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Love of Knowledge

Introduction

The dispositions of desire, emotional response, and choice that constitute the excellent formation of the will have been, from ancient times to the present, much noticed in discussions of ethics, but remarkably less so in epistemology. A central contention of Part I has been that the formation of the will is crucial to an agent's intellectual functioning. So we begin the more substantive part of our book with a discussion of a virtue that consists in an excellent orientation of the will to knowledge. We mean "knowledge" to express the concept that we sketched in Chapter 2: namely, the richly intertwined bundle of understanding, acquaintance, and propositional knowledge. In using the phrase "love of knowledge", we do not mean strictly to follow ordinary usage, but to express a virtue concept that we will develop in this chapter.

Despite omitting the will from his account of the intellectual virtues, Aristotle begins his *Metaphysics* by attributing to human nature an appetite for knowledge.

> All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences among things.[1]

[1] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I. 1, 980^{a}20–8, trans. W. D. Ross, in *Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 689.

Human beings have several natural dispositions of attraction. We are attracted to food and drink, to members of the opposite or our own sex, to beautiful sights and sounds, to activity (moving, doing, making), and, as both Aristotle and Nietzsche note, to the exercise of power over things, other people, and ourselves. Aristotle points out in this famous passage that our species is also attracted to knowledge. We enjoy knowing things; we spend money on books; we take pleasure in noticing differences and similarities, say, in being able to distinguish the plants and birds in our surroundings, in being able to associate some birds with one bird group, others with another. Taxonomy satisfies. Aristotle here emphasizes a simple variety of the kind of knowledge that we have been calling "acquaintance": the baby explores with his eyes, his ears, his hands, his mouth; but even in our remotest maturity we take pleasure in the kind of contact with reality that we call seeing for ourselves. Sometimes this seeing is literal sensory experience ("Let *me* look in the telescope"), sometimes it is mathematical or conceptual insight or religious experience. And even when it is sensory, it may be at the same time conceptual (scientific, moral, religious). But acquaintance is not the only kind of knowledge we thirst for and enjoy. We take pleasure in deepened explanatory competence, in the ability to interpret texts, in the confirmation or disconfirmation of beliefs and hypotheses. Aristotle here points to a natural disposition—what we called a faculty in Chapter 4. This natural appetite for knowledge needs to be matured, formed, realized, completed. Everyone has the faculty, presumably, but only a few people ever come to possess its full and mature realization. In the present chapter we will explore the structure of this mature disposition of the will towards knowledge.

In the very young infant the appetitive orientation of which Aristotle writes is perhaps an indiscriminate penchant for sensory stimulation and the activities that promote it. But discriminations soon emerge, and the appetite becomes exploratory—the child wants to know things, to understand how things work. It is as though she is asking questions, thus focusing her desire for knowledge in very personally particular ways (*this* is what *I* want to know). And with further maturity, crucial distinctions come to guide the child's epistemic activities. She wants true perceptions and beliefs, not false ones; she wants well-grounded beliefs, not vagrant, floating ones; she wants significant rather than trivial, relevant rather than irrelevant, knowledge; she wants deep rather than shallow understanding; and she wants knowledge that ennobles human life and promotes human well-being rather than knowledge that degrades and destroys; she wants to know important truths. The development indicated in the previous sentence is often compromised or arrested short of its highest reaches, but the individual who loves and desires knowledge according to the discriminations of significance, relevance, and worthiness has the virtue that we are calling love of knowledge.

Christian tradition, starting with the Bible, has commended a discriminating appetite for knowledge. The apostle Paul writes, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if anything is excellent, if anything is worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4: 8). Saint Augustine says that not only our bodily appetites need to be properly channeled if we are to avoid self-ruin, but we must do the same for the appetite of the mind, which is "subject to a certain propensity to use the sense of the body ... for the satisfaction of its own inquisitiveness. This futile curiosity masquerades under the name of science and learning, and since it derives from our thirst for knowledge, and sight is the principal sense by which knowledge is acquired, in the Scriptures it is called *gratification of the eye*."[2] Thomas Aquinas continues this tradition in distinguishing a virtuous love of knowledge (*studiositas*) from an unvirtuous one (*curiositas*). (See *Summa Theologiæ* 2a2æ, Questions 166 ("Of Studiousness") and 167 ("Of Curiosity").) The present chapter is not an exposition of this Christian tradition, but it is inspired by it; the analysis of this virtue, like that of the others in this book, is in part controversial because of the way in which virtues are indexed to metaphysical commitments and world views.

Knowledge among the Human Goods

Locke describes a virtue marked by "an equal indifferency for all truth, I mean the receiving it in the love of it as truth, but not loving it for any other reason before we know it to be true" (*Of the Conduct of the Understanding*,

[2] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), Book X, ch. 35, p. 241; the biblical quotation is from 1 John 2: 16.

§12, p. 186).[3] We will try to understand what this loving indifference amounts to, but we can begin by specifying one thing that it cannot reasonably be. Many propositions of which a person could have knowledge are, absent very special circumstances, of no interest whatsoever, so that a person who equally loved all of them would not thereby display virtue, but instead a weird intellectual pathology. Imagine a lover of truth who with equal indifference wanted to adjudicate the truth-values of (1) a charge of capital crime against his mother and (2) the proposition that the third letter in the 41,365th listing in the 1977 Wichita telephone directory is a "d". The world is rife with truths of the latter sort, and a person who aspired to know them with indifference of enthusiasm would not be a model epistemic agent. Instead, the healthy, well-functioning agent loves some propositions (is interested in them, that is) far more than others—before he knows which ones are true. Epistemic goods are not all created equal; in fact some of them are so far down the value scale as hardly to be goods at all. So discrimination among epistemic goods is essential to the virtue that consists in loving them.

One kind of principle of discrimination is the set of criteria for propositional knowledge. The lover of knowledge wants his beliefs to be true, and to be adequately supported, in whatever way of supporting is appropriate to his particular belief in its particular circumstances. So the virtuous epistemic agent will insist on these conditions and will choose practices that tend to satisfy them, and will feel emotional discomfort when his desire for them is frustrated. Given a certain aptitude, he will tend to get truth and adequate support because he wants and pursues them. But an agent whose passion for knowledge involved only these principles of discrimination would exemplify the kind of indifference that we condemned in the preceding paragraph. So other criteria of discrimination must be essential to the virtue of love of knowledge.

If beliefs often need support, then beliefs can gain in value by being supports for other beliefs. So not only is *having* support a sometime desideratum in beliefs; a belief's *providing* support for other beliefs can also make it more interesting than some others, and a belief can be trivial because of its utter lack of a supporting role. One reason why the belief about the

[3] In John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), p. 186.

Wichita phone book lacks allure is that, barring very special circumstances, nothing rides on it. By contrast, explanations of anomalies in biology are usually highly significant, in that they press for revisions of other biological beliefs, on which, in turn, still other beliefs depend. Acquaintance and understanding can also be valued for the load they bear. Perceptions and insights can support important beliefs or important understandings of things. Compare, for example, the microbiologist who is excited by seeing something telltale on a chromosome with an accident gawker on the highway. Both exemplify the human appetite for perception that Aristotle indicates, but the gawker's desire and delight are going nowhere. They are idling; the perceptions they seek support nothing in particular. Seeing something or not seeing something through the microscope can make all the difference for the formation of a belief or for the coming together of understanding, and a scientist often spends much time and energy putting herself in a position for an acquaintance as a basis for some such epistemic good. In science, theology, history, and individual self-knowledge, the understanding of one thing often contributes to the understanding of another, or helps to warrant some belief. A philosopher or mathematician may expend great energy and time developing his understanding so as to put himself in a position to have basic insights within a given range.

