



The Social Dimension of Open-Mindedness

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Abstract

This paper explores how open-mindedness and its exercise can be social in nature. In particular, it argues that an individual can be regarded as open-minded even though she does not conduct all of the intellectual tasks as required by open-mindedness *by herself*; that is, she delegates some of these tasks to her epistemic peers. Thinking about open-mindedness in such social terms not only opens up the possibility that there are different and surprising ways for an individual to be open-minded, but can also help offset some recent criticisms raised against open-mindedness and its status as an intellectual virtue.

1 Introduction

Open-mindedness, roughly speaking, is the disposition to engage seriously with views that are novel or that conflict with one's own, and to take appropriate action to accommodate or discard them. Many philosophers have argued that open-mindedness is an intellectual virtue because its exercise, when motivated properly, helps its possessor to acquire truth, knowledge and understanding (e.g., Baehr 2011; Kwong 2016; Riggs 2010; Zagzecki 1996; also, cf. Carter and Gordan 2014; Cohen 2009; Levy 2006; Madison 2017). As one might expect, not everyone agrees with such a characterization of open-mindedness. Some have criticized it as too broad or too imprecise (e.g., Riggs 2010; Baehr 2011), while others have argued that it fails to capture all forms of open-mindedness (e.g., Baehr 2011). Most, however, would concur that open-mindedness requires its possessor to give, at the minimum, serious consideration to novel ideas, and to revise one's beliefs in light of these ideas.

This paper will not be directly concerned with the question of how best to define open-mindedness; much has already been written about it (see Adler 2004; Baehr 2011; Hare 1985; Higgins 2009; Kwong 2016; Riggs 2010, 2015). Rather, it will be concerned with an assumption that philosophers have held about open-mindedness

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and its exercise, namely, that it is *individualist* in nature. There are two senses in which open-mindedness may be considered individualist. The first is that it is a character trait that can be attributed to an individual (e.g., *Jordan* is open-minded or is an open-minded person), and the second is that the individual has to perform *on her own* all of the intellectual tasks that are required to give novel or conflicting ideas serious consideration. These two senses are, of course, connected: It is precisely *because* Jordan does all of the work as demanded by open-mindedness *that* she is rightly said to be open-minded. This individualist assumption seems so natural and obvious that it has gone largely unnoticed, and the two ways of explaining it undifferentiated.

The individualist assumption is erroneous, as I will argue in this paper. I contend that there are good reasons to pay attention to this assumption, and to distinguish its two senses. In particular, I argue that we should think of open-mindedness as a character trait that can be attributed to an individual but reject the idea that for this attribution to happen, the individual must conduct all of the required intellectual tasks *by herself*. Put another way, my claim is that of the two senses in which open-mindedness is individualist in nature, there is a way for us to make sense of the first without accepting the second. The key is to recognize that the exercise of open-mindedness can be *social* in nature: An individual is permitted, and under some circumstances, even obligated, to divvy up intellectual tasks demanded by open-mindedness with others in her intellectual community. Yet, despite the shared epistemic labor, the individual can still be regarded as, and get credit for, being open-minded.

Recognizing that the exercise of open-mindedness can be social in this way opens up innovative ways for us to see how an individual can exercise this character trait. For example, as a surprising turn of my argument holds, open-mindedness in some contexts *demand*s that an individual act more or less dogmatically. Moreover, opening up the exercise to include social others makes new responses possible to difficulties that critics have raised against open-mindedness, such as that we ought not exercise it when we find ourselves in epistemically hostile environments or when we encounter ideas that are deliberately engineered to mislead, especially when we lack the required expertise or background to assess them (Cohen 2009; Levy 2006; Carter and Gordan 2014). In these critics' eyes, to do otherwise would subject our beliefs to scrutiny, and unnecessarily risk acquiring false beliefs or discarding true ones. This objection has led these critics to challenge the usefulness of open-mindedness and its status as an intellectual virtue and to conclude that we are better off being dogmatic or closed-minded under these circumstances.¹ But, as I will argue

