THE METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF VICE EPISTEMOLOGY

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Vice epistemology is the philosophical study of the nature, identity and significance of intellectual or epistemic vices. Among the questions that vice epistemologists might reasonably be expected to answer are the following:

1. What kind of thing is an epistemic vice?

2. How are epistemic vices individuated?

3. To what are competing accounts of epistemic vices answerable?

The first of these will be referred to here as the *Kind Question*, the second as the *Individuation Question* and the third as the *Answerability Question*. These three questions are ontological or metaphysical and they bring into focus the metaphysical foundations of vice epistemology. The third question is especially pressing. Where there are disagreements about what to count as an epistemic vice, or about how specific vices are individuated, it is natural to wonder how such disagreements are to be resolved. Choosing between competing accounts of epistemic vice, or of particular epistemic vices, requires clarity about the facts to which rival theories are answerable.

One approach to the Kind Question is *vice monism*. This says that epistemic vices are one kind of thing. One version of vice monism insists that epistemic vices are character traits. Other versions of vice monism can be imagined. *Vice pluralism* allows that there are different varieties of epistemic vice, between which it isn't necessary or even advisable to choose. As well as character traits and attitudes, epistemic vices might include thinking styles, emotions, cognitive faculties and cognitive biases. Different vice pluralists have different views about

what to include and what to exclude but they all agree that epistemic vices come in different shapes and sizes. They aren't one kind of thing.[1]

For present purposes, to individuate an object or kind is to draw a boundary around it in thought or perception, to distinguish it from other objects or other kinds. Individuating in this sense is the same thing as differentiating, and differentiating is something that thinkers do. An *indirect* approach to the Individuation Question holds that specific epistemic vices such as dogmatism and closed-mindedness are individuated by analysing our concepts. Conceptual analysis seeks to identify conceptually necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept. It proceeds by the method of cases.[2] In the present context, this means constructing and examining examples of epistemic conduct with a view to determining whether and how particular vice concepts apply in those cases. If there are cases in which, intuitively, the concept of closed-mindedness applies but the concept of dogmatism does not then this would support the conclusion that these are distinct vices.

A *direct* approach holds that if our interest is in the individuation of epistemic vices then we should focus on those vices themselves rather than on our concepts of them. A similar point has been made by Hilary Kornblith in response to the suggestion that knowledge is best studied by analysing the concept of knowledge: 'the subject matter of epistemology is knowledge itself, not our concept of knowledge' (2002: 1).[3] Something like this thought is the basis of the suggestion that the subject matter of vice epistemology should be our epistemic vices themselves rather than our concepts of them. But what would it even be to individuate epistemic vices themselves without engaging in conceptual analysis or employing the method of cases? The answer to this question is far from obvious. It conceivable that in reality the direct approach employs many of the same techniques for individuating epistemic vices as the indirect approach. In that case, one might conclude that the differences between the direct and indirect approaches are more ideological than practical. [4]

The Individuation Question leads directly to the Answerability Question. Where there are different and incompatible accounts of, say, the relationship between one epistemic vice and another, there is the challenge of deciding which one is better. It is hard to choose between rival accounts without having an answer to the Answerability Question. What is the reality to which the rival accounts are trying to do justice? *Realism* is the view that there can only be one thing to which accounts of epistemic vices are answerable: the nature of the vices themselves. The realist models the individuation and classification of vices on the individuation and classification of diseases. For example, disease taxonomies classify Alzheimer's and vascular dementia as distinct forms of dementia because there is a real distinction between one condition and another. The physical basis of Alzheimer's is different from the physical basis of vascular dementia. The boundary between one epistemic vice and another might not be physical but the realist nevertheless regards it as a real distinction.

At the opposite extreme is *conceptualism*. In its most general form, conceptualism says that there are no lines in nature between one kind of thing and another.[5] All distinctions between kinds or types are the product of conceptualization. For present purposes conceptualism needn't take a view about diseases but it does insist that the distinction between one epistemic vice and another is simply a reflection of a difference in concepts. There are no 'real' divisions to which the individuation of epistemic vices is accountable. All we have to go in is the ordinary usage of vice terms and our intuitions about where the line between one vice and another falls. This is very much in keeping with the indirect approach to the Individuation Question.