The fact and extent of some knowledge's bearing an epistemic load is thus one of the criteria by which the lover of knowledge discriminates in her appetite for knowledge. She will tend to be more resolutely attached to more load-bearing beliefs, acquaintances, and understandings, and more interested in assessing the truth-value of proposed ones that seem to her to bear more of a load. However, load bearing *by itself* is not much of a value, since the load that a belief bears may itself be trivial or irrelevant. The fact that an expert witness has told me *the third letter in the 41,365th listing in the 1977 Wichita telephone directory is a "d"* supports the proposition, but the supporting role of the testimony does not lend much value to it if the proposition it supports is utterly without interest. The lover of knowledge discriminates pieces of knowledge by reference to their load bearing, but only by virtue of other bases of discrimination.

A more fundamental basis is one that we call worthiness. Propositional knowledge, understanding, and insight are important, not taken in abstraction, but in connection with their bearing on human flourishing

and the intrinsic importance of their objects. Knowing the truth in a criminal trial, understanding the mind of the accused, hearing the emotion in his voice, are important because justice is important. Getting a diagnosis right and understanding how a disease agent works are important because people's health is at stake. Warranted true beliefs and understanding of history may be important because our understanding of present-day institutions and current policies may depend on it; this knowledge is important also because the events it recounts were important to the people concerned in them. So, in the epistemically virtuous person the disposition of caring about the intellectual goods will derive in part from a disposition of caring about other goods such as justice, human well-being, and friendship. Love of the intellectual goods properly resides within the concern for what Aristotle calls eudaimonia—the broadest and deepest human well-being. So love of the epistemic goods is not a virtue in abstraction from other virtues, like justice, compassion, and a sense of civic duty.

But we are not saying that knowledge is valuable only if it is "practical". Some things are worth knowing even if the knowledge has no "application". Why is it worth knowing how old the universe is, while it is not worth knowing how many grains of sand are in a particular cubic centimeter of the Sahara Desert (assuming that both truths are "useless")? Why is it worth having a map of the entire human genome, even apart from the medical applications? Why is it worth understanding the details of the evolution of some organism? Is it just that these questions are very difficult to answer, and thus a challenge to human ingenuity, in the way some logical puzzles are? Is it just a challenge, like a crossword puzzle, so that once the puzzle is solved, the fun is over? The value of inquiry often turns on the value of the thing to be known. Organisms are excellent and beautiful things in their own right; human beings are glorious and important (to us, but just as some insect is also glorious, the value of human beings is not simply a parochial human affair). The universe, with all its processes, is worthy of respect. And this worthiness of the objects of knowledge is tied to their particular character—their particular complexity and simplicity, the particulars of their structure and composition and functions. The human genome is interesting because of what it is, whereas the cubic centimeter of the Sahara, simply as so many grains of sand together, is uninteresting because of what *it* is. And the epistemic correlative of complexity–simplicity functioning is not "knowing facts" but "understanding". The point of knowing the age of the universe is not that of having a number to put on it, but of the web of connections on which that number depends, the other parts of the story of the development of the universe, the explanation and the grasping of it. Again, the value of the epistemic goods is interconnected with other goods—now not just with human eudaimonia, but with the value of the universe, of the things that are known. But the value of the thing known does not guarantee the virtuousness of the love of knowing it.

The criterion of the intrinsic value of a potential object of knowledge is vague, and we have certainly not developed it significantly here. But we can say one more thing. Fictional objects—say, the *Star Wars* series or J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy—sometimes have a complexity and simplicity, a structure, that is analogous to the human genome or the evolution of the universe. Their intrinsic character may render them worthy to be studied, but this worthiness seems much less than that of something that is real; and we think that much of the legitimate interest that such fictional objects have depends on their reflecting reality in one way or another. We should not be taken as suggesting that the intrinsic worthiness of a real object trumps the worthiness of any fictional object. We want to allow, for example, that a knowledge of *Middlemarch* may be more worthy than a knowledge of a real car.

The proper lover of knowledge will value some knowledge more than others because some knowledge is more worthy. People differ as to the kinds of truths they take an interest in, and the differences can be differences of intellectual virtue, according to the quality of the goods the people care about. Individuals who are concerned about the truths they read in *Science* magazine, or the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *National Geographic*, the *New York Review of Books*, or *Books and Culture*, are in this respect more virtuous than people who are most interested in the truths they read in *People* magazine or the gossip columns, because the truths that are found there are mostly trivial or even salacious and invidious (that is, the truths aren't vicious, but it is less than virtuous to care about them, or to care much about them). This may sound elitist, but if it is, this is an elitism we cannot avoid. Surely anyone acquainted with intellectual culture knows the distinction between important and trivial knowledge. The aim of liberal arts programs in colleges and universities is not just to transmit a bit of the higher kind of knowledge to their students, but to nurture in them a discriminating

love of knowledge and thus to create in them a distaste—or at any rate, a limited patience—for trivial knowledge. It would be elitist not to spread this kind of education as broadly as possible through the population, but the aim of such an education is *properly* elitist. It is to produce people with a taste for what is excellent, and this will necessarily distinguish them from people who lack this taste. The right attitude of the educator is what Michael Platt has called "elitism for everybody".

A third principle of discrimination is relevance. Beliefs, understandings, insights, and perceptions can be very significant in the sense that other epistemic goods rest on them, and worthy in the sense that their objects are intrinsically important or bear on human eudaimonia, without being of much interest to a given person or group at a given time because these are not relevant to their current concerns. It is not for everyone to know the details of Samuel Johnson's life or important facts in quantum mechanics, despite the ramifications and intrinsic value of such knowledge, because some bits of important knowledge are necessarily restricted to a small community of specialists. No human being can know all important knowledge. People's special placement in society and their already existing fund of knowledge can make certain pieces of knowledge relevant to them which are not relevant to many other lovers of knowledge. Conversely, knowledge can be highly relevant without bearing much epistemic weight or being generally very worthy. Sometimes the most relevant question is "Where are my keys?" or "How can I get some food for my family?" (Of course, the relevance of where my keys are does and must bear, in at least a small way, on my human flourishing.) The intellectually virtuous person is acutely circumspect—that is, has a strong and sharp sense of the relevance of the parts of his knowledge to his current circumstances and his finitude—and his appetite for knowledge will be governed, in part, by his sense of relevance.

It would be a mistake to attribute to the lover of knowledge a too methodical approach to its acquisition, one whereby she governed her intellectual behavior by an explicit and rigid appeal to principles of load bearing, worthiness, and relevance, carefully and decisively shunning all experiences, insights, and beliefs that did not satisfy the criteria for properly lovable knowledge. Even the most brilliant and best-educated human being is not in a position to recognize with sufficient reliability the beliefs, insights, and understandings that have the property of proper lovability.

