

CULTIVATING INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES WITH THE EPISTEMIC BENEFITS OF RELIGIOUS DISAGREEMENT

Kirk Lougheed | ORCID: 0000-0001-5844-2870
LCC International University, Klaipėda, Lithuania
University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa
philosophy@kirklougheed.com

Abstract

In recent years, intellectual virtue has garnered significant attention in the philosophical literature. Though there is significant work on how to cultivate intellectual virtues, there is less explicitly on this topic within the context of religion. I aim to show how work in the epistemology of disagreement can contribute to cultivating intellectual virtue, including in the context of religious disagreement. There are epistemic benefits to be gained from fostering disagreement, at least in certain scenarios. I explain how these ideas apply to at least some cases of religious disagreement. Any religious adherent seeking to cultivate intellectual virtues should be interested in gaining epistemic benefits, and therefore should be interested in fostering religious disagreements in the relevant types of scenarios. I conclude with a brief case study in philosophy of religion that shows that disagreement in the context of cross-cultural dialogue can be quite epistemically productive.

Keywords

disagreement – intellectual virtue – epistemic benefits of disagreement – religious disagreement

1 Introduction

Religious disagreement can be quite disconcerting for the devout. The stakes of such disagreement could often not be higher. If a person believes that the fate of their eternal soul (and the souls of those they love) is at stake, it is unsurprising that religious disagreements have to some extent been the cause of much violence and suffering in our world. Even when one is not threatened with violence and lives in a society where one can freely practice one's religion, disagreement about religion can still be fraught. My goal is to attempt to shift this attitude about religious disagreement by suggesting that in certain scenarios, engaging in

disagreements on religious matters is a way to cultivate intellectual virtues such as intellectual courage, humility, generosity, and open-mindedness.

In recent years, intellectual virtue has garnered significant attention in the philosophical literature. Though there is significant work on how to cultivate intellectual virtues, there is less explicitly on this topic within the context of religion. I aim to show how my previous work on the epistemology of disagreement can offer ways of cultivating intellectual virtue in the context of religious disagreement. I begin by briefly highlighting some of the key intellectual virtues (section 2). I then outline two arguments from my previous work in the Epistemic Benefits to Inquiry Argument and the Epistemic Benefits of Worldview Disagreement Argument (section 3). These arguments purport to show that there are epistemic benefits to be gained from fostering disagreement, at least in certain scenarios. After this, I explain how these ideas apply to at least some types of religious disagreement (section 4). Furthermore, my argument implies that any religious adherent seeking to cultivate intellectual virtues should be interested in gaining epistemic benefits, and therefore should be interested in fostering religious disagreements in the relevant types of scenarios. In other words, the arguments about the epistemic benefits of disagreement turn out to support the cultivation of intellectual virtue.

I also explore the degree to which these ideas might be consistent with nondoxasticism about religious propositions, in addition to observing that the other-regarding nature of many religious ethics implies that their adherents should care about the epistemic health of their communities. I conclude with a brief case study in philosophy of religion that shows that disagreement in the context of cross-cultural dialogue can be quite epistemically productive (section 5). I hope to establish a theoretical framework for thinking about religious disagreement as epistemically positive, while recognizing much of what is ultimately subject to empirical scrutiny. My point is that it is theoretically possible that religious disagreement can help to cultivate intellectual virtue in oneself and in others too.

The upshot of my discussion is that it provides a framework for showing that in the right sort of contexts, religious disagreement does not have to be threatening. Caring about the cultivation of intellectual virtues will sometimes mean not shying away from disagreements in matters of religion; instead, it indicates that we should openly engage in such disagreements. Realizing that such a framework is even possible should help begin to shift negative attitudes about religious disagreement.

2 What Are the Intellectual Virtues?

There are different ways of understanding the intellectual virtues, including what constitutes a virtue and how to categorize them. In this section, I briefly explain what assumptions I will make about intellectual virtues. Intellectual virtues are characteristics or traits that foster intellectual flourishing (see Turri et al. 2021). Intellectual flourishing involves (but is not limited to) gaining knowledge, true beliefs, understanding, and the like, while avoiding false beliefs, particularly costly ones. I am not going to address deeper normative questions about why an individual should care about intellectual flourishing and hence intellectual virtues. I am going to assume that individuals should care about intellectual virtue and intellectual

flourishing, whether because they are valuable in themselves or because doing so promotes something else that is valuable.