¹ These difficulties have prompted various responses from defenders of open-mindedness. For example, Jason Baehr has argued that an individual's exercise of open-mindedness is virtuous only if she reasonably believes there is a good chance of reaching the truth (Baehr 2011, p. 210). Similarly, Wayne Riggs has pointed out that there are situations in which we could be close-minded in an open-minded way (Riggs 2010). Both of these responses adopt the strategy of identifying specific conditions under which open-mindedness should or should not be exercised, thus spelling out when it is virtuous and when it is vicious. Both, however, also assume the individualist assumption in that the possessor of the trait is still expected to carry out these intellectual tasks herself, though now under limited circumstances. In this paper, I propose an alternative response to these difficulties by abandoning the individualist assumption understood in this sense.

in this paper, these critics implicitly assume a sense of the individualist assumption that is objectionable. Once we reject it, we can see that there are alternative ways to meet this objection, enabling us to further defend open-mindedness as an intellectual virtue.

The paper will be structured as follows. The first section begins with a discussion of a relatively uncontentious example of open-mindedness as exercised by an individual, with the aim of identifying some of the core intellectual tasks that open-mindedness requires. The discussion will then explore ways in which this example can be modified and extended to involve other people in the execution of some of these intellectual tasks without jeopardizing our original assertion that it is the individual who is said to be open-minded. The final section will consider some conclusions and implications of my argument.

2 Preliminary Considerations

Take Jordan as an example of an open-minded person. She has firm beliefs about certain things but is willing to consider challenges or alternatives to these beliefs. Whenever she finds herself presented with these challenges or novel ideas, she is disposed to consider them seriously, and to adjust her beliefs accordingly, if necessary, because she is motivated by a desire to acquire truth, knowledge and understanding, and to purge false beliefs. Sometimes, she abandons her own beliefs because she realizes that they have been exposed by these challenges or novel ideas to be mistaken. Other times, she dismisses them because she concludes that they are misguided and thus rejects them without altering any of her beliefs. Given her motivation and dispositions, Jordan is regarded as an open-minded person.

I take this to be a fairly straightforward and uncontroversial characterization of open-mindedness. William Hare, for instance, has advocated and defended it (Hare 1985). This characterization assumes that an exercise of open-mindedness consists principally in a person's being willing and able to give challenges or alternative views serious consideration, and disposed to revise her beliefs accordingly, if necessary, because of a desire and motivation to pursue truth, knowledge and understanding. This characterization has met with criticisms. One objection is that it fails to capture what is unique about open-mindedness. What it captures instead, according to the critics, is merely what it means to be rational (Riggs 2010). Another objection is that it mistakenly limits exercises of open-mindedness to cases in which our beliefs come under challenge. To counter these objections, alternative accounts and remedies have been offered. Jason Baehr locates open-mindedness specifically in an individual's effort to transcend or set aside her default cognitive standpoint in order to consider the merit of a novel one (Baehr 2011), while Wayne Riggs argues that in addition to taking challenges seriously, open-mindedness requires an individual to cultivate certain habits of thought, such as exercising self-awareness and self-monitoring for cognitive biases and weaknesses (Riggs 2010). As for the objection that the above characterization is too restrictive, Baehr has argued that open-mindedness can be extended beyond cases of challenge to include situations in which we have to adjudicate disputes that do not involve our own beliefs (e.g., an impartial

judge weighing arguments from claimant and defendant), and those in which we are exposed to radical ideas but do not involve rational assessment (e.g., learning about the General Theory of Relativity) (Baehr 2011).

For my purposes in this paper, I will not delve on these disputes concerning the definition and applications of open-mindedness (see Kwong (2016)) but will continue to employ, despite the disputes, my above characterization of open-mindedness for two reasons. First, I am prepared to acknowledge that there are additional forms of open-mindedness to cases in which an individual's beliefs come under challenge. However, for my argument below, I will be concerned primarily with the challenge scenario because this is where we are particularly susceptible to the charge of being dogmatic or close-minded, and where the exercise of open-mindedness is most needed to counter such a charge. My goal will be to explore the extent to which an individual's exercise of open-mindedness can involve other people. I would therefore be content simply to establish the conclusion that exercises of open-mindedness can be social *in these scenarios*. Despite this specific focus, I believe, for reasons to be stated shortly, that my argument can also be extended to apply to the other forms of open-mindedness identified by Baehr.