The three sections that follow will address, in turn, each of the three basic metaphysical questions for vice epistemology. In section 2 a case will be made for vice pluralism. Section 3 will argue that the direct/ indirect dichotomy is a false one and recommend a different way of proceeding, one that focuses on the *function* or *purpose* of vice attributions. It will be argued in section 4 that neither realism nor conceptualism offers a satisfactory answer to the

Answerability Question. The perspective to be developed here is more pragmatic. We cannot hope to understand what epistemic vices are, how they are individuated, or what makes one account better than another without a serious examination of whether and why it is useful (if it is) to describe people as epistemically vicious or virtuous. Section 5 will raise a question about the usefulness of vice attributions.

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Vice monists tend to assume rather than argue explicitly for vice monism. For example, it is taken for granted by 'responsibilists' that epistemic virtues and vices are character traits. This is in line with Aristotle's account of virtues as 'states of character' but is there an argument for the view that epistemic vices are limited to such states? One argument that can be extracted from the work of Linda Zagzebski is what might be called the *argument from depth*: the premise of this argument is that virtues and vices are deep traits of a person. A virtue, Zagzebski argues, is a 'deep quality of a person, closely identified with her selfhood' (1996: 104). Once a virtue or a vice develops, 'it becomes entrenched in a person's character and becomes a kind of second nature' (1996: 116). These and other such formulations can be read as restricting virtues and vices to character traits on the grounds that only character traits can have the requisite depth.

One question about the argument from depth is whether specifically intellectual virtues and vices need to be as deep as Zagzebski supposed. A vice is 'a quality we would ascribe to a person if asked to describe her after her death (1996: 135) but there are minor intellectual vices such as obscurity or pretentiousness that would hardly merit a mention in a person's obituary. It might also be objected that personal qualities other than character traits can be deep enough to count as vices. Many of a person's attitudes are closely identified with her selfhood but attitudes are stances or postures rather than character traits. In her list of intellectual vices Zagzebski includes prejudice and wishful thinking. Yet prejudice is a judgement or attitude rather than a character trait. Having strong prejudices might be a character trait but prejudices

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themselves aren't character traits. Wishful thinking is a mode of thought rather than a character trait. If wishful thinking, prejudice and character traits like closed-mindedness are genuine epistemic vices, as they appear to be, then it follows immediately that epistemic vices aren't one kind of thing. It is a further question whether the three types of epistemic vice all spring from a common root or whether two of the three types are somehow reducible to the third. These are not questions that will be addressed here, other than to say that there is no obvious way of reducing the three types to one. It certainly looks like there are epistemic vices of genuinely different kinds[6].

An explicit theoretical defence of vice pluralism has been provided by Heather Battaly.[7] Her argument is this: virtues are qualities that make one an excellent person whereas vices are qualities that make us worse people. These very thin general conceptions of virtue and vice can be fleshed out in different ways. Having a hard-wired cognitive faculty like excellent vision is one way to be an excellent person. Another way is to be open-minded. By the same token, bad vision is one way to be a defective person, closed-mindedness is another. Bad vision and other such defects are 'reliabilist' vices whereas closed-mindedness is a 'responsibilist' vice. In this way, Battaly's pluralism accommodates both varieties of epistemic vice. It also accommodates two different intuitions about virtues and vices. One is that luck plays an important role in whether we are virtuous or vicious. The other is that bad effects over which one has no control should not render one vicious. Reliabilism accommodates the first intuition, responsibilism the second, but vice pluralism accommodates both.

One concern one might have about this argument for vice pluralism centres on the idea of a better or worse person. It is far from obvious that cognitive disabilities, such as bad vision or forgetfulness make one a 'worse person'.[8] One does not become a worse person if one loses one's vision as a result of an illness or the ageing process. Care also needs to be taken here to avoid suggestions of ableism. Furthermore, as Liezl van Zyl has argued, the reliabilist and

responsibilist intuitions about virtue and vice that Battaly seeks to accommodate are not just different but incompatible. If luck plays an important role in whether we are virtuous or vicious then why can't bad effects over which one has no control render one vicious? It is not a virtue of vice pluralism that it endorses contradictory verdicts about what does and doesn't constitute a vice. This is not an objection to vice pluralism *per se* but to one specific version of this doctrine. There are, however, other less contentious ways of being a vice pluralist. One way is to be an *obstructivist*.[9]

Obstructivism refrains from claiming that epistemic vices make one a worse *person*. It argues that the intuitive notion of an epistemic vice is that of a personal quality that, as Medina puts it, 'gets in the way of knowledge' (2013: 30). Epistemic vices systematically obstruct the gaining, keeping or sharing of knowledge. The personal attributes that do that are a mixed bag. They include character traits like closed-mindedness, attitudes like prejudice and arrogance, and modes of thinking such as wishful thinking. In that case, why not also include conditions such as insomnia that make it harder to gain and retain knowledge? One reason for excluding insomnia is that epistemic or intellectual vices must be conditions of the intellect. In addition, being epistemically vicious is something for which a person can fairly be blamed or criticised. This rules out insomnia as well as forgetfulness, even though the latter might be regarded as a condition of the intellect.