Still, even with this assumption in view, further clarifications are needed. Virtue reliabilists tend to say that intellectual virtues are represented by faculties like memory, perception, and intuitions (e.g., Greco 2010). Virtue responsibilists, on the other hand, say that intellectual virtues are more like character traits that can be developed over time. This will include virtues like conscientiousness. There has also been debate over whether this distinction is all that helpful (e.g., Fleisher 2017). For example, it seems like perception, memory, and conscientiousness could all contribute to epistemic flourishing, perhaps in different cases but also sometimes in the same cases. While I will not wade further into this debate, I acknowledge that my arguments to follow need to assume that at least some important intellectual virtues can be *cultivated*.

What, specifically, are the intellectual virtues? A recent comprehensive survey of virtue epistemology provides a starting point that I will rely on in my description of the virtues (Turri et al. 2021): having intellectual courage and caution means that an individual reacts appropriately to threats. This can mean not being scared to follow certain lines of inquiry, but also not being too rash in disregarding evidence (Roberts and Wood 2007; Baehr 2011, chapter 9; Alfano 2013). Intellectual humility involves not adopting the wrong epistemic attitudes (Carter and Pritchard 2016; Hazlett 2012; Roberts and Wood 2007; Samuelson and Church 2015). The pursuit of epistemic justice (hermeneutical and testimonial) is also a virtue (see Fricker 2007). Other virtues include intellectual generosity (Roberts and Wood 2007, 293), open-mindedness (Adler 2004), intellectual perseverance (King 2014), and curiosity (Whitcomb 2010), among others (see Turri et al. 2021 for more).

What has received even less attention is the nature of epistemic vices.¹ These might include wishful thinking, close-mindedness, and insouciance. Though not exclusively, intellectual virtues tend to be discussed entirely in *self-regarding* terms such that they tend to be described as traits that an individual cognizer possesses. In the discussion below, I will explain that (i) there are cases of self-regarding intellectual virtues that can be developed well, perhaps even best, in the context of a community of epistemic agents; and (ii) there are certain intellectual virtues best conceived of in terms of other-regarding virtues.

Finally, though significant attention has been spent on how to develop moral virtue (e.g., Birondo and Braun 2017; Snow 2015, 2016; Stangl 2015, 2020), comparatively little has been said about how to cultivate intellectual virtues. One finds even less on the cultivation of intellectual virtue in the context of religion, with the exception of some work exploring whether religious faith is even compatible with it (Callahan and O'Connor 2014). My final assumption will be that at least some versions of religious faith are compatible with at least some intellectual virtues such that it is intelligible to ask how to cultivate intellectual virtue in the context of religion. Again, none of this is intended as anything close to a comprehensive survey of these topics. However, this discussion is sufficient to set the stage for the argument I offer about cultivating intellectual virtue in the context of religious disagreement. Before doing that, I turn to discussing the relevance of some of my previous arguments in the epistemology of disagreement.

¹ Cassam (2019) is a notable exception.

3 The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement

It is easy to see why there might be skepticism about the possibility of cultivating intellectual virtue in the context of religion. Consider that some find even mild forms of religious disagreement quite scary. Presumably, some of this can be explained by the fact that for many people, their religious commitments are deeply held and extremely cherished. Such beliefs are often central to a person's self-understanding and understanding of the wider world. It is easy to see why challenges to such beliefs, which often present themselves in the form of disagreement, could cause a religious adherent discomfort. If their opponent is right and they are wrong, a significant part of their self-understanding and understanding of the world would have to be amended. Religious disagreement can also give those who are decidedly secular and nonreligious cause for concern. Sadly, religious disagreements have led to violence and civil unrest. Indeed, this means that religious disagreement can be perceived as a threat to a stable society, serving to erode peaceful interactions and commonsense morality. Still, as I said above, I am going to assume that at least some degree of virtue cultivation is compatible with religious belief. I will further argue that certain forms of religious disagreement can cultivate intellectual virtue. This implies, I suspect, that certain religious adherents need to drastically change their attitude toward religious disagreement, though this is an empirical claim I will not defend here.²