Second, my characterization of Jordan's open-mindedness is sufficiently broad to be compatible with the additional requirements for open-mindedness as posited by the foregoing accounts. All that my argument below requires is that when an individual's beliefs are challenged, she gives these opposing ideas serious consideration, evaluates and adjudicates them in relation to her own beliefs, and makes the necessary doxastic adjustments. As far as I know, all current accounts of open-mindedness agree with this as a minimal requirement. Where they differ is in terms of *how* an individual goes about considering these opposing ideas and *why* she might do so. However, these differences, which are themselves not uncontentious, are not crucial for my argument.² I therefore invite readers to modify the discussion below in light of their preferred account of open-mindedness. For example, when Jordan considers challenges or novel ideas, she can be thought of as doing so in transcending her usual cognitive standpoint, or in recognizing that these ideas occur in a context in which she is prone to certain cognitive biases and prejudices.

I will therefore continue to rely on the above example of Jordan as an exercise of open-mindedness to develop my argument below. My plan now is to use it to highlight an assumption that has been held regarding open-mindedness and to show that we need not subscribe to it. The assumption in question is that the exercise of open-mindedness is *individualist* in nature. Consider the following characterizations of open-mindedness:

“An open-minded **person** is characteristically (a) willing and (within limits) able (b) to transcend a default cognitive standpoint (c) in order to take up or

² These accounts of open-mindedness have also been criticized. For instance, Baehr points out that Riggs's habits of thought are better thought of as preconditions for exercising open-mindedness, as opposed to its core (Baehr 2011). Similarly, Baehr's requirement is better construed as one among other ways in which a person can give novel ideas serious consideration (Kwong 2016).

take seriously the merits of (d) a distinct cognitive standpoint” (Baehr 2011, p. 202) (**bold**, mine).

“A **person** is open-minded when she is willing to engage with a viewpoint that is novel to her...**she** is willing to make room for it in **her** ‘cognitive space,’ ... and to see how it might relate to, or connect with, her network or web of beliefs.” (Kwong 2016) (**bold**, mine).

“To be open-minded is to be aware of **one’s** fallibility as a believer, and to be willing to acknowledge the possibility that anytime **one** believes something, it is possible that **one** is wrong (Riggs, 2010, p. 180) (**bold**, mine).

The dispute among these theorists concerns the method with which an individual performs certain intellectual tasks, and the motivation with which she does so, in order to be open-minded. However, what I want to draw attention to instead is that these characterizations are anchored around an individual, in two senses. The first is that the character trait is attributed to an individual. When Jordan seriously considers a challenge to her own beliefs, and makes the necessary epistemic adjustments, *she* is the one who is deemed to be open-minded. The second is that in order for an individual to be considered open-minded, there are certain intellectual tasks that she must perform. Thus, in a case of challenge, such an individual must, at the minimum, consider the challenge seriously by weighing and assessing the merits of the opposing viewpoint, and evaluating them *vis-à-vis* her own beliefs. Notice that these two senses are connected: It is precisely *because* Jordan does certain things (provided that she is properly motivated) *that* she can take credit for being open-minded. This individualist assumption is such a natural one to make that it has not, as far as I know, been queried. After all, open-mindedness is regarded as a *character* or *personal* trait, and the individual is its natural locus. Moreover, when we credit an individual as being virtuously open-minded, we are praising her possession of such a trait as an achievement because she has, among other things, invested the time and effort in performing the required intellectual activities for open-mindedness.

I do not wish to challenge the first sense in which open-mindedness is individualist and agree that open-mindedness is indeed a trait of an individual.³ What I question is the second sense of the assumption, namely, that all the core intellectual tasks demanded by open-mindedness must be performed by the individual. My claim below is that in order for an individual to be deemed open-minded, all of these tasks must indeed be performed. However, these tasks need not all be conducted by the individual to whom we attribute the trait of open-mindedness. Some of these tasks can instead be executed by other people. As I will argue below, abandoning this second sense of the individualist assumption affords us new ways to think about how open-mindedness is exercised, ways that can help mitigate some recent difficulties that critics have made about the character trait.

³ As we will see later, this does not preclude the possibility that entities other than individuals, e.g., groups, can be open-minded.

