware that the cost of receiving a just treatment would be a decreased likelihood of financial gain.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, as for the question of *whether* to consult someone, students report being more likely to seek advice from their professors on academic as well as on personal matters, when they take the professors to be such that they would treat them in a just manner.<sup>34</sup>

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Consequently, if we were to formulate a slogan capturing what sources need to do in order to promote deference—assuming, as above, that listening is to a robust enough extent conducive to believing what’s said—it would be this: *people listen to people who listen*. In formulating the slogan thus, I am making an assumption about the relationship between *perceived* justice and *de facto* justice, to the effect that the best way to *seem* just is to *be* the things that people consider just. The rationale for that assumption is that, while it is certainly conceptually possible to solve compliance problems by simply *seeming* to be those things, it is not only unlikely that one would be able to pull off the level of deception required in the long run, but also unclear what would be gained from it. After all, maintaining the relevant deception would most likely require a greater amount of resources than would simply *being* the things people think of as just. In other words, the best way to have people perceive good sources as just is for those sources to sincerely work to provide a forum for input, and to take into account what is being said in a factual manner, where the relevant consideration involves also explaining why the input does not change the verdict in cases where it does not.

By way of illustration, return to the case of the professor telling her students: ‘*Listen, all utilitarians are consequentialists, but not all consequentialists are utilitarian.*’ The request signals that the professor wants the students to listen to her—i.e., to comply with her request to be listened to—and the reason she wants that is because listening is conducive to believing, in accordance with the empirical assumption discussed above. So, how can she bring the students to listen to her? If what has been argued in this section is correct, she can do so by listening to her students in turn, in such a manner that they feel that they’ve been provided with a forum for input wherein their viewpoints are evaluated in a factual manner, and that it’s being explained in what respects they are correct or mistaken. As such, the present framework confirms what most

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

people who have been involved in education probably already know: the best way to inform people is not to tell them what to think, but to engage them in a dialogue.

We're now in a position to formulate the upshot of the present investigation. We started out by noting that there is a consequentialist notion of epistemic virtue. On such a notion, epistemic virtues are dispositions that promote the epistemic goal of believing truly. It was noted that this is not the only notion of epistemic virtue on offer—in addition to the consequentialist notion of virtue utilized in this investigation, there are also notions of epistemic virtue rooted in the Aristotelian tradition—but that it might just be fruitfully applied in contexts concerned with bringing about epistemic improvements in testimonial contexts. What has been argued in the above has hopefully made good on that claim, by showing that there are (at least) two consequentialist virtues that can be involved in such contexts:

The first virtue is a *virtue of deference*, manifested when a hearer is disposed to defer to sources who know what they're talking about within domains where the hearer is uninformed. To return to the example used at several points above, the student who is disposed to listen to her professor manifests a virtue of deference, if the student is uninformed and her professor knows what she's talking about in the relevant contexts. By contrast, if the student is disposed to listen to people who don't know what they're talking about, on account of speaking falsely, she can be said to manifest the vice of *gullibility*. I will have more to say about this vice in the next section.

The second virtue is a *virtue of procedural justice*, manifested by informed speakers in so far as they are disposed to interact with uninformed hearers in a way that involves listening in a manner satisfying the *input*, *factuality*, *consideration*, and *effort* conditions outlined above. Specifically, being disposed to interact with hearers in this particular way is a virtue in so far as it increases consultation and compliance rates, and in so doing instills a virtue of deference in

uninformed hearers. Here, it's also worthwhile to highlight the possibility of a number of contrasting vices, corresponding to the set of dispositions that would not only serve to decrease consultation and compliance rates, but positively drive people into the hands of people who don't know what they're talking about. That said, I will not elaborate on the variety of vices that can be imagined here.

One final point, before moving on to a couple of objections and replies. I have been working with a consequentialist framework throughout this paper. The reader might wonder how that framework fits with the deontological-sounding vocabulary that has been introduced in this section, relying on terms like 'procedural justice'.<sup>35</sup> The answer is as follows: the psychological research we've been considering suggests that people's *judgments* about what's procedurally just can be captured by the *input, factuality, consideration, and effort* conditions. This doesn't give us a *theory* of justice, as in: a normative theory of what justice *consists* in. Since it doesn't give us a theory of justice, it also doesn't give us a *deontological* theory of justice—or, indeed, any other kind of theory of justice. It simply gives us a psychological story about how people *think* about justice, and what they *perceive* to be just as a result. When, in the present context, talking about people being procedurally just, that's all we're talking about: being whatever the relevant empirical research suggests that people take procedural justice to consist in.