Before launching into my specific argument for the cultivation of intellectual virtue in the context of religious disagreement, some background on the epistemology of disagreement literature is needed. This literature focuses on questions about the implications of epistemic peer disagreement. Suppose that after careful evaluation of the question, you come to believe that the current war in Ukraine being carried out by Russia is unjustified. However, you become aware of an epistemic peer—someone equally reliable about the relevant truth claims of the war—who believes it is justified.³ They need not have precisely the same evidence or reasoning style as you, but you know they are just as likely as you to arrive at the right answer about questions regarding the war. The disagreement literature focuses on asking whether you now possess a defeater for your initial belief that the war in Ukraine is unjustified.

Conciliationists say that peer disagreement constitutes a defeater such that you ought to now adjust your belief that the war is unjustified. This can involve slightly lowering your credence in the proposition, or giving equal weight to the credence of your opponent (e.g., Matheson 2015), or suspending judgment altogether (e.g., Feldman 2006). For the conciliationist, the point is that you are no longer justified in believing the original proposition, or at the very least, you are less justified than you were prior to discovering that a

² Again, this is on the assumption that they ought to care about intellectual virtue.

³ There are different understandings of epistemic peerhood. See King (2012); Elgin (2018); Loughheed (2020, chapter 3).

peer disagrees with you.⁴ Since peer disagreement appears to be widespread, conciliationism poses a skeptical threat to many of our most cherished beliefs.

Nonconciliationists, on the other hand, claim that there are cases where it is rational to remain steadfast in the face of peer disagreement. Reasons in favor of nonconciliationism include that I must enjoy a special insight or have self-trust (van Inwagen 1996), only first-order evidence matters (e.g., Kelly 2005), and remaining steadfast can yield more true beliefs (Oppy 2010). Nonconciliationists also rely on the fact that there are problems with conciliationism, such as that it is self-referentially incoherent (e.g., Elga 2010) or that it leads to an untenable widespread skepticism.

3.1 *The Benefits to Inquiry Argument*

In various places elsewhere, I have defended forms of what I call the Benefits to Inquiry Argument, which was developed in the context of the epistemology of disagreement:

- (1) If agent *S* reasonably believes that there are future epistemic benefits to be gained from continuing to believe proposition *p* in the face of epistemic peer disagreement within a research context *R*, then *S* is rational to be a nonconciliationist about *p* in the context of *R*.
- (2) *S* believes *p* within the context of *R*.
- (3) There is at least one epistemic peer of *S*'s who believes not-*p* within the context of *R*.
- (4) *S* reasonably believes that there are future epistemic benefits to be gained from continuing to believe *p* within the context of *R*.

Therefore,

- (5) *S* is rational to be a nonconciliationist about *p* within the context of *R*.⁵

One initial item to notice is that this argument is only a *partial* response to conciliationism since it only applies to peer disagreements that occur in the context of inquiry. The argument says nothing about disagreements in other contexts, including at least most *prima facie* cases of religious disagreement. Another observation is that there is some intuitive support for this argument, especially when one considers some examples from the history of science.

Galileo's advocacy of heliocentrism and Charles Darwin's defense of natural selection are both examples of defending a view in the face of disagreement (although perhaps not peer disagreement) that led to future epistemic benefits (Lougheed 2020, 67–68). Another example is the nineteenth-century physician Ignaz Semmelweis and bacteria. Semmelweis rightly believed there was a causal connection between physician handwashing, particularly after dealing with corpses, and a decline in infant mortality rates. However, microscopes were not strong enough to detect bacteria at the time, and so there was no way to establish the causal connection posited by Semmelweis. Though he persistently defended his ideas and wrote articles trying to convince his colleagues, he was rejected at every turn. He eventually suffered a mental breakdown and was institutionalized. Of course, Semmelweis's ideas eventually started to be taken seriously, and he was ultimately vindicated. Indeed, his

⁴ A conciliationist could say that only a very slight lowering of credence is necessary such that it does not pose a skeptical threat. However, this is not a position that very many defend in the literature.