3 Stretching the Example

In my earlier characterization of Jordan, she is regarded as open-minded because she is willing and disposed to give challenges and novel ideas serious consideration.⁴ Part of what this involves is that she is willing and able to give these ideas her best and most charitable interpretation in an effort to understand them, identify their merits and weaknesses, assess them vis-à-vis her own beliefs, and make the necessary epistemic adjustments. These are some of the minimal requirements for exercising open-mindedness. If she finds these opposing ideas compelling, she will readily abandon her old beliefs as mistaken. However, if she is not persuaded, she will dismiss them without making any epistemic adjustments to her beliefs. Implicit in this characterization is the assumption that Jordan is sufficiently *competent* to take on all of these intellectual tasks by herself. At the minimum, she is assumed to have the relevant expertise and the background knowledge, as well as the requisite intellectual skills and abilities, to understand and interpret the content of the challenges, identify the ways in which they conflict with her beliefs, and to adjudicate these conflicts.⁵

This, however, may not always be the case. Sometimes, Jordan faces challenges that she herself acknowledges are too technical or complex for her to manage. Depending on how difficult these challenges are, she will only be partially competent in assessing them. Now, if she is epistemically responsible and resourceful, she will seek help from other people, namely, those who possess the relevant background knowledge, expertise, and intellectual abilities. Doing so will help compensate for her intellectual inadequacies. In the ideal scenario, consulting with her expert friends will help her overcome these difficulties by making the challenge comprehensible and accessible to her, placing her in a position to understand and assess it, and then, if necessary, to revise her beliefs accordingly.⁶ When Jordan defers to her expert friends for help in this way, we will not see her as being any *less* open-minded, nor withdraw our assessment that she has, on these occasions, exercised open-mindedness. After all, Jordan did manage to give the challenge serious consideration and revise her beliefs accordingly, intellectual tasks that are requisite

⁴ Throughout the essay, I will assume that Jordan undertakes these intellectual activities with the proper motivation, that is, out of a desire for truth, knowledge, and understanding, or to be in closer cognitive contact with reality (Zagzecki 1996). For stylistic reasons, I will sometimes omit the motivational component in my description of Jordan. Unless otherwise stated, she should always be understood as possessing the proper motivation.

⁵ This assumption of her competence is not necessarily a requirement for open-mindedness, though possessing it is important for being virtuously open-minded.

⁶ Jeremy Fantl and Neil Levy have argued that under some of these circumstances, such as ones involving controversial debates, we ought to be dogmatic and not consider challenges that we fail to understand (Fantl 2018; Levy 2006). Part of the worry here is that when an individual considers these challenges but is unable to respond to them, she would be epistemically worse off than if she did not take them up. In this paper, I will not directly address this important issue, which raises questions tangential to this paper. Rather, I am interested in exploring alternative options that an open-minded person has when she finds herself in these circumstances.

for open-mindedness. The only difference is that she enlists the expert advice and help from others.

In my view, this is not a controversial point. It is commonplace to involve others in our inquiries. For instance, when we have to think through difficult issues, we often sound our friends out with the aim of getting the issues, their pros and cons, right. My claim is simply that this can also happen in contexts in which we give challenges to our beliefs serious consideration, and that when we do so, we are not being any less open-minded. Other than lacking expertise and background knowledge, or the need or desire to discuss matters with others, there are additional reasons we may want to do so. Suppose Jordan has to assess a challenge that involves examining a topic that falls under a domain of inquiry of which she is highly prejudicial, and cannot give it a fair assessment. No matter how hard she tries, she still cannot cast aside her prejudice to give it a balanced evaluation (or put differently, to fully transcend her cognitive viewpoint to recognize its merits). In such a case, she seeks the help from someone whose judgment she trusts and who she knows does not share her prejudices. This person will then ensure that Jordan, in interpreting and evaluating the challenge, does not fall prey to any intellectual traps and will give it impartial consideration. Again, if Jordan relies on her friend in such a manner, she will not be considered any less open-minded.

By seeking the help of experts and friends, there is now a social element in Jordan's exercise of open-mindedness: Her overall assessment of the challenge vis-à-vis her own beliefs can involve people *other than herself*, provided that she defers to them for the right reasons. Intellectual sloth, for example, does not count as a legitimate reason. I want now to further expand the example of Jordan to uncover additional ways in which others can play a role in her inquiry without compromising our assessment that she has exercised open-mindedness. In the above cases, Jordan *seeks* help, of her own choice and volition, from others in understanding and assessing the issues. In exercising open-mindedness, she takes on an *active* role in giving the challenges serious consideration: These expert friends do the work *for her benefit*, or are working on *her* behalf.