This version of vice pluralism is relatively relaxed about admitting additional varieties of epistemic vice. It doesn't insist that only character traits, attitudes and modes of thinking can be epistemic vices. It allows that it can sometimes be hard to say whether something is or is not an epistemic vice. Cognitive biases might not qualify if they are aren't personal qualities or defects for which a person can be blamed or criticised. It isn't clear, however, that they aren't personal attributes or that people can't be criticised for their biases. The key point is that epistemic vices make one a worse gainer, keeper or sharer of knowledge rather than a worse

person. On one issue, however, obstructivism is in complete agreement with Battaly: epistemic vices are not one kind of thing.

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How are epistemic vices individuated? How do we draw the line between one epistemic vice and another? Even if the subject matter of vice epistemology is our epistemic vices themselves, it is arguable that our concepts are our only guide to their structure. This would explain why conceptual analysis is the appropriate method for vice-individuation. The labelling of this approach as 'indirect' might be questioned on the basis that there is no alternative 'direct' method. For example, if we are interested in understanding the relationship between closed-mindedness and dogmatism the only effective way of doing that is to analyse the corresponding concepts. If these concepts are such that it is possible for one of them to apply without the other applying then the only reasonable conclusion would be that these are in fact distinct vices.[10]

Battaly's work is again relevant here since she argues that there are indeed requirements for dogmatism that aren't requirements for closed-mindedness.[11] The latter is an unwillingness or inability to engage with relevant intellectual options. It does not require one to have already made up one's mind. Dogmatism does. It is an unwillingness to engage seriously with relevant alternatives to the beliefs one already holds. On this account, dogmatism is a form of closed-mindedness but it is possible to be closed-minded without being dogmatic. The basis of such claims is conceptual analysis. As Battaly recognises, other analyses of the relationship between closed-mindedness and dogmatism are possible. For example, she considers and rejects the proposal that closed-mindedness is an unwillingness or inability to transcend a default cognitive option.[12] In effect, she employs the method of cases to undermine this proposal: she devises cases in which it seems that a person is genuinely closed-minded without having, non-trivially, a default cognitive option or position.

The necessary conditions for closed-mindedness that interest Battaly are conceptually necessary, and disputes about such conditions are notoriously difficult to resolve. The method of cases might be employed to determine what is conceptually necessary for closed-mindedness but will not provide a resolution if people have conflicting intuitions about whether a given case is or is not a genuine case of closed-mindedness. A given individual's intuitions about hypothetical cases might be a guide to *their* concept but it is a further question to what extent they reveal conceptually necessary conditions for the application of 'the' concept of closed-mindedness.[13] One might take the view that there isn't a single, univocal concept, and that there is bound to be an element of stipulation in an individual theorist's conception of what it is to be closed-minded.

There is, however, another way of proceeding. Instead of individuating epistemic vices by conceptual analysis one might instead ask how, when, and why it is useful and appropriate to employ vice concepts – concepts of epistemic vices – to attribute epistemic vices to another person. With luck, an answer to this question will shed some light on how epistemic vices are individuated. The inspiration for this approach is Edwards Craig's 'state of nature' account of knowledge.[14] Craig describes himself as 'creeping up on the concept of knowledge' (1990: 3) by asking what its role in our life might be. Its purpose 'should be at least as interesting as its analysis' (1990: 2), and this leads to the suggestion that 'the concept of knowledge is used to flag approved sources of information' (1990: 11). The fact that this is what the concept is used for is a clue to what its characteristics might be.

When a person is judged to be closed-minded or dogmatic or to display some other epistemic vice, such vice attributions appear to serve a number of different purposes. They can be explanatory, evaluative, or cautionary.[15] We suppose that a person's epistemic conduct can sometimes be explained by their epistemic vices. In attributing an epistemic vice to someone we are also implicitly evaluating them on account of their being epistemically vicious in that

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respect. The implicit evaluation is negative rather than positive. Finally, the judgement that someone is epistemically vicious can serve as a warning to proceed with caution in relying on them for knowledge or understanding. To say that vice attributions are used to explain, evaluate and warn is to make a point about what might be called their *functional role* and, by implication, the functional role of vice concepts. If V_1 and V_2 are both epistemic vices but attributions of V_1 have a different functional role from attributions of V_2 then that is an indication that V_1 and V_2 are distinct vices.