The normative significance of the relevant empirical results enters when we add to that story what happens when people are perceived to be just in the relevant sense: other people are more likely to consult them and to comply with any requests they might provide. That's normatively significant, and for purely consequentialist reasons: in so far as those consulted and complied with know what they're talking about, we can expect epistemic benefits when those doing the consulting and complying are uninformed within the relevant domains. Moreover, in so far as the

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

relevant behaviors become ingrained enough for it to make sense to talk about the former as being *disposed* to act in ways that have the sources be perceived to be procedurally just, and others as being *disposed* to consult and comply as a result, we can describe the relevant tendencies as amounting to epistemic virtues, in the consequentialist sense introduced at the outset of our investigation. That is how to square the overarching consequentialist framework with the deontological-sounding vocabulary of this section.

## 5. Objections and Replies

Let us consider some objections to what has been argued above. In the previous section, it was suggested that a hearer disposed to act in the manner captured by the *input, factuality, consideration*, and *effort* conditions can under certain circumstances be said to be instantiating an epistemic virtue. This is so because there is a consequentialist notion of epistemic virtue on which such virtues simply are dispositions promoting the attainment of the epistemic goal of believing truly. Bringing people who are uninformed within the relevant domains to listen to sources who know what they're talking about—i.e., who speak the truth—promotes that goal. Hence, being disposed to bring people who are uninformed to listen to sources who know what they're talking about by exercising the relevant kind of justice qualifies as an epistemic virtue, and a virtue of procedural justice in particular.

But here is an objection: The relevant virtue does not necessarily promote any goal for the *hearer*; in particular, it does not necessarily make *the hearer* epistemically better off. And if it does not, how can it be right to say that the relevant disposition qualifies as an epistemic virtue on *her* part?

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

It is true that the relevant disposition to be procedurally just does not necessarily make the hearer possessing that disposition epistemically better off. However, it is not clear why that would disqualify the disposition as a virtue. Many non-epistemic virtues are virtues primarily, if not exclusively, on account of the good that they bring to others. Think, for example, of courage and generosity. These qualify as virtues because they are beneficial to others, whether or not they are beneficial to the virtuous person herself. Being courageous and generous might certainly be beneficial for the courageous and generous individual in the long run. Courage might bring you fame and respect, while generosity might motivate people to help you out, were you ever to find yourself in a difficult situation in turn. But it is clear that the relevant virtues would remain virtues, even in the absence of any long-term benefits to the courageous or generous person. And the same goes for the relevant notion of procedural justice as virtue: it being possible that that virtue only promotes the epistemic good of others in no way disqualifies it as an epistemic virtue.

It might be objected that there are many cases in which we consult and defer to others without justice being a factor. Consider, for example, cases wherein people simply accept what prominent scientists are telling them. Notice, however, that what I have argued above merely outlines a tool for *promoting* deference, which is compatible with us deferring in other cases wherein people are not utilizing that tool. The case of science is still interesting, though. It might be that, when people trust scientists, they trust science, and part of what it is to trust science is to trust that one's viewpoint (as in: its content) has been taken into account. In some cases, people might acknowledge that this condition is satisfied for fairly uninteresting reasons, as when I trust that my *non-existent* viewpoint has been taken into account by those working on quantum mechanics or the big bang theory.<sup>36</sup> So the relevant trust can be captured in the following manner: to the extent that I take myself to have anything to contribute (and I might not), I trust

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

that my contribution (whether actually put forth by me, or—which is more likely—by someone in the scientific community) has been taken into account. After all, it is interesting to note that what seems to be lacking in controversial cases of distrust in science (e.g., climate change deniers and creationists) is exactly trust of this kind: those who refuse to trust science seem to think that their viewpoint has *not* been taken into account.<sup>37</sup>

Let us consider a different worry. In section 4, I suggested that we may formulate the upshot of the present paper in terms of the slogan that *people listen to people who listen*, if we assume that *perceived* justice and *de facto* justice are related in such a way that the best way to seem just is to be whatever it is people consider just. However, this might raise worries about bad sources—i.e., sources who don't know what they're talking about—being able to come across as just and, as such, bring about consultation and deference. This worry speaks to a point made already in the above. The focus of the paper has been on how to enable good sources to bring about deference. However, as we noted in section 3, if we assume that there is a practical limit to how many sources people can defer to, then increased success in bringing people to defer to good sources will, in effect, also serve the goal of bringing people to *only* defer to good sources. We can put this point in terms of the virtues and vices of deference introduced at the end of the previous section: Since it is practically impossible for people to defer to everyone, the more successful we are when it comes to instilling the virtue of *deference*—i.e., a disposition to listen to good sources within domains in which one is uninformed—the fewer opportunities there will be for people to manifest the vice of *gullibility*, i.e., the disposition to listen to sources who don't know what they're talking about. In other words, promoting the relevant virtue and obstructing the relevant vice are not two separate projects: to the contrary, doing the former will, in effect, contribute to the latter.