Experimentation, trial and error, and muddling about are unavoidable features of the life of the mind. It will be part of the flexible practical wisdom of the intellectually virtuous individual to know when to play with ideas, hypotheses, interpretations, images, experiences, and formulas, often with only a vague sense of the positive value of the objects of play. Thus the lover of knowledge, whether she is a scientist, an interpreter of texts, a historian, or a layperson interested in any of these fields, will on occasion exemplify something like the Derridean-Nietzschean virtue of epistemic playfulness (see Chapter 5), letting her mind go on outrageous creative wanderings. And it will be part of the formation of her intellectual taste that she takes pleasure in such activity. The difference between the lover of knowledge as we describe her in this chapter and the authentic Derridean-Nietzschean is that in the lover of knowledge epistemic playfulness is just one of the many virtues which, in her practical wisdom, the agent exemplifies as occasion calls for.

A similar topic is the enjoyment of problem solving. People who are talented at puzzle solving often take great pleasure in exercising their brains, sometimes without discriminating regard to subject-matter. Thomas Kuhn points out that a leading motive for doing "normal science" is the joy that certain smart people get from solving the numerous puzzles that are created by a scientific paradigm.[4] Human beings' attraction to intellectual puzzles—regardless of the significance of the subject-matter—is a natural expression of the love of knowing that Aristotle mentions. But if getting solutions to the puzzles had no significance beyond amusing smart people, the enthusiasm for doing so would not be much of a virtue. We credit chess masters with intellectual brilliance of a sort (thus a virtue in the thin sense promoted by some virtue epistemologists), but their interest in chess is at best a minor intellectual virtue. Some scientists' love of puzzle solving may be little more than an enthusiasm for highly technical and challenging amusement. But the enterprise is communally ennobled by the fact that their work contributes to an understanding of nature, and we think that most cases of scientists' motivation for their work contains at least an admixture of joy in understanding the universe. The taste for puzzle solving is itself virtuous, in a mild way,

[4] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 35–42.

but it gains enormously in value if integrated into an overall intellectual will or project that is governed by load-bearing significance, worthiness, and relevance.

If the love of knowledge is governed by these kinds of discriminations, what can Locke mean by "equal indifferency for all truth"? He identifies the counterpart intellectual vice as "prejudice". A person who suffers from prejudice adheres to certain beliefs for inadequate reasons, such as that he likes believing them, that it would cause him anxiety to give them up, that this is what people in his tribe have always believed, and that the investigations leading to the revision of these beliefs would cost him more trouble than he wants to spend. The lover of knowledge is free from prejudice. Described in our terms, prejudice is a malformation of the epistemic will. The four examples of inappropriate reasons that we have just attributed to the prejudiced are all appetitive states—aversions, preferences, attachments—which may not always be bad, except as they override the good of knowing the truth. The lover of truth, by contrast,

> must suppose ... that his persuasion is built upon good grounds, and that his assent is no greater than what the evidence of the truth he holds forces him to, and that they are arguments and not inclination or fancy that make him so confident and positive in his tenets.

And the test of whether he really and honestly loves belief-as-adequately-grounded above all such competitors as we mentioned above is his openness to hear criticism and revise his opinions:

> Now if, after all his profession, he cannot bear any opposition to his opinion, if he cannot so much as give a patient hearing, much less examine and weigh the arguments on the other side, does he not plainly confess it is prejudice governs him? (*Conduct*, §10, p. 184)

What shall we say about Locke's sketch of the lover of knowledge in the light of the three principles of discrimination that we have laid out? We note first that Locke seems to be concerned primarily with the discriminations associated with the structure of propositional knowledge. We have argued that commitment to such knowledge is not enough for someone to count as a lover of knowledge. Furthermore, Locke's conception of adequate grounding is evidentialist, and we would propose a more pluralistic, Alstonian understanding of warrant (see Chapter 2). We concur that where evidence is called for, the lover of knowledge

will discriminate among beliefs on the basis of the evidence for them; but in addition to allowing for a variety of kinds of warrant, whose adequacy varies with the beliefs in question and their circumstances, the lover of knowledge will have a more complex set of principles, which he will apply with practical wisdom according to kinds of beliefs and their circumstances. We also agree that mere preference for a belief, fear of emotional distress, and aversion to exertion are usually not adequate reasons for retaining an important belief that one has been given some reason to abandon. While we do not want to rule that retaining a belief for any of these reasons is incompatible with love of knowledge, we agree that they are uncharacteristic for a person with the virtue. We also want to allow that the lover of knowledge may have some of the impulses of the prejudiced—an anxiety about putting his pet beliefs in jeopardy, a certain aversion to long drawn-out investigations, and so forth—but he also has a counterbalancing love of the intellectual goods, discriminated according to their significance, relevance, and worthiness, and he has a toughness of self-discipline that allows him to override these less worthy motivations when they threaten his intellectual life, with more or fewer efforts of self-management.

Locke is right to accord great importance to discriminating truth from falsehood; the lover of knowledge does love truth as such, even if he doesn't love truths indiscriminately. Bernard Williams points out that just as a person can love music as music without loving all kinds of music, so the fact that a person wants his knowledge to have other qualities besides truth does not imply that he desires truth only incidentally or instrumentally.[5]

But Locke is far from advocating an indiscriminate obligation to ground our beliefs in argument and evidence. He says that since life is short and knowledge hard to come by,

> it becomes our prudence, in our search after knowledge, to employ our thoughts about fundamental and material questions, carefully avoiding those that are trifling.... How much of many young men's time is thrown away in purely logical inquiries ... is much worse than for a young painter to spend his apprenticeship ... in examining the threads of the several cloths he is to paint upon, and counting the hairs of each pencil and brush he intends to use in the laying on of his colors.... superficial and slight discoveries and observations that contain nothing of moment

[5] See Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 90.

in themselves, nor serve as clues to lead us into farther knowledge, should be lightly passed by, and never thought worth our searching after. (*Conduct*, §43, p. 222)

And he gives as an example of a fundamental piece of knowledge "that admirable discovery of Mr. Newton, that all bodies gravitate to one another."

Purveyance

Among human beings, knowledge is very much a social affair, and the two main kinds of social roles people occupy with respect to it are those of *acquiring* it from others and *purveying* it to others. For example, these two functions constitute the social side of the teamwork characteristic of modern science. Throughout this study, we are interested in what we might call the *general* delivery of the epistemic goods, the role of the virtues not just in fostering the single virtuous individual's own knowledge, but the general human acquisition of these goods—or rather, their acquisition, maintenance, and application within a community. The love of knowledge would not be in the fullest sense an intellectual virtue in a person who loved it only for himself. So now we need to comment briefly on the love of knowledge as it characterizes people in the various roles of purveyor—for example, those of witness, teacher, and supporter of epistemic enterprise. To think of an intellectual virtue as a disposition that fosters the goods in this general way is to bring social attitudes into the analysis, to include in the disposition concerns for the cognitive well-being of other people. Let us consider the love of knowledge as a motivation for purveying it through testimony, teaching, and support of epistemic enterprises.