An illustration of the explanatory role of vice attributions is the well-documented case of the Yom Kippur surprise.[16] On Yom Kippur 1973, Egyptian and Syrian forces launched a surprise attack on Israel on two fronts. Israel's military was taken by surprise despite the prior availability of excellent intelligence indicating an impending attack. A subsequent study by Uri Bar-Joseph and Arie Kruglanski blamed the intelligence failure on the closed-mindedness of Israel's Director of Military Intelligence and his senior Egyptian Affairs specialist.[17] The study concluded that these individuals ignored evidence of an impending attack because they had a particularly high need for cognitive closure and had already made up their minds that Egypt and Syria would not attack. The 'because' in this formulation is both causal and explanatory. Bar-Joseph and Kruglanski's hypothesis is that the attribution of the epistemic vice of closed-mindedness to two senior intelligence officers enables us to explain their lapses. If these individuals had been more open-minded, they might be been more inclined to pay attention to clear indications that Egypt and Syria were preparing to attack.

In explaining an event like the Yom Kippur surprise by reference to the epistemic vices of specific individuals, it is important to mark certain distinctions. There is, for example, the distinction between an intelligence analyst who is committed to a particular doctrine – say the doctrine that there Egypt and Syria wouldn't attack – and an analyst who is disposed to ignore evidence against whatever he happens to believe but who is not committed in advance to a

specific doctrine. Bar-Joseph and Kruglanski mark this distinction by distinguishing between the nonspecific and specific need for closure. The former is 'the desire for a confident judgment on an issue, *any* confident judgment as compared to confusion and ambiguity' (2003: 80). The latter is 'the desire for a judgment *of a particular content*' (2003: 80). A person with a specific need for closure has a specific bias, not just a bias against *any* view that is opposed to his.

A different way to mark this distinction would be distinguish the *dogmatism* of the intelligence analyst whose need for closure is specific from the mere *closed-mindedness* of the analyst whose need for closure is non-specific. Even if both analysts are dismissive of evidence pointing to an impending attack the explanation is different in the two cases. The dogmatic analyst is dismissive of such evidence not simply because of a general disposition to stick to his guns but because the evidence is at odds with a specific doctrine – that the Arabs wouldn't attack – to which he is dogmatically committed. The merely closed-minded analyst would have been receptive to evidence of an attack if he already believed that an attack was likely. He is dismissive of such evidence only because he happens already to have concluded that the Arabs wouldn't attack and has a general disposition to be dismissive of information that is at odds with his prior conception, whatever that conception happens to be.

In this example, closed-mindedness and dogmatism are distinguished not by analysing the corresponding concepts but by reflecting on the role of vice attributions in enabling us to flag salient differences between different explanations of a person's epistemic conduct. It might even be hypothesised that concepts like closed-mindedness and dogmatism came into being as subtly distinct concepts precisely in order to make it possible for us to draw correspondingly subtle explanatory distinctions. These and other epistemic vice concepts earn their keep by helping us to make sense of the many different ways in which a person's epistemic conduct can be flawed. A satisfactory account of how specific epistemic vices are individuated must track differences in their explanatory roles.

With regard to the evaluative function of vice attributions, one view is that, as Gabriele Taylor puts it, 'merely to use the labels "virtue" and "vice" is to indicate candidates for praise and blame' (2006: 6). It should be noted, however, that our evaluative repertoire is much more extensive than this suggests.[18] There are vices for which people are criticised but not blamed. Stupidity, understood as foolishness rather than lack of intelligence, is one such vice. In George Sher's terminology, epistemic vices cast a 'negative shadow' over the person whose vices they are but different vices do this in different ways.[19] Virtue and vice attributions are evaluative in the way that references or letters of recommendation are evaluative, and this has a bearing on how virtues and vices are individuated. What we expect from a person who is described in a letter as arrogant is different from what we expect from a person who is described as overconfident. This is a sign that arrogance and overconfidence are not the same vice. In the same way, closed-mindedness and dogmatism aren't the same epistemic vice if they generate different expectations. Reflection on such differences is a tool for delineating epistemic vices. V_1 and V_2 are not the same epistemic vice if the epistemic conduct one would expect from someone who has V_1 is different from the epistemic conduct one would expect from a person who has V_2.