Notice, however, that we can retain our assessment that Jordan has exercised open-mindedness even if she takes on a less active role in seeking help. Suppose that Jordan faces a challenge that is too technical for her to assess. However, she knows in advance that someone within her community or circle of friends will take it up and give it serious consideration. Moreover, she knows with reasonable confidence that this individual possesses the requisite knowledge and intellectual capacities to assess the challenge, and that this individual will do so with diligence, intensity, seriousness and thoroughness. Jordan thus does not actively solicit this individual's help but waits instead for the individual's findings to be presented in a more accessible form for Jordan's assessment. Jordan will then use this individual's conclusion in *her own* evaluation of the challenge vis-à-vis her beliefs before deciding if she needs to make any epistemic adjustments. If the expert friend concludes that the challenge is incoherent and flawed, Jordan will reject it without making any epistemic adjustments. Alternatively, if the expert friend restates the technical challenge in a form Jordan can understand, then Jordan will assess it in the context of her own beliefs and draw the necessary conclusions.

In this scenario, Jordan plays a less active role in relying on others in two ways. First, she does not ask her friends for help; instead, she simply waits for it, for she is reasonably confident that it will be forthcoming since she knows her friends or members of her community are conscientious inquirers who diligently keep up with the latest debates. Second, she does not participate in their deliberation and leaves the inquiry into the challenge entirely to her peers because she lacks the intellectual resources to do so. In effect, her friends will not be aware that in assessing the challenge, independently of Jordan, their effort will later be used *by her for her own inquiry*.

When we expand the example in these two ways, are there grounds to regard Jordan as any *less* open-minded? I do not think so. Neither scenario compromises Jordan's open-mindedness. In the end, Jordan will get what she needs to conduct her open-minded inquiry, namely, a studied assessment of a challenge conducted by people she trusts, which she can use to review her beliefs. In terms of Jordan's achieving her overall goal, which is to assess the challenge vis-à-vis her own beliefs, it does not much matter *how* she gets her information—whether she actively seeks it or patiently waits for it—so long as she eventually has it.⁷ Nor does it matter that there is a time lag between her awareness of a challenge to her beliefs and its subsequent assessment by others. Suppose when the challenge presents itself, Jordan cannot attend to it right away, as she is already preoccupied with another debate, or on vacation, or ill. But she makes a mental note to return to it when she can do so and later keeps her word by revisiting the challenge, giving it serious consideration, and reviewing and/or revising her beliefs accordingly. It cannot be denied that she has exercised open-mindedness from beginning to end. The lapse of time does not nullify the fact⁸; what matters is that the process unfolds within a reasonable time frame.⁹ Jordan's wait for the expert findings, which involves a time lag, is therefore unproblematic in qualifying her as having exercised open-mindedness.

Nor can it be objected on the ground that Jordan is not involved at all in her friends' consideration of the challenge. This is what advice from friends and experts is usually like, advice based on views that they have *already* formed without our input or participation. Moreover, in cases where a person simply lacks the expertise and background knowledge, or is knowingly biased and prejudicial, her participation, at least when it comes to assessing certain aspects of the debate, is actively *discouraged*. What matters for assessing a person's exercise of open-mindedness is not

⁷ It should, of course, be noted that the present issue has to do with whether active involvement in the process is epistemically relevant to assessing one's open-mindedness. Thus, I do not have in mind cases in which Jordan acts viciously (i.e., coercing others to do the work for him, or stealing ideas from others).

⁸ In this case, we might commend Jordan for taking her time, for if she did not, she would be acting in an epistemically irresponsible way, placing herself in an avoidable position in which she risks the potential loss of true beliefs and acquisition of false ones.

⁹ It is difficult to specify what this time frame is. If she does not return to the challenge—say, she forgets about it—then that would be a reason to judge that she is not after all open-minded. However, I am inclined to think that what matters here is intention and motivation. Suppose Jordan suddenly passes away before she has a chance to examine the challenge. Even though she fails to make good on her promise to review the challenge, her initial intention and motivation to do so perhaps suffices to warrant our original evaluation of her as an open-minded person.

that she must participate in every intellectual task required for facing the challenge; rather, what matters is that she is willing to use reliable information and conclusions in assessing the challenge vis-à-vis her own beliefs. Therefore, when Jordan appeals to her expert friends' independent assessment of the challenge and their conclusions, she can properly be regarded as having exercised open-mindedness.