According to Thomas Reid, among the inborn epistemic dispositions with which human beings are equipped by nature is a

propensity to speak truth, and to use the signs of language so as to convey our real sentiments. This principle has a powerful operation, even in the greatest liars; for where they lie once, they speak truth a hundred times. Truth is always uppermost, and is the natural issue of the mind. It requires no art or training, no inducement or temptation, but only that we yield to a natural impulse. Lying, on the contrary, is doing violence to our nature; and is never practised, even by the worst men, without some temptation. Speaking truth is like using our natural food, which we would do from appetite, although it answered no end; but lying is like taking physic, which is nauseous to the taste, and which no man takes but for some end which he cannot otherwise attain.[6]

Reid's sentiment is a credit to the persons in his range of observation; perhaps they were unusually truthful. It is true that a person needs *some* motivation to lie, as one needs some motivation to do anything at all, but we have known people who at the slightest hint of being in a "political" situation spontaneously adopt the strategy of deceit or evasion. However, even if the disposition that we have observed is always a positive perversion of our native condition, the disposition to tell others the truth, if it amounts to no more than Reid describes here, is not the virtue of truthfulness—in part because the natural impulse to tell the truth is not tough enough to make truth telling highly probable when the going gets rough (the temptations are a fact of life), and in part because it does not require a love of something good. The disposition that Reid describes is not an appreciation of the epistemic goods and the importance of others' possessing them. Here again, we see the gulf between a faculty—a natural propensity to some kind of behavior—and a virtue, a state of mature character that is somehow the development and realization of that faculty.

Truthfulness is a love of the intellectual goods as they may be lodged in other people by way of one's own communication. It is a concern that what one tells the other be true, not just in some legalistic sense of being a true proposition, but that what one is communicating actually become a true belief or correct understanding lodged in the other person—that she know and understand the truth. Here love of knowledge is not just a love of epistemic goods as such, but of other people's having them. So what we would ordinarily call a moral motivation is involved in the structure of the virtue—benevolence, *agapē*, justice, generosity, or the like—but the virtue is intellectual inasmuch as the good or the justice that is wished for the other is an epistemic one.

This is not to say that the truthful person never knowingly deceives or allows an interlocutor to continue uncorrected in a false belief, but it is to say that she does not do so without good reasons, and she is subject to emotional discomforts in many cases of withholding truth, or allowing or

[6] Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind On the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. with an introduction by Timothy Duggan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), ch. 6, sect. 24, pp. 238–9.

conveying falsehood. This animus against purveying or allowing falsehoods is not indiscriminate; the practical wisdom of truthfulness is a sense of which falsehoods are important to avoid, or especially important to avoid, and why, and which, truths urgently need to be told. The criteria governing this wisdom are the ones that govern the love of knowledge, except that now the judgments are made by virtue of empathy with the interlocutor's situation: One judges for the other as to communication as one would judge for oneself as to inquiry—according to the discriminations of truth, load bearing, worthiness, and relevance. And the last two criteria, especially, reach out beyond the "purely epistemic" to the broader concerns for human well-being. Consider the case of Socratic irony.

History has given us, perhaps, no greater lover of knowledge than Socrates, and yet in the course of his ironical proceedings in the *Euthyphro* and other dialogues Socrates plays rather fast and loose with the truth of particular propositions. He is on his way to the law court to be prosecuted by Meletus for impiety and leading the youth astray when he meets Euthyphro, who is going to the same place to prosecute his father for a "murder". Euthyphro discloses that his motive for prosecuting his father is piety to the gods, who, according to him, require utterly impartial justice. He displays such confidence in his knowledge of what piety requires that Socrates proposes to become his pupil so that when he appears in court he can tell Meletus that he has learned the truth about piety and so is in a position to reform and lead a righteous life hereafter. All of this is literally false. In truth, Socrates functions throughout the dialogue as a potential teacher of Euthyphro. The topic is the nature of piety, and the upshot is that Euthyphro is much less clear about what piety is than he thinks. What Euthyphro might have learned is the highly ramified, worthy, and relevant truth that Euthyphro does not know what piety requires. Socrates makes a good-faith effort at teaching Euthyphro this truth, and his strategy is irony: falsely presenting himself as Euthyphro's pupil so as to engage him in a conversation from which Euthyphro may learn this truth. On the surface the effort seems to fail miserably, with Euthyphro as ignorant at the end of the dialogue as he was at the start—maybe even worse off epistemically, inasmuch as he seems to have developed a more defensive posture against Socratic questioning.

Socratic irony has epistemic victims in the sense that it sometimes leads people to believe falsehoods; furthermore, Socrates employs it intentionally,

in full awareness that it may have this effect. Is the practice compatible with truthfulness and the love of knowledge? We think so, and we think that the justification can be explained in terms of some of the discriminations that we take to govern the love of knowledge. The false proposition that Socrates risks introducing into Euthyphro's doxastic structure—namely, *Socrates wants to learn from me*—is trivial compared with the ramified and worthy understanding that might be engendered by their conversation. Furthermore, if deceit is brought on by the irony, it is very likely to be temporary; on one reading of the dialogue, by the end Euthyphro realizes that he has been tricked into the rather deep conversation he has just had. If, in addition, seeds of intellectual and moral humility have been sown in his constitution, then perhaps nothing has been lost, and something gained. Euthyphro is not likely to forget soon his conversation with Socrates, and the probability is pretty high that it will have more durable effects than the ones recounted in Plato's literary product. Besides these considerations, Euthyphro may not be the only person to be considered. In many of Socrates' dialogues, while the irony may be lost on some interlocutors, it may be transparent to others, yet not unimportant in the economy of communication even for those who see right through it. The irony presumably has pedagogical power for many of the millions who have read and will read the dialogue across the ages. Another plausible justification is that a more direct communication of the important truth that Socrates tried to communicate to Euthyphro would have had even less chance of success than the ironic approach.

We have argued that the lover of knowledge is motivated, in her role of purveyor, by the value of knowledge in itself and its value for the ones to whom it is supplied. In connection with purveyance, then, the love of knowledge is a kind of benevolence, generosity, or justice. People communicate epistemic goods to others, as well as a great deal of epistemic trash, for reasons other than these ideal ones. Some of these lesser motivations are exploited in social structures to encourage the communication of epistemic goods, while others would be better omitted altogether from life. Teachers teach reasonably responsibly, at least in part for salaries and prestige, and institutions are contrived to reward excellence in these extrinsic ways. People speak the truth from fear of a bad reputation, and that is often better than lying or keeping the truths to themselves. People pass on information about others from malice or

envy. Some people teach out of a love of showing off. Most people's motivation for teaching has at least some admixture of the vice that we will call "domination" in Chapter 9—the hubristic desire to be the author of somebody else's mind. All these kinds of motivation differ from the virtue that we have been calling the love of knowledge.

Even apart from the currently growing specialization of knowledge and narrowing of disciplinary expertise, no one can care in the same way about all important truths. It is not indicative of intellectual vice not to care much about knowing for oneself, say, the chemical properties of some rocket propellant or the rice yield in the Mekong Delta, even though it may be very important for somebody else to know these things. The fully mature lover of knowledge will, in a necessarily abstract sense, love all knowledge, even the knowledge which she knows only by hearsay and with respect to which she will thus not have the powers of discrimination that we outlined in the second section of this chapter. If such a lover of knowledge is to contribute to its purveyance, she will have to ally herself with and trust others for judgments about load bearing, worthiness, and relevance, as well as for the more immediate purveyance of the knowledge. Such a lover might send her children to a university to which she herself would not have been admitted; she might give money so that a student could study a subject that she would not want to know (or at any rate, know deeply) herself; she might support research on a question that she barely understands. Of course, such actions may be motivated by vanity, domination, or other vicious or non-virtuous motives. The point is that a person need not be particularly intellectually accomplished, or have tasted very directly any particular kind of knowledge, to have something like the virtue that we are describing in this section.