Letters of recommendation can be cautionary as well as evaluative. A letter that goes into great detail about a person's epistemic vices but is silent about their virtues is sending a message to the reader: for example, do not hire this person. Different epistemic vices provide different reasons for rejecting a candidate. Again, this tells us something about the relationship between one vice and another. The fact that a person is arrogant might not be seen as a reason for rejecting their application to be a foreign exchange trader. In contrast, overconfidence might be regarded as a fatal defect. V_1 and V_2 are not the same epistemic vice if it coherent to regard V_1 but not V_2 as relevant to person's suitability for a particular professional role.[20] How can they be the same vice if it matters whether they have V_1 but not whether they have V_2?

Is the functional role approach to the Individuation Question direct or indirect? The case for treating this approach as indirect is that it seeks to individuate epistemic vices by reflecting on various aspects of vice *attributions*. On the other hand, the functional role approach doesn't offer an analysis of the vice concepts that are employed in vice attributions and does not see itself as creeping up on the *concept* of an epistemic vice. Just as Craig's state of nature theory can be read as an account of *knowledge* rather than just the concept of knowledge, so there is nothing wrong with regarding the study of epistemic vice attributions as revealing the nature of the epistemic vices themselves.[21] There is little to be gained by describing the functional role approach either as 'direct' or as 'indirect'. What matters is whether, one way or another, it tells us something about the nature of the vices to which it is applied.

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What are the implications of the functional role approach to the Individuation Question for the Answerability Question? To put this issue into context, consider again the contrast between realism and conceptualism. Realism insists that philosophical accounts of epistemic vices are answerable to nature of the vices themselves and that the distinction between one vice and another is a real distinction. Epistemic vices are like diseases or other natural kinds and are no less real. Like natural kinds, they have real essences, though not physiological real essences. The realist's motto is that there are lines in nature and these lines include the line between one vice and another as well as one disease and another.[22]

It is not clear, however, in what sense the distinction between one epistemic vice and another is a 'distinction in nature'. One might suppose that epistemic vices have psychological rather than physiological essences. For example, the need for closure might be posited as the psychological essence of closed-mindedness. Yet it is conceivable that what grounds a person's closed-mindedness is not a need for closure but arrogance. By the same token, people aren't

motivated to be stupid by an independently identifiable need or desire. This makes it hard to see in what sense epistemic vices have psychological real essences. Realism helps itself to the idea that epistemic vices are 'natural' but does little to address the suspicion that its conception of naturalness lacks substance.

What is the conceptualist alternative to realism? The commitments of conceptualism are highlighted by Locke's theory of 'mixed modes'. Modes are dependent existences that can only exist as the qualities of a substance. *Simple* modes are combinations of the same simple idea whereas *mixed* modes combine ideas of several different kinds.[23] For example, theft is a mixed mode since the idea of theft is the idea of the concealed change of possession of something without the consent of the proprietor. Locke maintains that ideas of modes are 'voluntary Collections of simple *Ideas*, which the Mind puts together, without any reference to any real Archetypes' (II.xxxi.3).[24] It follows that these ideas can't fail to be adequate since, as Ayers puts it on Locke's behalf, we form these ideas 'without the need to refer to reality' (1991: 57).[25] Consider the idea of courage:

> He that at first put together the *Idea* of Danger perceived, absence of disorder from Fear, sedate consideration of what was justly to be done, and executing it without that disturbance, or being deterred by the danger of it, had certainly in his Mind that complex *Idea* made up of that Combination: and intending it to be nothing else, but what it is; nor to have any other simple *Ideas*, but what it hath, it could not also be but an *adequate idea*: and laying this up in his Memory, with the name *Courage* annexed to it, to signifie it to others, and denominate from thence any Action he should observe to agree with it, had thereby a Standard to measure and dominate Actions by, as they agreed to it' (II.xxxi.3)..

It is reality that sets the standard for our ideas of substances. With mixed modes, our ideas set the standard for reality, so that an action is courageous just if it has the features that our idea

of courage brings together. Locke doesn't deny that ideas of mixed modes *can* be formed by observation. For the most part, however, ideas of modes are the products of invention, of the 'voluntary putting together of several simple *Ideas* in our own minds' (II.xxii.9), without prior observation. It is, in an important sense, arbitrary how we choose to put together simple ideas to form complex ideas of mixed modes.

A striking consequence of Locke's conceptualism is that there is no external standard by reference to which disputes about what is and is not part of the idea of mixed modes can be settled. Again Locke uses the example of courage to make his point. Suppose that one person X's idea of a courageous act includes the idea of 'sedate consideration' of 'what is fittest to be done' (II.xxx.4). This is the idea of 'an Action which may exist' but another person Y has a different idea according to which a courageous action is one that is performed 'without using one's Reason or Industry'. Such actions are also possible, and Y's idea is as 'real' as X's. An action that displays courage by X's lights might fail to do so by Y's lights and vice versa but it seems that the only respect in which Y's idea might count as 'wrong, imperfect, or *inadequate*' (II.xxxi.5) is if Y intends his idea of courage to be the same as X's. Apart from that, both ideas are equally good and equally valid.