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Let us consider one final objection. If what was argued above is correct, sources manifesting the virtue of procedural justice increase the chances that people will consult as well as listen to them. However, it might be objected that there is something questionable, maybe even objectionable, about that virtue. Often, we listen to people because we are interested in hearing what they are saying, and not primarily for the purpose of having those people in turn listen to us. If a person who knows what she's talking about listens to us primarily—perhaps even simply—for the purpose of having us listen to her, is there a sense in which she is *using* us?<sup>38</sup> I am inclined to say 'no', the reason being this: while it would make sense to talk about someone using us if the purpose of getting us to listen would be for *her* to gain something (think advertisement), the contexts that concern us here involve attempts to get us to listen for the purpose of benefitting *us*. If we can be brought to listen to good sources, we are not being used—on the contrary, we are being helped. Specifically, we are being helped to become more epistemically virtuous.

## 6. Conclusion

We often fail to defer to people who know what they're talking about. When doing so consistently, we fail to possess a *virtue of deference*, a disposition to defer to sources who know what they're talking about. This is because, on a consequentialist notion of epistemic virtue, epistemic virtues are dispositions that promote the attainment of the epistemic goal, and the epistemic goal is knowledge. Following Goldman, I identified knowledge with true belief.

The present paper made two points about how to go about instilling the virtue of deference. First, it was argued that one way to instill that virtue is by promoting compliance with the requests on the part of good sources to be listened to, under the assumption that listening is

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

conducive to believing. Second, it was suggested that research in social psychology on the relationship between justice and compliance suggests that one way to promote compliance with such requests is by having the relevant sources manifest a virtue of their own, namely that of *procedural justice*, which involves as a crucial component being prepared to listen.

In closing, I would like to make two suggestions for potential, practical applications:

One area within which failures to defer have proved particularly problematic is that involving the provision of intellectual advice. In particular, while we know that we are fallible creatures, susceptible to a number of cognitive biases, we also have a strong tendency to underestimate our susceptibility to such bias, and therefore fail to defer to people providing advice on how to avoid bias. Since bias renders us susceptible to false belief, it also prevents us from attaining virtue within the relevant domains. As I have argued elsewhere, this is a problem of deference, and of *intellectual* deference in particular, that might be addressed with reference to the exercise of procedural justice.<sup>39</sup>

Another potential area of application concerns the dissemination of scientific information. Failures to defer to scientific experts are widespread in certain quarters, and do not merely present an epistemic problem in so far as the relevant failures stem from epistemic vices promoting ignorance and error, but moral problems as well. Consider, for example, how the failures on the part of a subset of the population to defer to climate scientists enables politicians to do the same, with the consequence that future generations are likely to suffer gravely. Here, too, it's possible that we can put to work the notion of procedural justice in order to increase popular deference, and thereby bring about political accountability, which in turn will (hopefully) lead to the taking of necessary action.<sup>40</sup>