4 A Final Stretch

To get to the central thesis of this paper, let us stretch the example of Jordan one last time. Suppose that Jordan is fully competent to consider and assess a challenge on her own, that she does not possess any known prejudices to hinder her inquiry, and that she has no pressing need to discuss it with others. Nevertheless, she still leaves the task of considering the merit of the challenge entirely to others. Her reasons for doing so on this occasion are more complicated. Although she is reasonably confident of her own intellectual position, she still does not have a full grasp of its intricacies and dimensions as they relate to any larger, outside debate and is unclear about its implications. She knows that it would be unwise, for several reasons, for her to consider any objection or alternative account at this time. First, without a firmer understanding of her own position, she would not be able to fully understand these objections, and adequately respond to them. Second, she would risk abandoning her position if she were misled by these objections. Third, she would not be able to effectively explore, buttress, and defend her position if she got distracted by competing accounts.

Her plan therefore is to revisit these objections and assess them vis-à-vis her own beliefs *only after* she has finished developing her position. In the meantime, she plans to completely *ignore* all objections and alternative accounts, and operate with a cognitive resolve that her position is correct. In the event that she has no choice but to confront these objections, she automatically assumes (for the time being) that they are mistaken and instead devotes her efforts entirely to finding ways to reject or answer them. By doing so, she values these objections not because they are correct but because they are useful in helping her advance her position. However, and this is the important point, she allows herself to ignore these positions or presume them to be mistaken because she is confident that while she does so, her peers will take up and seriously investigate the challenges through debates and discussions in order to assess them. Moreover, she is sure that they would approach these challenges from more or less the same perspective as hers if she were to do so herself. Once Jordan is satisfied that she has a sufficient grasp of her position, and once her peers have finished assessing these challenges, she intends to review all of these findings, hers and theirs, and determine on her own whether she needs to adjust any of her beliefs.

Let us assume that Jordan does everything as planned. Can Jordan be characterized as open-minded? I contend that she can be. Recall that the key component of exercising open-mindedness is that Jordan seriously considers the challenge vis-à-vis her own position. In the above example, she does precisely this, though not entirely on her own, and not immediately. What she does is that she divvies up in her mind all of the tasks as demanded by an open-minded inquiry: Her job is to

come up with the strongest and most defensible formulation of her position, while her peers, unaware of her plan, take on the task of assessing the challenges through debates and discussions (but without her) to ensure that these challenges, too, receive the most competent treatment. Once their task is finished, after a lapse of time, Jordan then evaluates her peers' findings in light of her reconsidered position, and if needed, adjusts her beliefs. Jordan can thus be regarded as having exercised open-mindedness.

Notice that there is a weak interpretation of the claim that Jordan has exercised open-mindedness. She rightly can be so characterized because in the end, she does in fact review and evaluate her peers' findings vis-à-vis her own position. However, this characterization can only be applied at the moment that she does so (namely, after her own inquiry is finished) but not any time before, when she acts rather dogmatically. It is possible in fact to argue for a stronger characterization: Jordan is open-minded *throughout* the entire scenario. This is because she is the one who initiates the whole inquiry with the appropriate mindset and motivation. Her insistence at the beginning that her account holds true is based on a genuine desire to bide her time so that she can give it her best formulation. From her standpoint, the most efficient way to do so is to proceed *as if* all challenges to her position and all alternative accounts are mistaken and misleading. Such a cognitive resolve prevents her from being distracted from her central task at hand, which could result in a premature abandonment of her position or a blind acceptance of an alternative but incorrect account. But this cognitive resolve is only meant to be temporary, and will end once Jordan is finished with her own work. Moreover, she has a strategy for handling these objections while she is preoccupied: She is reasonably confident that her epistemic peers, whose judgments she trusts and relies upon, will consider them. What confirms Jordan's open-mindedness is the dual fact that she *does* return to consider the challenges herself, and that at no time during her inquiry does she categorically dismiss the challenges as mistaken or insists that her position is categorically correct.