Suppose, then, that one vice epistemologist insists, while another denies, that closed-mindedness involves an unwillingness to engage seriously with relevant alternatives to the beliefs one already holds. Can it not be argued in this case that both ideas of closed-mindedness are equally good and valid? Not if one of the two ideas does a significantly better job of flagging a distinction that is important for the purposes of explanation or evaluation. If it is important for such purposes to distinguish epistemic vice V_1 from another vice V_2 then the distinction between these vices is not arbitrary and there *is* something beyond our ideas to which it is answerable: the fact that some explanations are better than others.[26] If a distinction is useful or

even indispensable in practice then it is, at least to this extent, a *real* distinction in a non-quixotic sense of 'real'

Much depends, therefore, on whether it is true, as argued above, that certain ways of delineating epistemic vices such as closed-mindedness and dogmatism are better than others, better, that is, relative to an interest in explaining and evaluating people's epistemic conduct. If so, then this is the reality to which competing accounts of our epistemic vices are answerable. It is also the reality that conceptualism is in danger of disregarding if it insists that the choice between competing accounts of epistemic vices is arbitrary or that there is no need to refer to reality in the deciding where to locate the line between one epistemic vice and another. There may be forms of conceptualism that play down the arbitrariness of vice individuation but the extreme conceptualism about mixed modes to which Locke is committed is not one of them.[27]

Realism is also problematic since the functional role approach does not support the idea that epistemic vices are natural kinds or that the line between one epistemic vice and another is analogous to the distinction between one disease and another. This is not the sense in which the distinction between two epistemic vices is a 'real' distinction. An analogy might help to make the point clearer: a taxonomy of belief that is interested in explaining human action, and not just categorising it, will almost certainly have to recognise religious beliefs as a distinct type of belief. One reason, perhaps, is that religious beliefs have a distinctive content but it is also true that a person's religious beliefs can explain many aspects of their conduct – the fact that they pray regularly, for example - that their non-religious beliefs cannot. Religious beliefs have a distinctive functional role.[28] However, few would be tempted by the notion that there is a real distinction 'in nature' between the religious and non-religious beliefs, or that religious beliefs constitute a natural kind. An unqualified realism about types of belief is a non-starter, and the same goes for an unqualified realism about epistemic vices.

In both cases, it is necessary to find a middle way between conceptualism and realism. A label for this middle way is *conceptualist realism*.[29] A less cumbersome label that captures the link between the reality of a distinction and its usefulness is *pragmatism*. The Answerability Question invites vice epistemologists to decide whether competing accounts of epistemic vice are answerable to our concepts or to extra-conceptual reality. Conceptualist realism regards this as a false choice. Since our concepts and classificatory choices are shaped by reality if follows that the two options aren't mutually exclusive. The way that epistemic vices are individuated is both a reflection of our conceptual scheme and the explanatory and other realities by which our thinking is influenced. Epistemic vices lack the ontological stability of genuine natural kinds but they aren't arbitrary constructs if they enable us to make sense of epistemic reality, including numerous varieties of flawed epistemic conduct that are part of that reality.

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For the conceptualist realist the crux of the matter is whether vice attributions are actually as useful as has been claimed here. If one epistemic vice is distinguished from another on the basis that they explain different things it had better be the case that epistemic vices are explanatory. In offering an explanation of the flawed epistemic conduct of people who should know better, vice attributions offer an answer to certain 'how-possible' questions.[30] For example: how was it possible for Israeli military intelligence to overlook or ignore compelling evidence of an impending attack? Because of the epistemic vices of key individuals in the story of the Yom Kippur surprise. What might otherwise be hard to understand becomes intelligible in the light of the vice attribution or, as one might call it, the vice explanation. A vice explanation is not an explanation *of* an epistemic vice but an explanation of a person's conduct *by reference to* an epistemic vice.