Faulty Epistemic Will

We can deepen our understanding of the love of knowledge by reflecting on shortfalls and deviations from it. Faulty epistemic will encompasses immaturity and vice. Immaturity is a fault, not among the very young, whose immaturity is perfectly normal, or among the congenitally defective, whose "immaturity" is inevitable, but among those who are old enough and well enough endowed to be properly developed, but aren't. The

difference between immaturity, when it is a fault, and vice is not very sharp, but one criterion is the positiveness of the fault—is it in the direction of the perverse, or is it just a shortfall from the good?—and another is blameworthiness, though this is not a strict criterion, because some cases of immaturity are blameworthy and some cases of vice may not be. With these provisos, we want to retain the distinction between immaturity and vice.

We have the following reservation about Aristotle's distinction between weakness of will and vice. Bad motivation that will count, in a given person, as contributing to no more than what Aristotle calls weakness of will, since the person is also virtuously motivated to struggle against the bad motivation, can be both blameworthy and positively perverse, and thus clearly vicious. That is, we want to attach the word "vicious" not just to overall behavioral dispositions, but to motives. However, we gladly acknowledge the heart of Aristotle's distinction: namely, that between a disposition to struggle against a vicious motive, and to regret failing in the struggle, and a disposition simply and cheerfully to act on the vicious motive. Roughly, immaturity relative to the love of knowledge will be a shortfall of proper love for the epistemic goods or of proper aversion to epistemic harm, while vice will be a perverse love for or aversion to the epistemic goods and/or perverse attraction to other things that affect epistemic performance. Accordingly, our discussion can be divided along the following lines: (1) failures of concern to know, (2) unvirtuous concerns to know, (3) failures of concern not to know, and (4) unvirtuous concerns not to know.

Failures of concern to know We have seen that while mature love of knowledge is the development of a natural, faculty-like disposition of the human will which at the beginning is little more than a love of cognitive stimulation, the virtue itself is a desire or concern that discriminates its objects along several dimensions. Since the original disposition is an inbuilt aspect of human nature, we are not likely to find many members of the human race who lack interest in all kinds whatsoever of cognitive stimulation or activity. In this respect the sheep diverge from the goats along the lines of discrimination that we outlined in the second section of this chapter. Consider some of the more typical kinds of faulty cognitive indifference to be met with among human beings.

Locke comments that some people, while not by any means "indifferent for their own opinions" (indeed, these people are passionately attached to their own opinions), are not "concerned, as they should be, to know whether [their opinions] are true or false" (*Conduct*, §12, p. 187). One sign of insufficient concern for truth is that when such people are given an opportunity to test their more cherished beliefs, they decline it, or apply it too casually, or offer defenses of the beliefs that are weaker than any that these people would accept in other contexts. From time to time we hear of scientists who intentionally falsify data in favor of their own hypotheses. It is not that these people have no concern at all for truth, but that they do not care about it enough to be fully excellent epistemic agents. When other motives conflict with the concern for truth, these defective individuals tend to forsake truth to satisfy the other motives. Locke seems to underestimate, consistently, the rightful place of intellectual firmness and personal advocacy of beliefs in the intellectual life. We will discuss this point in the next chapter. Not everyone who seems to his colleagues rigid in his beliefs is in fact intellectually immature or vicious; intellectual practical wisdom may dictate that one person hold on where another, because of *his* placement in the intellectual history or community, should forfeit. Both individuals might be exemplars of both firmness and love of truth. The fact that firmness is a virtue does not diminish the importance of the love of truth.

Connected with the intellectual defects of caring too little about truth and grounding is a casualness about understanding, a complacency about letting certain things, which one could understand with effort, go unun-derstood. The very best intellectual agents are alert to deficiencies in their understanding and continually seek to untie the knots in it and deepen it. Most intellectual endeavors afford plenty of scope for improvement of understanding, and a person who insists inordinately on understanding everything can, admittedly, become discouraged or tire himself to the point of sickening. So again, judgment and balance are requisite. A person can be uninterested in deepening his understanding in some area without exemplifying a vicious intellectual complacency. A student might wisely elect to settle for a "B" understanding in microbiology if this is not central to his own intellectual development and if getting a deeper understand-ing here would entail sacrifice of development in other more important areas. Yet a very common defect of the intellectual will is complacency

of understanding. The agent reaches a level that enables him or her to "function" (say, to keep his job, to get a "B" in the course, to do the tasks that daily life requires), and settles for his intellectual *status quo* until forced by the threat of no promotion, a lower grade, or the inability to perform some task, to go a little deeper.

A similar complacency about important kinds of acquaintance is an immaturity in the same vein. Let us mention just a couple of notable kinds. Facing our own emotions is often difficult for people, and important. We do not like to admit that we are feeling guilty about something we have done; we give ourselves "justifications" for our action that shield us a bit from the experience of the emotion, yet it is there waiting with its impact were we to look straight at it. Or we avoid feeling the envy that is working in us, again telling ourselves stories about our situation that are calculated (in an unexplicit sort of way) to shield us from full perception of the emotion. Feeling these emotions (as compared with a mere "intellectual" acknowledgment that we have them) is an important part of self-knowledge; in the feelings we may have access to a clear and distinct idea of what we are like.[7] But some of us systematically shield ourselves from this self-knowledge, and while in a sense we "know" these emotions are present, we keep our back turned and so remain in the twilight about ourselves.

Another kind of acquaintance that is subject to complacency is the perception of anomalies in science and other intellectual endeavors. Thomas Kuhn points out that scientists working within a paradigm are sometimes quasi-blind to phenomena that resist explanation within the paradigm. But as in the emotion case we just mentioned, this dimness of insight is not a sheer blindness, but partly a phenomenon of the will, a deficit of desire, pleasure, and choice. Scientists differ from one another in the extent to which they find anomalies attractive, exciting, interesting, enjoyable. For some scientists anomalies are chiefly an annoyance, an impediment to getting on with the day's work, while for others they illustrate the comment of Johannes Climacus that "a thinker without a paradox is like a lover without passion".[8] A passion for paradoxes is a disposition to be

[7] For more on feelings of emotion as a source of self-knowledge, see Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ch. 4.

[8] See Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), ch. 3. Climacus might have formulated his point more accurately

acquainted with them, a principle of their saliency. A fear of paradoxes, or a lack of interest in them, is a defect of the epistemic will. Again, proper formation of the will is governed by practical wisdom: some paradoxes, while intractable, seem to be tricks of formulation, while others invite solutions that yield genuine progress of understanding.

What is the cure for these complacencies, these deficits of intellectual passion? How can one who lacks a sense of the value of something be brought to love it? The answer lies in a certain kind of education, one that treats goods like truth, grounding, understanding, and significant insight as intrinsic goods and not merely as means to other goods like employment, grades, and the accomplishment of tasks. Such an education leads the agent into the presence of the good, thus inviting him to appreciate it. In the middle of Plato's *Theaetetus* is a digression (172c–177c) in which Socrates compares the character and education of a philosopher with the character and education of a lawyer. The lawyer learns to argue in court, where topics are determined by the exigencies of the legal system, where truth-claims and the arguments for them are subordinate to prosecutions and defenses, and where strict time limits are set for the arguments. Such an education, says Socrates, is not likely to lead to the love of knowledge. The philosopher, by contrast, learns argument in the context of a free and leisurely search for the truth itself, so that if one line of argument does not deliver the goods, it is abandoned, and another is taken up. The student here learns through an endeavor that is directly and ultimately aimed at the epistemic goods themselves, in the company of others who value these goods for their worthiness. If the inquirer achieves some understanding (and in the *Theaetetus* the participants do, even though they discover no adequate definition of knowledge), he delights in it for what it is. So in the process of such an education, the value of the epistemic goods becomes evident to the student. We hope that such acquaintance can also be fostered by thinking hard about the epistemic goods, as we are trying to do in this book.