⁵ This argument also appears in Lougheed (2020, 80).

tenacious defense of his ideas in the face of peer disagreement plausibly helped lead to epistemic benefits.

The examples I originally appealed to are grounded in empirical claims that have fairly agreed-upon criteria for establishing their truth. But other cases of disagreement over more controversial, nonempirical matters include those engaged in by Martin Luther King Jr., to name just one example. King led the civil rights movement in the United States, attempting to achieve greater equality for Black Americans. However, King's movement was the target of great disagreement, and he faced fierce opposition throughout his life, including being ultimately killed for his beliefs. That King persevered in the face of persistent disagreement was presumably truth conducive, leading more people to discover the truth that society should not be divided along the lines of race.⁶

The majority of the work I have conducted on this argument has been in defense of premise (1) against various objections. For example, Scott Page has argued extensively that diversity trumps ability, at least within certain parameters. His main claim is that “collections of diverse individuals outperform collections of more individually capable individuals” (Page 2007, 159), at least when the following conditions are met (Page 2007, 162; see also Loughheed 2020, 70–71):

Condition 1: The Problem is Difficult: No individual problem solver always locates the global optimum [i.e., best solution].

Condition 2: The Calculus Condition. The local optima of every problem solver can be written down in a list. In other words, all problem solvers are smart.

Condition 3: The Diversity Condition. Any solution other than the global optimum is not a local optimum for some nonzero percentage of problem solvers.

Condition 4: Good-Sized Collections Drawn from Lots of Potential Problem Solvers. The initial population of problem solvers must be large and the collections of problem solvers working together must contain more than a handful of problem solvers.

There is also some empirical support for the idea that disagreement can help to counteract the pernicious effects of confirmation bias. For example, Duarte et al. argue that because social psychologists tend to be politically liberal, this likely leads to the existence of confirmation bias in the field. They explain that

in a politically homogeneous field, a larger-than-optimal number of scientists shine their flashlights on ideologically important regions of the terrain. Doing so leaves many areas unexplored. Even worse, some areas become walled off, and inquisitive researchers risk ostracism if they venture in. . . . Political homogeneity in social psychology can restrict the range of possible research programs or questions. It may also deprive us of tools and research findings we need to address pressing social issues.

⁶ Of course, one potential wrinkle with this example is that those who disagreed with King about race were not his epistemic peers. Still, it is possible to imagine a *hypothetical* case of peer disagreement.

In order for these benefits to obtain, the existence of cognitive diversity is more important than identity diversity (see Duarte et al. 2015; Menz 2012).

A different way to think about things like confirmation bias and motivated reasoning is that instead of demonstrating that humans are poor reasoners, it points to a different function of arguments. Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber suggest that arguments are not about offering cogent reasons for one's position but instead solely about getting others to agree with one's beliefs. In *The Enigma of Reason*, they advance a theory known as the interactionalist account of reason (Mercier and Sperber 2017). This theory of reason is about persuading others to adopt your beliefs and has its explanation in evolution, where it was an adaptive advantage to be able to figure out whom to trust. Though this might make one suspicious of human's ability to generate cogent arguments, it turns out that we are very good at *evaluating* arguments. The benefit of disagreement, then, is that there are a variety of positions that can be evaluated, and such a process is likely to help us arrive at the truth. Elsewhere, Mercier and Sperber (2011, 65) note that

when one is alone or with people who hold similar views, one's arguments will not be critically evaluated. This is when the confirmation bias is most likely to lead to poor outcomes. However, when reasoning is used in a more felicitous context—that is, in arguments among people who disagree but have a common interest in the truth—the confirmation bias contributes to an efficient form of *division of cognitive labor*.

This is only a terse survey of the empirical evidence I discuss elsewhere, but it should be sufficient for my purposes (see Loughheed 2020, 69–77).