It might be objected that vice explanations lack the explanatory power that has been claimed for them and that they only serve to obscure more pertinent factors in many cases. For example, from the standpoint of what Mark Alfano calls 'epistemic situationism', a person's epistemic conduct usually has much more to do with situational factors than with intellectual or other character traits.[31] Some situationists even see this as part of an argument against the very existence of such traits and, by implication, the existence of intellectual character vices. Yet there are many examples of defective epistemic conduct that are not amenable to explanation in situational terms. For example, much has been written about the conduct of senior members of the Bush administration in the run up to the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. The flaws in this conduct have been attributed to a wide variety of epistemic vices, including arrogance, imperviousness to evidence and an inability to deal with mistakes.[32] It is questionable whether in this case there are plausible situational alternatives to such vice explanations.

Other alternatives to vice explanations focus on sub-personal, socio-structural, or ideological factors. For example, belief in conspiracy theories has been explained by reference to the intellectual vices of conspiracy theorists but some psychologists argue that conspiracy theories are sustained by sub-personal biases such as proportionality and intentionality bias.[33] A socio-structural approach might be encouraged by studies that indicate that a tendency to see conspiracies everywhere is associated with adverse life circumstances.[34] Finally there is evidence that conspiracy theories are associated with extremist political ideologies, including anti-Semitic ideologies.[35] A person who subscribes to such an ideology might be more inclined to endorse ideologically motivated conspiracy theories. In such cases, it is the person's ideology rather than their epistemic vices that is the key to their thinking. The importance of ideology tends to be underestimated by vice epistemologists. There are apparently epistemic failings that have more to do with politics than anything else.[36]

One question that arises is whether ideological explanations are an alternative to vice explanations. It might be suggested, for example, that a commitment to extremist ideologies is itself something that calls for an explanation in terms of the extremist's epistemic vices. On the other hand, it is important not to underestimate the extent to which ideologies are expressive of a person's values. At least on the face of it, the fact that a person is an anti-Semitic conspiracy theorist say more about that moral failings than about their epistemic vices. Hitler did what he did and believed what he believed because he was morally depraved and not because he was closed-minded. No doubt he *was* closed-minded but when it comes to explaining his conduct his epistemic vices pale into insignificance when compared to his moral defects.

The lesson of such examples is that one and the same phenomenon can be explained at multiple different levels and by reference to multiple different factors: situational, ideological, moral, psychological and epistemological. To describe a person as closed-minded is, in effect, to pass comment on their psychology and their epistemological outlook. Vice explanations can be trumped by explanations of other types and it's not clear in such cases whether there is even such a thing as the 'right' explanation. Vice epistemologists are perhaps too inclined to promote vice explanations of what they see as flawed epistemic conduct even in cases where plausible alternative explanations are available. This is an epistemic vice of vice epistemologists. The contrary intellectual virtue that they need to cultivate is the virtue of only resorting to vice explanations where such explanations are called for.

As the case of the Yom Kippur surprise shows, there are cases where such explanations are more compelling than any alternative. If this were not so the appeal of vice epistemology would be considerably diminished. Given that vice explanations are sometimes successful, the remaining question is how a person's epistemic vices are to be explained. José Medina proposes that vices like arrogance and closed-mindedness are among the structural and systematic vices of the privileged.[37] If this proposal is correct then there is an opening here for vice explanations

to take account of socio-structural factors. However, the fact that some of the epistemic vices that figure in vice explanations are amenable to explanation in socio-structural terms is not a reason for doubting their existence. It remains true that it is sometimes plausible and necessary to explain why people think and reason as they do by reference to their epistemic vices. That is the reality to which philosophical thinking about epistemic vices is answerable. [38]

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[1] For a defence of vice pluralism see Battaly 2014 and 2015a. For a critique, see Van Zyl 2015.

[2] There is a vast philosophical literature on the method of cases. See, for example, Goldman 2007, Kornblith 2007 and Sosa 2007.

[3] By focusing on the concept of knowledge, Kornblith argues, 'we only succeed in changing the subject: instead of talking about knowledge, we end up talking about our concept of knowledge' (2002: 9-10).

[4] For further discussion of these issues see Kornblith 2002, especially chapter 1.

[5] As David Wiggins puts it, 'there are no "lines" in nature (even though, after the imposition of lines, there are edges for us to find there). It is we, sharing the benign illusion that there is just one way to do this, who impose lines on nature, not arbitrarily or in just any way, but in ways that are determined for us by our constitution and ecology, by the scale appropriate to our physical size in relation to the rest of the world, and by our intellectual and practical concerns' (1986: 170). The view that there are concept-independent lines in nature is defended in Ayers 1991.

[6] See Cassam 2019a for a defence of this approach.

[7] See, for example, Battaly 2015a and 2015b. Pluralism, as Battaly understands it, is the view that there are different kinds of virtues and that 'different qualities can make one a better person in different ways' (2015a: 9).