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

## References

- Ahlstrom-Vij, K. (2013), 'In Defense of Veritistic Value Monism', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 94 (1): 19-40.
- Ahlstrom-Vij, K. (forthcoming a), 'The Social Virtue of Blind Deference', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Ahlstrom-Vij, K. (forthcoming b), 'Procedural Justice and the Problem of Intellectual Deference', *Episteme*.
- Aristotle (2002), *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by C. Rowe and edited by S. Broadie and C. Rowe, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baehr, J. (2011), *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Battaly, H. (2012), 'Virtue Epistemology', in J. Greco and J. Turri, Eds., *Virtue Epistemology: Contemporary Readings* (pp. 3-32). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Blader, S. L., and Tyler, T. R. (2003) 'A Four-Component Model of Procedural Justice: Defining the Meaning of a "Fair" Process' *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 29 (6): 747-758.
- Coady, D. (2010), 'Two Concepts of Epistemic Injustice', *Episteme* 7(2): 101-113.
- Crisp, R. and Slote, M. (1997), *Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Doris, J. (2002), *Lack of Character*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Driver, J. (2001), *Uneasy Virtue*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fricke, E. (2006), 'Varieties of Anti-reductionism about Testimony—A Reply to Goldberg and Henderson', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 72: 618-628.
- Fricke, M. (2007) *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goldman, A. (1999), *Knowledge in a Social World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goldman, A. (2001), 'Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63(1): 85-110.
- Greco, J. and Turri, J. (2011), 'Virtue Epistemology', in *the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-virtue/>.
- Lackey, J. (2008), *Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mill, J. S. (2001), *Utilitarianism* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Indianapolis, IN: Hackett; originally published in 1861.
- Roberts, R. C. and Wood, J. (2007), *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Slote, M. (2001), *Morals from Motives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tyler, T. R. (2006a) *Why People Obey the Law* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Tyler, T. R. (2006b) 'Psychological Perspectives on Legitimacy and Legitimation', *Annual Review of Psychology* 57: 375-400.
- Tyler, T. R. (2006c) 'Process Utility and Help Seeking: What do People Want From Experts?' *Journal of Economic Psychology* 27: 360-376.
- Tyler, T. R. (2011) *Why People Cooperate: The Role of Social Motivations*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Tyler, T. R. and Blader, S. L. (2005) 'Can Businesses Effectively Regulate Employee Conduct? The Antecedents of Rule Following in Work Settings', *Academy of Management Journal* 48(6): 1143-1158.

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Tyler, T. R., Callahan, P., and Frost, J. (2007) 'Armed and Dangerous (?): Motivating Rule Adherence among Agents of Social Control', *Law and Society Review* 41: 457-492.

Zagzebski, L. (1996), *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> To say that someone believes what someone else is saying *because* they are saying it is to make a mere causal claim, and not to prejudge the issue of the believer's *reasons* for the relevant belief. The latter are relevant to whether or not the believer can be said to *be justified* on the basis of deference, which is not something that I will take a stand on here. However, note that, since I'll be identifying knowledge with true belief, deferring to someone who speaks the truth means coming to know.

<sup>2</sup> See Goldman (1999, p.5).

<sup>3</sup> Notice the formulation in terms of *speaking* the truth as opposed to *believing* the truth. This way of understanding what it is to know what one is talking about excludes people who *believe* the truth but are either unable or unwilling to communicate what they believe, but includes people who do *not* believe the truth but nevertheless speak the truth. As for the latter, consider Jennifer Lackey's (2008) example of a creationist teacher, who teaches her students about evolution, without believing the things she's telling them.

<sup>4</sup> Suggesting that what makes it a good idea to defer is the target of deference knowing what she is talking about in a context where I'm uninformed might raise worries about condoning *blind deference*, i.e., deference in the absence of any insight into the epistemic credentials of the

source. However, as I have defended the idea that there is nothing epistemically objectionable about such blind deference elsewhere (see Ahlstrom-Vij, forthcoming *a*), I will not pursue that possibility here.

<sup>5</sup> See Mill (2001/1861). The relevant notion can also be found in Driver (2001).

<sup>6</sup> See Crisp and Slote (1997).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Slote's (2001) agent based virtue ethic.

<sup>8</sup> Mill (2001/1861: 36).

<sup>9</sup> Mill (2001/1861: 7).

<sup>10</sup> Mill (2001/1861: 7).

<sup>11</sup> Mill (2001/1861: 36; my emphasis).

<sup>12</sup> For example, in *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that the courageous person will “withstand [the things that make for boldness] in the way one should [...] for the sake of achieving what is fine; for this is what excellence aims at” (1115 b 12-13), and that “the munificent person will incur [...] expenditure for the sake of the fine, since this is a shared feature of the excellences” (1122 b 7-8).

<sup>13</sup> See Ahlstrom-Vij (2013).

<sup>14</sup> This corresponds fairly well to Fricker (2006), who suggests that someone is gullible ‘if she has a disposition or policy for doxastic response to testimony which fails to screen out false testimony’ (p. 620).

<sup>15</sup> When on the topic of stability across environments, a word is in order on the ‘situationist’ challenge to virtue ethics. Very briefly, the challenge is that we have empirical reason to believe that what people do is a function of their situation to an extent that seems incompatible with

maintaining that our behavior is generally a result of moral character traits, of the kind Aristotelian virtue ethicists are concerned with (Doris 2002). However, if we individuate virtues partly with reference to situations (i.e., environments), in the manner that I have done here, situational influences cease to present a challenge to the explanatory and predictive powers of virtue theory, and instead provide a practical resource for explaining behavior (doxastic and otherwise) in terms of the virtues. Moreover, since I am providing a robustly *consequentialist* virtue theory, there is no worry about some of the situational factors being ‘of the wrong kind’ (e.g., ambient sounds or smells); whatever makes us more disposed to achieve epistemic goods is a candidate for contributing to virtue. In that respect, my theory is potentially revisionary, as far as our common-sense conception of epistemic virtue is concerned (to the extent that we *have* such a conception).