The two most pressing worries for this argument have to do with (i) explaining why this argument is not about practical reasons instead of epistemic reasons and (ii) being able to identify the precise conditions under which the antecedent of (1) obtains. Regarding (i), remaining steadfast in the face of peer disagreement because of reasonably expected epistemic benefits is not justified merely on practical grounds. The future benefits in question are *epistemic*. A better distinction than the one between practical and epistemic reasons is one between *synchronic* and *diachronic* epistemic reasons. If conciliationism is true, then in the face of peer disagreement, if one is only considering what is epistemically rational to believe *right now* while blocking off any future considerations, the Benefits to Inquiry Argument does not justify remaining steadfast. However, if diachronic epistemic reasons are in play, then it could be reasonable to remain steadfast in the face of disagreement. A kind of all-things-considered epistemic rationality, then, needs to consider diachronic epistemic reasons (see Loughheed 2020, 94–107). Unlike the content of synchronic epistemic reasons, the contents of diachronic reasons are simply not yet known (otherwise they would be synchronic reasons). Finally, for a positive argument in favor of diachronic epistemic rationality, consider that such diachronic reasons exhibit interpersonal normative parity; they apply to every person, regardless of an individual's specific goals (Loughheed 2020, 94–107; see also Loughheed and Simpson 2017). This is reflective of the way that epistemic reasons are generally understood.

With respect to the specific conditions under which the antecedent of (1) obtains, I admit that I have never been able to give a set of necessary and sufficient conditions or anything close to it. One of my attempts to do so has been with the Giving Up Principle (GUP): an agent is irrational to continue to believe proposition p when reasons they are aware of ought to convince them that their belief in p is mistaken (see Loughheed 2020, 64). If a person is to be epistemically rational in remaining steadfast in the face of disagreement, they need to reasonably believe that there are epistemic benefits to be gained in the offing (in addition to reasonably believing they will *not* accrue outweighing epistemic harms).⁷

This does not mean they need to be epistemically certain of such benefits; rather, they must reasonably believe that the benefits will obtain. But this is still vague. Just how confident must they be? As said, I have never been able to state the precise conditions in which it is reasonable to believe (1). Still, I think I have shown that there are cases where (1) obtains. For the argument about religious disagreement I will be making in this article, it is not necessary to resolve this worry; (1) just needs to obtain sometimes.

3.2 *The Epistemic Benefits of Worldview Disagreement Argument*

I now turn to explore the degree to which the Benefits to Inquiry Argument can be expanded beyond the confines of formal inquiry by stating my previous development of what I call the Benefits of Worldview Disagreement Argument:

- (6) If agent S encounters epistemic peer disagreement over proposition p and subsequently discovers that disagreement over p entails a disagreement over their worldview W (a set of propositions including p), then in order to rationally maintain W , they should examine whether W is theoretically superior to the competing worldview.
- (7) If S evaluates the theoretical virtues of W , then S will gain a better understanding of W , including being better informed about the truth-value of W .⁸
- (8) S discovers an epistemic peer who believes not- p .
- (9) S subsequently discovers that the disagreement about whether p entails a disagreement between two competing worldviews W and W^* .

Therefore,

- (10) In order to rationally maintain W , they should examine whether W is theoretically superior to W^* .⁹

Therefore,

- (11) S should evaluate the theoretical virtues of W .

Therefore,

⁷ Regarding outweighing epistemic harms, imagine a scenario in which arriving at a true belief comes with ten accompanying false beliefs about matters of great importance. In such a case as this one, the purported epistemic benefits of the disagreement are not worth the epistemic costs.

⁸ Theoretical virtues include evidential accuracy, explanatory scope, internal consistency, parsimony, and unification, among others. For a systematic treatment of theoretical virtues, see Keas (2018).

⁹ This does not mean S needs to immediately lower their credence, but rather that they need to be genuinely open to doing so if that is where the inquiry leads.