Unvirtuous concerns to know We have argued that loving knowledge as good in itself is compatible with discriminating grades of knowledge, where the

but less poetically thus: "A thinker indifferent to paradox is like a lover indifferent to his beloved," thus showing himself a little more clearly to be a virtues epistemologist.

grading is determined by human well-being and the importance of the objects of knowledge. These ways in which the value of other things affects the value of knowledge make possible unvirtuous or even vicious concerns to know. Let us distinguish instrumental from non-instrumental unvirtuous concerns to know.

People desire to know things for a wide variety of instrumental reasons. Knowledge can be the way to finishing that damned dissertation, getting tenure, getting a job at Yale, making lots of money, getting a Nobel prize, scaring other people, plumbing the basement, and cooking up a first-rate soufflé, to mention just a few. In some of these cases, desiring knowledge solely for the kind of reason in question is perfectly compatible with the highest intellectual virtue. The knowledge of how to make a soufflé seems to *have* no value beyond its instrumentality in mediating soufflés. So you're none the less virtuous for desiring that knowledge with nothing more than the crass intention of puffing up a terrific soufflé for yourself and your honey. But in other cases there is something intellectually immature, to say the least, about somebody who seeks the kind of knowledge in question solely for instrumental reasons. If the knowledge in the dissertation is worth writing a dissertation about, then something is wrong if your only interest in it lies in finishing the dissertation. If a piece of knowledge merits a Nobel prize, one who desires that knowledge only for the Prize has a defective epistemic will. The point is not that wanting the Nobel Prize is in itself perverse (though it's not particularly admirable either), but that wanting something as worthy as important scientific knowledge less than one wants the incidental good that it procures shows a corrupted or immature spirit.

Some goals for which high-level knowledge is instrumental are, however, much more worthy than the goals of fame and fortune embodied in the Nobel prize. The medical applications of biological knowledge would be an example. A person who seeks biological knowledge solely for the sake of its medical applications is more mature, intellectually, than one who seeks the same knowledge solely for a Nobel prize, for at least two reasons. First, the medical applications are the kind of eudaimonia-integral rationale that more broadly contributes to the value of knowledge in the first place; second, medical knowledge is internal to such applications, in the same way that a knowledge of justice is internal to justice in court cases. By contrast, biological knowledge is not internal to prestige and money. Note that, in this book, we formulate the broad powers afforded

by the intellectual virtues as the acquisition, maintenance, transmission, and *application* of knowledge. Our rationale for including the application of knowledge among the aptitudes essential to virtuous intellectual character is our sense that knowledge's instrumentality to application of knowledge is quite different from knowledge's instrumentality to making money or gaining a prestigious position. Still, biological entities are astoundingly beautiful and ingenious, and a biologist who found knowledge about them utterly uninteresting apart from its medical applications would have a defective intellectual character.

Non-instrumental desires for knowledge can also be vicious or immature, through lack of circumspection. Circumspection is a concern for the values that the knowledge, or the pursuit of it, would affect, along with good judgment about the possible effects of the research or the resulting knowledge. Nazi medical researchers using concentration-camp prisoners as subjects in experiments with obvious and horrendous harmful consequences for the subjects provide clear examples of extreme vice. Nuclear physicists or biologists working on weapons of mass destruction provide more ambiguous examples. Since intellectual circumspection has both a motivational and a "success" component, an individual scientist could fall short of virtue either by caring too little about the possible consequences of her researches or by lacking good judgment about those consequences. The present point is just that such vice or immaturity is compatible with desiring the knowledge in a purely non-instrumental way.

Another perversion of the love of knowledge is that of being a willing purveyor or consumer of gossip. While the concept of gossip stresses, perhaps, the giving of information, the practice includes collecting it. The gossiper enjoys passing on gossip, but equally enjoys collecting material, and may become very skilled at research, learning to drop comments and ask questions that tend to elicit gossip from others, and entering into transitory quasi-contractual relationships in which gossip is traded. He takes pleasure in learning and passing on information about other people that is inappropriate for him to learn, possess, or pass on to another. Much gossip is only pseudo-knowledge, but nothing in the idea of gossip prevents its being perfectly warranted true belief. Since gossip is not necessarily defective as propositional knowledge, the standard by which the love of it is faulty must be some principle of discrimination other than those governing propositional knowledge. The proper response to gossip is, "It's none of his (her, my, your, our) business." That is, the gossiper lacks an epistemic (life) context for his acquiring or passing on the information in question. The knowledge is idling in his cognitive establishment. But to say that it's none of his business is not just to say that his interest is idle; the gossiper is more vicious than a mere lover of trivia. Among the more sophisticated and "sensitive", gossip is often couched in benevolent and compassionate terms, in a tone of solicitude and caring for the objects of their discourse and researches, but what makes it gossip is that it is nosey. It is invasive, voyeuristic, and often has an invidious edge of put-down about it; and even if it expresses no bad will, it is often to the unjust hurt of another's reputation or to the violation of his privacy. The gossiper exhibits a deficit of circumspection, of seriousness about the question: Is this something I, in my circumstances, am permitted to learn, or to pass on to this other in his circumstances? That gossip is circumstantial, and that the vice betokens a deficit of circumspection is obvious from the fact that the very same propositional knowledge may be perfectly legitimate if kept to oneself, or if inquired after by a priest, police officer, doctor, or teacher.

In Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the slave-narrator comments on a slave-owner who was a cut above the average, that he looked away when the slave women were nursing their infants. This intentional forgoing of acquaintance expresses respect for the women's privacy and a sense of the limits that human proprieties set to appropriate knowledge. It is not that acquaintance with the appearance of the women's breasts is a bad thing in itself, knowledge that no human being ought ever to have; rather, the epistemic virtue here consists in an appetitively qualified sense of context, determined in part by social conventions concerning modesty and in part by universal facts of human nature such as the need to be dignified by respectful treatment. To be an indiscriminate ogler is a trait of bad intellectual character, a failure of discipline of the will to know.