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Zagzebski (1996) and Baehr (2011).

<sup>17</sup> See Battaly (2012), Baehr (2011), and Greco and Turri (2011) for recent endorsements of such pluralism about legitimate notions of epistemic virtue.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Roberts and Wood (2007).

<sup>19</sup> Saying that the layperson in such a scenario faces a problem of discrimination is not to deny that there are indirect strategies for gauging the epistemic credentials of experts by laymen, e.g., along the lines suggested by Goldman (2001). However, as Goldman himself acknowledges, this is by no means a trivial matter: ‘the situations facing novices are often daunting’ and raise questions about ‘[w]hat kinds of education, for example, could substantially improve the ability of novices to appraise expertise, and what kinds of communicational intermediaries might help make the novice-expert relationship more one of justified credence than blind trust’ (p. 109).

<sup>20</sup> We will revisit this point in section 5.

<sup>21</sup> See Ahlstrom-Vij (forthcoming *b*) for a discussion of the relation between this notion of procedural justice and other epistemologically relevant notions of justice, e.g., in Fricker (2007) and Coady (2010).

<sup>22</sup> See Tyler (2006*a*).

<sup>23</sup> Tyler (2006*b*: 376).

<sup>24</sup> See Tyler (2006*a*: 57).

<sup>25</sup> Tyler (2006*a*: 147).

<sup>26</sup> Tyler (2006*a*: 127).

<sup>27</sup> See Tyler (2006*a*: 149).

<sup>28</sup> See Tyler (2006*a*: 107).

<sup>29</sup> To prevent confusion for readers familiar with Tyler's work, it should be noted that, in some places (e.g., in Blader and Tyler 2003), Tyler talks about a four-*component* model of procedural justice. In those contexts, the components correspond to the *dimensions* along which people evaluate procedural justice, namely with respect to decision-making, quality of treatment, formal interactions, and informal interactions. By contrast, the four components discussed here pertain to what Tyler and colleagues' research suggests constitutes the *content* of justice evaluations, in the sense of what we look for when evaluating people's behavior or the structure of organizations, along aforementioned dimensions or otherwise.

<sup>30</sup> See Tyler and Blader (2005).

<sup>31</sup> See Tyler (2011: Chapter 3). To avoid confusion, I have ignored a possible terminological shift between Tyler's earlier (e.g., his 2006*a*) and his more recent work (e.g., his 2011). In the

former, what I have referred to as the *input* and *consideration* conditions are conditions on perceived procedural justice; in the latter, these are occasionally (e.g., 2011: 106) but not invariably (e.g., 2011: 114) treated as conditions on *perceived trustworthiness*, where the latter is treated as a separate contributory factor to perceived legitimacy, in addition to that of perceived procedural justice (see, e.g., his 2011: 112). Since this terminological shift makes no substantive difference, I will stick to his earlier terminology, and take perceived trustworthiness—if that is the term we should use for what is captured by *input* and *consideration*—to be a component of perceived procedural justice.

<sup>32</sup> See Tyler, Callahan, and Frost (2007).

<sup>33</sup> Tyler (2006c: Study 1 and 2).

<sup>34</sup> Tyler (2006c: Study 3).

<sup>35</sup> Thanks to Christian Miller for raising this question.

<sup>36</sup> Thanks to Christian Miller for suggesting this qualification.

<sup>37</sup> Thanks to Walter Sinnott-Armstrong for raising the question, and to John Turri for the suggested link between trust and deference in scientific contexts.

<sup>38</sup> I'm grateful to Stephen Grimm and Rebecca Stangl for raising versions of this worry.

<sup>39</sup> See Ahlstrom-Vij (forthcoming *b*).

<sup>40</sup> For helpful discussion, I am grateful to Sandy Goldberg and Baron Reed, as well as to the participants at the Final Research Colloquia of the Character Project at Wake Forest University, and in particular to Anne Baril, Stephen Grimm, Nathan King, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Rebecca Stangl, and John Turri. I am also grateful to Christian Miller for detailed comments on an earlier draft of this paper. This publication was made possible through the support of a grant

Forthcoming in C. Miller, R. M. Furr, A. Knobel, and W. Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

from The Character Project at Wake Forest University and the John Templeton Foundation. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Character Project, Wake Forest University, or the John Templeton Foundation.