(12) *S* will gain a better understanding of *W*, including being better informed about the truth-value of *W*.¹⁰

Sometimes, if not often, when a person discovers there is an epistemic peer who disagrees with them about a proposition, they subsequently discover they disagree with that peer about a whole host of interrelated issues. To the extent that these propositions are close to the core of a person's identity, these types of disagreements can be described as worldview disagreements. They frequently occur outside of formal research contexts. Still, the claim is that discovering worldview disagreement *ought* to prompt reflection on and evaluation of one's worldview. This does not mean that an agent ought to lower their confidence in their worldview upon discovering such a disagreement. They could remain steadfast in the worldview throughout this evaluative process provided they are genuinely willing to adjust their worldview if that is what the result of their evaluation recommends.

There is a lot more to be said about these arguments, but for the rest of this article, I am going to assume that there is some plausible formulation of both the Benefits to Inquiry Argument and the expansion of it in the Epistemic Benefits of Worldview Disagreement Argument.¹¹

4 Cultivating Religious Disagreement and Intellectual Virtue

4.1 *The Benefits of Religious Disagreement*

As stated above, religious disagreement is ubiquitous in our world, and it has often come with devastating consequences. With the background of the above section in view, I am now going to argue that religious disagreement does not need to be thought of as an evil that ought to be avoided at all costs. Religious beliefs are often held very near and dear such that they constitute part of the core of a person's worldview. If enough of a person's religious beliefs changed, they could reasonably describe themselves as having become an entirely different person. And yet, if there really are epistemic benefits to be gained from disagreements, including ones over religious belief, then any religious adherent who cares about intellectual virtue should not necessarily shy away from such disagreements. Indeed, provided the nonepistemic negative effects of religious disagreement could be avoided, there may even be an *obligation* to seek out such disagreements. The only assumption this claim makes is that epistemic benefits such as true belief, justified belief, knowledge, and understanding are epistemic goods that an intellectually virtuous person ought to care about cultivating. I will not defend this assumption and simply take it for granted that an intellectually virtuous person ought to care about cultivating epistemic goods.

Suppose that Bob and Griselda find themselves in disagreement over the proposition "Jesus was resurrected." Call this proposition *j*. Bob believes that *j* is false and not very well supported by the historical record. He is also a naturalist, and so, while he can entertain supernatural explanations, he ultimately cannot accept them. Griselda, on the other hand,

¹⁰ This argument also appears in Loughheed (2021, 90).

¹¹ For the details of these arguments, see Loughheed (2020, 2021).

believes that j is true and that it verifies Jesus's truth claims about his identity. Griselda is not a naturalist; also, she is just not as concerned about evidence in the same way that Bob is concerned about it. She believes j is true because of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which can probably be categorized as a religious experience. In discussing the impact of Christianity on contemporary culture one day, Bob and Griselda quickly find themselves in disagreement over j and subsequently also on a whole host of other propositions with religious content.

Now, one question that quickly emerges is whether Bob and Griselda are epistemic peers. Suppose that though they do not have the same view of evidence, naturalism versus supernaturalism, and so on, they are indeed peers because they are both equally likely to be right (or wrong) about the truth-value of j .¹² Conciliationism says a skeptical threat has been posed to both Bob and Griselda. Bob should wonder whether he has been downplaying the value of religious experience and whether nonevidential approaches to justified religious belief might be plausible. The conciliationist says that he should reduce his confidence that j is false. The disagreement should cause Griselda to rethink her position about the role of evidence. She should also consider whether naturalistic explanations of her religious experience might undermine its veracity. She should reduce her confidence that j is true.

Disagreement over j is a clear instance where the disagreement is really about a worldview. If Bob and Griselda disagree about j , they likely disagree on a whole host of issues, especially given that I have suggested they fundamentally disagree about what can exist. What we have here is a disagreement over a proposition that exists as a microcosm of a larger worldview disagreement. This is really a disagreement between a naturalist worldview and a Christian supernaturalist one. Epistemic benefits do not magically appear. They only obtain if Bob and Griselda are willing to explore their worldviews sincerely and open-mindedly. This likely requires a kind of intellectual curiosity and courage. Reexamining one's fundamental religious commitments can be quite demanding, not only at an intellectual level but also emotionally. If Bob and Griselda care about acquiring intellectual virtues, then their disagreement could promote the difficult process of evaluating their fundamental religious and worldview commitments, which will plausibly lead to epistemic benefits.