5 Profiles of Open-Mindedness

Now that we have explored several ways in which the example of Jordan can be stretched, and found ways to maintain our judgment that she has exercised open-mindedness, what are some implications and conclusions to be drawn from the foregoing discussion? The first is that a person's exercise of open-mindedness can be social in nature. As noted earlier, open-mindedness requires that a person give serious consideration to challenges to her position and adjust, if necessary, her beliefs accordingly. We tend to assume, rather naturally, that the person has to do all of these tasks *entirely on her own*; after all, when we judge a person to have exercised open-mindedness, we are saying *of her* that she has conducted herself in such a way as to satisfy the requirements for it. In exercising open-mindedness, the person may well carry out these tasks herself. However, as I have argued, this need not be the case. When an open-minded person needs help, say, in assessing a challenge to her view because of her lack of expertise, of her biases and prejudices, or of her need

for discussion, she can recruit help from others. Involving others in these ways does not compromise the fact that we can still say *of the person* that she is open-minded. Indeed, these are ways in which we do often enlist help from others in our open-minded inquiry; they are just too mundane to be noticed.

I have further argued that other people can play a much more substantive role in a person's open-minded inquiry. Her epistemic peers can take on entire tasks themselves, and she can make use of their findings after she finishes verifying her own position. Importantly, despite this division of epistemic labor, we can still retain our judgment that *this person* is open-minded because she is appropriately motivated in subjecting the challenge to consideration vis-à-vis her position, and intends all along to appeal to her epistemic peers' findings at the appropriate juncture. When a person relies so heavily on others in these ways, her exercise of open-mindedness is substantially more social in nature than is commonly recognized.

Another conclusion we can draw is that there can be *multiple profiles* of open-mindedness. Once we make room for the social in the exercise of open-mindedness—that is, once we acknowledge that some of the tasks as demanded by open-mindedness can be performed by other people—we see that there are different ways for a person to be open-minded. The typical profile of open-mindedness, as suggested earlier, is one in which a person conducts all of the tasks associated with an open-minded inquiry entirely on her own. She gives serious consideration to views that differ from her own, evaluates them and adjusts her own beliefs accordingly. But if she can delegate some of these tasks to her epistemic peers, other profiles emerge. So, the '*Dogmatist*' profile might characterize someone who, for most of her inquiry and for reasons listed above, remains committed to her position, and refuses to entertain objections or alternative viewpoints, or merely treats them as means to reinforcing her own position.¹⁰ This person however would still be considered open-minded: Even though she delegates the critical tasks to her epistemic peers, she does return at a later stage of her inquiry to consider their findings. Under this profile, all of the tasks as demanded by open-mindedness are completed, though the open-minded person expends much of her efforts on some but not all the tasks.

Alternatively, a '*Critical*' profile of open-mindedness might be generated if the open-minded person devotes much of her effort to evaluating the merit of a challenge or alternative to her position. One reason for her doing so is that she believes her epistemic peers are much more capable than her of developing and defending the position to which she subscribes. Moreover, she believes she has intellectual strengths (such as a critical eye) to examine positions *other than her own* from a detached and impartial point of view. With this in mind, she divvies up the tasks, fully intending to consult her peers' findings in order to make a final assessment of the challenge vis-à-vis her position. Lastly, a '*Judicial*' profile of open-mindedness surfaces if the open-minded person spends the bulk of her attention and effort on adjudicating the dispute between the challenge and her own position. She may do

¹⁰ We should, of course, be reminded that this person is not in fact dogmatic. The reason for the qualifier "for most of the inquiry" is that the person does at the end consider the merit of his epistemic peers' findings.

this if she lacks confidence in both developing and defending her own position *and* in understanding and assessing the challenge. She thus leaves both of these tasks to peers whom she regards as much more capable of executing the task than herself. Nevertheless, she is skilled and proficient in assessing and resolving intellectual disputes once they are presented to her in a digestible form. Once her peers make their findings available and present both the challenge and her own position in succinct synopsis, she adjudicates and settles the dispute, and makes the necessary epistemic adjustments.