The unvirtuousness of desire for acquaintance need not turn on the interpersonal dimension of knowledge. One of us (Roberts, in case you want to know) was recently subjected to the previews in a movie theater. Half a dozen movies were excerpted which, if the sampling was representative, consist in a series of flashing lights, raging fires, exploding buildings, speeding cars, crashing cars, cars falling over cliffs, cars chasing other cars,

burning cars, exploding cars, fistfights, gunfights, fights with unidentified high-tech weapons, and deafening booms from unknown sources. Here were various series of cognitive inputs (if this is not too exalted a term) of such a sort as to get the attention, easily, of the least epistemically developed among the animals. We should not say that no principles of discrimination were employed in selecting the inputs; but the principles were not truth, warrant, significance, relevance, or worthiness, but instead decibels, brightness, speed, suddenness, destruction, and violence. What kind of education grounds the enjoyment of prolonged exposure to this sort of thing? What sort of formation does a person have to have to find this worth paying $11 and a couple of hours of one's life for? Roberts thinks that ordinarily, a person with a proper intellectual education, a lover of knowledge, will find this pretty hard to tolerate for more than a couple of minutes because his cognitive interests make demands, shaped by the discriminative criteria that we have been expounding, that this sort of fare fails woefully to satisfy.[9]

Still, distraction by arresting but noetically low-grade sights, sounds, and thoughts can have its place in the life of the mind. Norman Malcolm, in his memoir of Ludwig Wittgenstein, tells how, after grueling sessions of philosophy in which Wittgenstein would exert his investigative powers to the utmost, he would invite Malcolm to go to a "flick". The movie would be some mindless American western with, no doubt, lots of galloping and shooting and Indians falling off horses and cowboys being pushed over cliffs and forts being burned down and the like, and Wittgenstein would sit as close as possible to the screen so as to fill his visual and auditory fields with the images and hullabaloo. Such distraction appears to have been therapeutic for Wittgenstein, allowing him to pry his mind off philosophy, to which it had become almost obsessively stuck during the seminar session. Wittgenstein's use of the mindless cognitive stimulation of movie theaters is remarkably similar, in some ways, to the use Roberts imagines that people of low intellectual virtue make of it. For Wittgenstein, as for the intellectually immature, it was paramount that the stimulation be mindless. Like the others, he did not go to the theater for an intellectual challenge.

[9] Thomas D. Kennedy traces the apparent increase in people's tolerance and appetite for mindless sensory stimulation and other kinds of contextless knowledge to the vast increase, in recent decades, in the power and availability of contemporary information technologies. See his "Curiosity and the Integrated Self: A Postmodern Vice", *Logos* 4 (2001): 33–54.

He wanted his attention to be riveted in as passive and effortless a way as possible. The difference between him and the intellectually immature was the place that this intake of acquaintance had in the rhythms of his larger intellectual life. For some people, viewing the movies that Roberts pre-viewed may constitute the cognitive high point of their day, the moment at which their mind is most engaged; for Wittgenstein such movies functioned like ballast on a hot air balloon, pulling hard downward with the effect of arresting dangerously uncontrolled flight. By letting his attention be absorbed by the sights and sounds, he could quiet a mind too passionately riveted on the higher epistemic goods. Few people have had greater powers of concentration, or a more integrated intellect, than Wittgenstein. So again, virtue and vice are not just a matter of "behavior" (of, say, sitting enthralled before a flashing, screaming screen), but are determined by patterns of motivation and of the relations of patterns of behavior to one another. Here Wittgenstein's use of distraction is intelligently in the service of concentration, integration, mental health, and the pursuit of high intellectual goods.

Failures of concern not to know We have seen that because of the criteria of worthiness and relevance by which the mature lover of knowledge selects propositional knowledge, understanding, and acquaintance, he actually has a will *not* to know certain things that he could know but ought not to know. Examples illustrating this point have been given in the preceding subsection, where we stressed perverse or immature concerns to know what is irrelevant or unworthy; so here we need comment only briefly on them from this new angle. The faulty epistemic will is characterized not only by inappropriate concerns for knowledge, but by a deficit of those concerns that might override the inappropriate ones. We have considered the possibility of a scientist's improper desire for understanding, the gossiper's improper love of nosey propositional knowledge, and the ogler's improper love of a certain kind of acquaintance. In the virtuous lover of knowledge, these kinds of knowledge are discriminated against by a certain orientation of taste, a concern for other things that rules out (or at least rules against) the improper love.

Very likely, a human being who is intensely interested in high-level scientific questions and sees the likelihood that she (or her contemporaries) will be unable to handle the proposed knowledge, will still, at some level or

in some degree, want the knowledge. So here, temptation will be normal for the lover of knowledge. A biologist involved in cloning research or a physicist working on nuclear fission, even if, as mature reflective lovers of knowledge, they are fully aware of the difficulties that humanity will have handling the potential new knowledge, will desire it. But if they have a strong sense of the place of knowledge in human eudaimonia, their sense of the knowledge's potential for evil will also give them a cautioning concern that countervails against the desire in the particular case. So the concern for human well-being and the ability to make this concern activate one's powers of discrimination of worthiness or relevance in the pursuit of knowledge make the difference between a Frankenstein or a Nazi medical researcher, on the one hand, and a virtuous lover of knowledge, on the other. Here the moral and the intellectual come together in the virtue of practical wisdom. Knowledge is only one of the important goods constituting human flourishing, but it is deeply entangled with those other goods.

Since cases in which the lover of knowledge chooses to eschew high-level but eudaimonistically unfitting knowledge are likely always to involve conflicting motives, the lover of knowledge will have to have, not just these two conflicting concerns—the love of knowledge thought of more abstractly and the love of human well-being—and the practical wisdom to know how to balance these in particular cases; he or she will also have to have the potential for self-denial, the power of self-mastery, that makes it possible for him to do what he takes to be best despite strongly wishing to do something else. The person who falls short of the virtue of love of knowledge will, therefore, fall short in one or all of these three ways: he will lack a clear and intense concern for the well-being of humanity, or he will have abstracted that concern so thoroughly from his intellectual life that he is undisposed to recruit this concern in decisions of the present sort, or, while he both has the concern and recruits it, he suffers so from weakness of will that he cannot implement his practical wisdom in this regard.

Consider now the rather different cases of the gossiper and the ogler. Here also the virtuous lover of knowledge forgoes knowledge because it is not right in the circumstances; but a major difference is that the forgone knowledge is quite low-grade. Insofar as it appeals to the lover of knowledge, it does not appeal to his highest concerns. The propositional

knowledge in which the gossiper trades and the acquaintance that attracts the ogler are rather uninteresting "intellectually", yet both kinds of knowledge have a widespread, primitive appeal. So here, too, the lover of knowledge is likely to have to struggle, in a way that lovers of knowledge do not have to struggle against the temptation to watch loud, flashy, and mindless movies all the way through. And again, the deficit of the person who doesn't exhibit the virtuous love of knowledge seems to be that he does not grasp, appetitively, the place of the illicit knowledge in life. He is deficient in aversion to this kind of knowledge in this kind of context.

Unvirtuous concerns not to know When we were discussing unvirtuous failures of concern to know, some of the cases involved a concern *not* to know, a positive aversion to the epistemic goods. Thus sometimes people do not want to know the truth about their bank balance or whether their kids are on drugs. Or they want not to perceive their own emotions or the anomalies to their scientific hypothesis. Or they want not to understand the causes of their obesity or the arguments against their religion. Such anti-epistemic motivational dispositions are principles of intellectual vice or immaturity. Our earlier point was that such bases of vice can be mitigated by an increase in sensitivity to the goodness of the epistemic goods, a deepened appreciation and desire for truth, warrant, understanding, and acquaintance. But it seems clear that one could also approach motivational improvement or repair by reducing these aversions. Such positive aversions are rooted in personal interests: I don't want to know the truth about my bank balance because I want to continue to spend freely; I don't want to know that my kid is on drugs because then I'll have to do something about it and I have no idea where to start. I don't want to perceive my own guilt or envy because it will indicate my personal nastiness. I don't want to see the anomalies to my hypothesis because I have invested years in this research and I'm afraid to change paths.