All of this requires what is for some, I suspect, a fundamental shift in how disagreement is viewed. Religious disagreement need not be scary. This is especially so for those who are interested in cultivating intellectual virtue. Indeed, disagreement is actually a benefit inasmuch as one is able to use it to foster the virtues.

4.2 *Religious Disagreement and Nondoaxastic Attitudes*

Though in my original presentation of the Benefits to Inquiry Argument I speculated that *belief* in a disputed proposition may better yield the epistemic benefits in question as opposed to weaker doxastic stances, this does not mean that some of the epistemic benefits cannot be

¹² Even if one denies that they are peers, the case could easily be modified such that Bob and Griselda align with one's preferred account of epistemic peerhood. Furthermore, even if they are no peers, I believe that what I say below still follows. It only needs to be the case that a person discovers they disagree with someone whose epistemic powers they respect enough that they could be right, even if they are not as likely to be right. In other words, an epistemic inferior should still give one pause if there is a real chance they could be right about the topic in question.

gained on weaker *nondoxastic* stances (Lougheed 2020, 87–91). Though certain religious traditions tend to focus on having the right beliefs, if doxastic involuntarism is true, then this might be ill-founded. This is because if a person cannot directly control whether they believe relevant religious propositions, it appears unfair to make them a matter of religious salvation or otherwise morally important. Indeed, such considerations are probably at least part of the reason why nondoxastic accounts of faith have been defended in contemporary philosophy of religion (Alston 1996; Pojman 1986; Himma 2006).

The reason I bring this up is that within the context of religion, adherents may well feel uncomfortable fostering disagreement about their beliefs. However, acceptance is a nondoxastic stance that could possibly be used to generate some of the same epistemic benefits. Likewise, nondoxastic stances can be used to generate artificial cases of disagreement that may turn out to be fruitful. Suppose I believe that God exists and, despite my best efforts, I cannot will myself to believe otherwise. It could be productive for me to accept that God does not exist in order to explore other avenues of research. Furthermore, it may allow me to conduct cognitive exercises to better understand my opponent's position. This is only intended to gesture at ways that nondoxasticism might interact with my claims here, and so I leave such connections open-ended.

4.3 Religious Disagreement and Other-Regarding Virtues

It is worth mentioning the importance that other-regarding virtues might play in this account. Epistemologists, even social epistemologists, have focused on how individual agents can acquire epistemic goods. However, by drawing an analogy to the importance of other-regarding virtues in ethics, Jason Kawall argues that agents should also care about other-regarding intellectual virtues. These are *epistemic* because they lead to epistemic goods such as knowledge, true belief, and understanding. They are *other-regarding* because they are about helping others (Kawall 2002, 259). To fail to cultivate other-regarding ethical virtues indicates a character deficiency: a person who cares only about self-regarding virtues is an ethical egoist. If this is right, then if such reasoning is analogous to intellectual virtues, there is a *prima facie* case to be made for caring about other-regarding intellectual virtues (Kawall 2002, 258–259). Kawall (2002, 259–260) has the following other-regarding virtues in mind:

(i) honesty (e.g. in one's testimony), sincerity, integrity (including an unwillingness to misuse one's status as expert), and creativity (which can inspire others, and lead to the discovery of new truths in a community), (ii) duties to develop the skills of a good teacher, and (iii) duties to develop the skills of a good listener (and critic) insofar as these help other epistemic agents to articulate and examine their own beliefs carefully and lucidly. These would be epistemic virtues insofar as they tend to produce knowledge—not in the agent herself, but in others in her community. Honesty and other such virtues could thus be as essential to being a good epistemic agent as having reliable sensory faculties or good reading skills.

For Kawall, the good epistemic agent focuses on promoting both self-regarding and other-regarding virtues. Such an agent cares about acquiring epistemic goods for themselves and the rest of their community (Kawall 2002, 267; see also de Sousa 2020).