[8] The claim that it does is made by Heather Battaly. She writes: 'Vices are qualities that make us defective people…. a person can be defective in a variety of ways: for instance, she can be defective insofar as she has bad vision; or insofar as she lacks logical skills; or insofar as she is dogmatic, unjust, or cruel' (2014: 52).

[9] See Cassam 2019a for an exposition and defence of obstructivism.

[10] Distinct concepts like water and H_2O can be concepts of the same property but in this case it isn't possible for one of these concepts to apply without the other applying. If there are cases

in which the concept of closed-mindedness applies but the concept of dogmatism does not then these are distinct concepts *and* distinct properties.

[11] See Battaly 2018.

[12] She attributes this view to Jason Baehr.

[13] For present purposes a concept can be understood as 'a psychological structure or state that underpins a cognizer's deployment of a natural-language predicate' (Goldman & Pust 2002: 83). If people have markedly different contents associated with one and the same predicate then, as Goldman & Pust note, 'philosophical analysis must be satisfied with using intuitions to get at each person's distinct concept; it must be prepared, if necessary, to abandon the assumption that the content of each person's concept can be generalized to others' (2002: 86). However, Goldman & Pust are not convinced that this is necessary.

[14] In Craig 1990.

[15] A fuller account of the functional role of vice attributions would also need to take account of what Ian James Kidd calls 'epistemic vice-charging', the critical practice of charging other people with epistemic vice. According to Kidd, 'the practice of vice-charging should ultimately be ameliorative' (2016: 192).

[16] See Bar-Joseph & Kruglanski 2003, Bar-Joseph 2005, and Cassam 2019a: 28-52.

[17] Bar-Joseph & Kruglanski 2003.

[18] As Julia Driver points out, 'we sometimes, and indeed often do, make critical comments about someone's intellect without blaming them' (2000: 132).

[19] Sher 2006: 58.

[20] On the role relativity of virtues and vices see Pigden 2017.

[21] It is an odd and unnecessary feature of Craig's account that he insists on representing it as an account of the *concept* of knowledge.

[22] It is worth noting that the distinction between one disease and another is less 'natural' and less straightforward than realism assumes. As Peter Toon notes, debates about the boundaries of a disease are often 'really evaluative debates about the boundary between illness and wellness' (2014: 57). Furthermore, when a disease is defined on the basis of a continuous variable 'the normal and the abnormal merge imperceptibly into each other, so the boundary is to some extent arbitrary' (2014: 58). The realist who insists that there are sharp distinctions in reality between epistemic vices is thinking specifically of diseases with sharp boundaries and that are defined on a categorical variable. For example, it isn't possible to have a touch of bubonic plague. See Cassam 2017 for further discussion of the analogy between epistemic vices and diseases.

[23] Locke's examples of mixed modes include beauty, theft, obligation, drunkenness, a lie, hypocrisy, sacrilege, murder, appeal, triumph, wrestling, fencing, boldness, habit, testiness, running, speaking, revenge, gratitude, polygamy, justice, liberality, and courage. This list is from Perry 1967.

[24] All references in this form are to a book, chapter and section of Locke 1975, originally published in 1689.

[25] Locke illustrates the arbitrariness of mixed modes by noting that we have the complex idea of patricide but no special idea for the killing of a son or a sheep.

[26] An explanation as I understand it is part of the natural world, and might remain undiscovered. For an account of the contrast between this 'objectivist' conception of explanation and more subjectivist approaches see Bird 2005.

[27] Locke's conceptualism is a form of what David Wiggins calls 'anti-realist conceptualism', as distinct from 'sober conceptualism'. Anti-realist conceptualism holds that nothing prevents us from dissecting reality completely differently from what we are used to. See Wiggins 1980: 138-140.

[28] Their functional role is not unrelated to their content.

[29] This label is borrowed from Wiggins 1980.

[30] See Cassam 2007 for an account of the nature of how-possible questions.

[31] Alfano 2013.

[32] See Ricks 2007 and Cassam 2019a: 1-27.

[33] An intellectual vice account of conspiracy theories is given in Cassam 2015. For a response see Pigden 2017. A cognitive bias approach is defended in Brotherton 2015.

[34] Freeman & Bentall 2017.

[35] See Byford 2011 and Cassam 2019b.

[36] This is the central point of Cassam 2019b.

[37] Medina 2013: 30.

[38] For helpful comments and suggestions I thank Heather Battaly, Ian James Kidd and other participants at the April 2019 UCONN Vice Epistemology conference.