It is not hard to see that a number of these anti-epistemic personal interests are morally substandard, or would threaten my intellectual life less if I had more of a virtue like courage. If I were more responsible in spending my money, I wouldn't be averse to knowing my bank balance. If I were more committed to helping my kid and more courageous in facing her problems, I would want to know what she is doing with drugs. If I had greater trust in God, I would have no interest in hiding behind an

ignorance of the objections that can be made to my religion. So we see that, at least in many cases, positive aversion to intellectual goods is mitigated, or corrected for, by an increase in the virtues that are usually regarded as moral. One of the main theses of this book is that no strict dividing line can be drawn between moral and intellectual virtue.

Love of Knowledge, Metaphysics, and Wisdom

If the virtue of the love of knowledge includes a sense of what is important among truths—if it is a kind of wisdom—then different moral and metaphysical communities will promote different versions of this virtue. Truths that are of overriding importance for the Stoic may not even be truths in the Marxist's opinion; nor will the theist's most important, and thus organizing, truths be of much interest to a Bertrand Russell. This seems to be a substantive difference in virtue, with ramifications over the whole personality; these people's personalities are differentially related to the truth. We have seen that there is no such thing as a simple love of the truth; this virtue is always oriented upon truths (of different kinds). We have to reckon with the possibility that what some serious people take to be knowledge is not knowledge, and thus that what some people take to be intellectual virtues are not virtues. If they are vices, they need not be such in any blameworthy sense; but if they systematically lead one away from the epistemic goods, they are intellectual vices nonetheless. Religious faith would be an example of an intellectual virtue that might be an intellectual vice; it is related to the supposed intellectual good of knowing God, which, if it is not an intellectual good, cannot properly be aimed at by an intellectual virtue. Similarly, a certain version of the virtue of caution—one that entails metaphysical naturalism, for example—could in fact be a vice or at least a virtue that has an unvirtuous dimension to it, a spoiled virtue. All of this could be decided only by a sort of metaphysical adjudication which is in all probability unavailable to human beings. So we are stuck with the situation of somewhat variant systems of traits that in charity we call virtues, which may not be such—indeed, which cannot all be such.

Locke's exposition of the virtue of the love of knowledge emphasizes the discriminations associated with propositional knowledge, though we

have noted that he acknowledges the discrimination of significance and presupposes that of worthiness. Being a Christian, Locke has a healthy respect for truth and for the created world that is the object of so much of the knowledge we aspire to. Accordingly, our account of this virtue differs from his primarily in emphasis. In the interest of seeing how different metaphysical commitments yield diverse versions of intellectual virtues, perhaps it is worthwhile here to glance briefly at a rather different case. Friedrich Nietzsche also endorses a virtue that we might call love of knowledge, and like us, he stresses that the epistemic goods that are hereby loved are inseparable from the other goods of human life. He rejects what he calls "dogmatism", examples of which are the doctrines of "the Vedanta in Asia and Platonism in Europe".[10] Nietzschean love of knowledge is decidedly not an aspiration for cognitive contact with the eternal Forms. Dogmatism posits a system of unchanging verities whose existence depends in no way on human thought or activity or concerns, to which the knower relates by humbly conforming his mind in a kind of contemplative receptivity (this attitude of receptivity is perhaps something like Locke's prejudice-renouncing indifference). For Nietzsche, by contrast, knowledge is always perspectival and interested. On his psychology, human beings are interested chiefly in power—our basic drive, from which all other drives derive, is to create, to control, to dominate—and the chief epistemic expression of this desire is the creation of interpretations. What he calls "the will to truth", which is an expression of the will to power that is misguided by such "dogmatic" outlooks as Platonism and Christianity, eventually gives rise to the truth(!) that there is no truth in the dogmatic sense; "truth" is interpretations that people make up in the interest of their will to power—unselfconsciously at first, and then self-consciously (with the advent of philosophers like Nietzsche). "The falseness of a judgment is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgment.... The question is to what extent it is life-advancing, life-preserving, perhaps even species-breeding" (Part I, §4, p. 17). Strictly speaking, Nietzsche does not believe in what Locke calls "knowledge", but he does believe in a counterpart epistemic good: namely, life-affirming, life-giving, exuberance- and power-expressing interpretations.

[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), Preface, pp. 13–14.

It might be thought that, compared with the trait of character that we have delineated, Nietzsche's intellectual virtue lacks discipline. We expounded several principles of discrimination that govern the passion for knowledge in our framework. Does Nietzsche's virtue exhibit counterparts of our principles? In a way it does. He certainly distinguishes correct from incorrect interpretations. For example, Plato and Christian thinkers think that they are telling truths, whereas they are really expressing their will to power. The person who knows that his interpretations are expressions of his will to power is expressing his will to power more frankly, more nobly, more freely than the muddle-headed Christians and Platonists. The will to power is a rather frightening essence of ourselves; it is easier and more comfortable just to be humble and go on taking oneself to be seeking truth in the dogmatic sense. The discipline of acknowledging the centrality of the will to power in one's epistemic activities is a counterpart of Locke's discipline of indifference; you stand still sometimes and say, "Don't take the easy route of prejudice (dogmatism); remember that you are a knower!" Another of our principles of discrimination is relevance. We have no reason to think that this principle does not guide the selection or invention of interpretations; one interpretation can be more or less relevant to another, or to a situation that arises in the course of life. Nietzsche is very astute in seeing the relevance of a variety of intellectual movements of his day and of preceding intellectual history to his own interpretation of human nature—and of his interpretation of human nature to those movements. He is circumspect in this regard, and his writings teach a Nietzschean style of circumspection to those who would like to learn it. We noted in Chapter 5 that Derridean interpretation requires a moment of "as-if" classical interpretation; the purpose of this is to prevent the interpretation from becoming so "playful" that it becomes irrelevant to the text. Another of our principles is worthiness. Whereas Christians and others might eschew gossip as unworthy knowledge because we think it incompatible with respect and *agapē* for the neighbor, a Nietzschean might eschew it as expressing a servile, petty, competitive spirit—that is, insufficient self-respect. But both outlooks distinguish worthy from unworthy knowledge, and do so by appeal to values embedded in the outlooks' conceptions of eudaimonia.

7

Firmness

Introduction

We have been writing about the general love of the epistemic goods, but we human beings have a natural, conservative tendency of attachment to some of the particular putative epistemic goods currently in our possession. We tend to cling to our theories and research programs and resist giving up our own understandings and beliefs, and we tend to continue to perceive in the ways we have perceived before. Tenacity with respect to one's own epistemic acquirements is natural and good. We cannot and must not be open to change our deeper views at the first appearance of contrary evidence. It is proper, then, that the first thing we do on confronting a putative reason for deeper epistemic change is to look for ways to refute the objection or accommodate the anomaly to our current understanding of things. At the same time, this conservatism is not completely rigid. The natural urge to seek perceptual input, support for our beliefs, and deeper understanding is a disposition that opens us to epistemic change. Our imagination, in concert with our senses and the vicissitudes of epistemic circumstance, contrive flexibility of perception, and of belief and understanding formation. And so they must do. Practices like investigating, studying, looking, listening, reading, conversing, and soliciting testimony are by their nature openings to change. In these activities we aim to acquire new knowledge, and sometimes such knowledge revolutionizes our noetic structure.

These opposite and complementary tendencies in our epistemic will divide roughly along lines of structural depth. We tend to be more conservative about the more foundational parts of our epistemic establishment (what we have called the goods with more load-bearing significance), and the ones in which we are more personally invested (ones that strike us as