A further interesting connection is that many religious traditions care about other-regarding moral virtues. If an important aspect of (some versions of) religious morality is other regarding, then it makes sense that this would also extend to caring about other-regarding intellectual virtues. Indeed, if a religious ethic recommends self-sacrifice, this could extend to making epistemic sacrifices for one's community. All of this points to fostering cases of disagreement, particularly when the members of one's epistemic community stand to benefit (epistemically). This could mean engaging in uncomfortable disagreement and dialogue in order to help the community arrive at truth. It could, perhaps, mean accepting certain positions in order to create artificial disagreements if doing so would be truth conducive. Disagreement is fundamentally a group activity as it necessarily involves two or more people. There are underdiscussed group or communal virtues that are particularly amenable to the claims I have made here. Religious diversity could be part of the common epistemic good.¹³

5 A Case Study: Contemporary African Philosophy of Religion

I close with a short case study about some of the ideas I have put forward here. Suppose there are epistemic benefits to disagreement and that such disagreements can reasonably be thought to cultivate some of the intellectual virtues. Having received my formal philosophical training entirely in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, I was ignorant of other philosophical traditions, including those that emerge in the Global South. However, over the last few years I have discovered the scholarship on African Traditional Religion, which is a monotheistic religion with millions of adherents in sub-Saharan Africa (see Magesa 1997; Mbiti 1975; Metz and Molefe 2021). Though there is much religious diversity on the African continent, there is still enough agreement on a number of important features to suggest a synthesis that can be fairly construed as a majority world religion.

African Traditional Religion posits that God created the world *ex materia*—so, from preexisting material. Furthermore, while some expositors claim that the God oft described in African philosophy of religion shares the maximal features of the Abrahamic God, such as omniscience, omnibenevolence, and omnipotence, many others reject this idea. Instead, they posit what is known as the *limited-God thesis*, which says that God has the most power, goodness, and knowledge of any being that exists but that it is not maximal or unlimited (e.g., Wiredu 1998). Notice that this has an immediate impact on the problem of evil. Though one could hold that the amount of evil that exists in our world should still not exist if there is a limited God, one could not, for example, expect the limited God to be able to guarantee that all instances of evil are gratuitous. Finally, some African scholars go so far as to suggest that though God is all-powerful, he is not wholly good, because he can use evil to accomplish his purposes (e.g., Bewaji 1998). To deny that God could do evil would be to put a limitation on God's power.

¹³ I have focused on individuals and other-regarding virtues, but it would be interesting to see how this could be applied to work in virtue epistemology that takes groups to be epistemic agents. For more on groups, see Kallestrup (2016); Aikin and Clanton (2010).

This is just one example where the disagreements about the nature of God could lead to fruitful epistemic benefits (e.g., novel solutions to the problem of evil). There are underexplored avenues for how the African conception of God interacts with the arguments for and against God's existence, in addition to whether new arguments might emerge from this conception.

6 Conclusion

All of this may seem rather abstract. I have suggested that religious disagreement can lead to epistemic benefits and that those concerned with cultivating intellectual virtue should seek to foster certain types of religious disagreement. The observant reader will notice that my ideas are rife with claims that are subject to empirical scrutiny. I take myself to have provided a theoretical framework to support the claim that religious disagreement should be cultivated by those who care about intellectual virtues. A religious adherent who cares about intellectual virtue will not shy away from certain types of disagreement. Yet the degree to which disagreement really does foster epistemic benefits is ultimately an empirical question. I only briefly gestured at some empirical evidence I had appealed to elsewhere. Indeed, it is also an empirical question to what extent nondoxastic attitudes weaker than belief are able to yield similar epistemic benefits in the context of religious disagreement. Finally, I have not even mentioned the fact that there could be empirically relevant differences between cases of religious and nonreligious disagreements such that the epistemic benefits cannot or are unlikely to obtain in the former type. What I claim here is simply to have offered a basic framework for thinking differently about religious disagreements, while acknowledging the empirical questions I left open. This represents a first, tentative step toward thinking about the value of religious disagreements in a different light.

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