We have identified four unique profiles of open-mindedness: The Typical, the Dogmatist, the Critical, and the Judicial. Their commonality is that their subjects, the selfsame Jordan, all give serious consideration to challenges to their positions, and adjust their beliefs as warranted. However, Jordan in the Dogmatist and Judicial profiles seems to behave in ways that are seemingly *antithetical* to open-mindedness: For an undetermined period of time, which can be months, years, or even decades, she refuses to give opposing views serious consideration, a stance virtually indistinguishable from that of a close-minded person. Yet, she is not truly close-minded, since she intends all along to *return* to make the requisite assessment, as she subsequently does at a later stage of the inquiry.

We can in fact push for a stronger claim still that open-mindedness permits one to behave like a closed-minded person and even argue that open-mindedness sometimes *demand*s that we behave this way. What is critical about the exercise of open-mindedness is that we give serious consideration to views that challenge our own, adjudicate their differences, and resolve to change or sustain our position. As noted above, this exercise is fruitful only if the person *actually* has the intellectual capacity, time and resources to do so. Otherwise, she would jeopardize the purpose of exercising open-mindedness, which is to acquire or preserve truths, to remove false beliefs, or to deepen understanding. Anytime the person realizes that she is not intellectually up to the task or is justifiably preoccupied, *and* she wants to be open-minded, she will take up one of the four profiles outlined above. In the event that she recognizes that her prejudices prevent her from giving an opposing view serious consideration, she lets her peers who harbor no such prejudices proceed, and in waiting for their findings, refrains from considering it herself. In this way, open-mindedness can actually demand that we act dogmatically, if only for a while.

If the idea of multiple profiles of open-mindedness is viable, we see that there is no singular manner in which a person must behave in order for her to be considered open-minded. Does this mean that there is no characteristic psychology associated with open-mindedness? The answer depends on how we construe the notion of a characteristic psychology. If we mean by it a pattern of typical behaviors, then the answer is no; Jordan as the subject in the 'Critical', 'Judicial', or especially the 'Dogmatist', profiles behaves in ways that are highly *uncharacteristic* of what we associate with open-mindedness. However, if the notion of a characteristic psychology is construed broadly to suggest something like a pattern of activities that can be attributed to, but not necessarily conducted by, an individual, then the answer is yes. After all, all of the profiles are united by a shared pattern, that is, a serious consideration of a challenge to one's position, and if needed, a subsequent adjustment of one's doxastic commitment. In all of the above profiles, a specific individual is, and

remains, to the forefront; *She* subscribes to a particular position, *she* is presented with a challenge to her position, *she* finds ways to understand and evaluate this challenge and to hold her own, *she* finds ways to adjudicate the conflict between the challenge and her position, and finally, if called for, *she* makes adjustments in her beliefs. The characteristic psychology of open-mindedness, then, *is* the disposition to ensure that these steps are followed and the tasks, completed. The open-minded person can choose, depending on her strengths and weaknesses, which of these activities she will conduct herself, and which she will defer to others. The division of labor does not detract from the fact that the open-minded person plays the key and lead role in the overall inquiry.

Given the emphasis here on *the person* as the site of open-mindedness, it might be argued, in objection, that her epistemic peers, who may unknowingly do some of the intellectual tasks for her, are just as important and that, consequently, *all* participating epistemic agents, rather than the individual, should be regarded as open-minded instead. To respond to this objection, note that the onus for establishing that the person is open-minded is far less burdensome than that for establishing that the inquiry or the collective group is open-minded.¹¹ My strategy in this paper has been to anchor the main argument around an uncontentious example of open-mindedness, and to show that we can maintain our ascription of Jordan as open-minded even if she leaves some of the intellectual tasks required by open-mindedness to others. What matters is not that Jordan must conduct all of these tasks herself but that she is fully aware *that* these activities will be conducted and that she *intends* to use them in her own inquiry. In this regard, whether these activities are done by her or by others is epistemically insignificant for our characterization of her as open-minded.

By contrast, to establish that the inquiry or group is open-minded will require us to settle a host of difficult metaphysical and epistemological issues, such as the ontological status of a collective group, the nature of collective or group virtues, the role of individual intention and motivation, and so forth. This is not to say that these issues cannot be resolved; indeed, I think some of the arguments advanced in this paper can be used to support the conclusion of group open-mindedness. However, the present point is simply that the considerations in this paper lend themselves more to *preserving* our ascription of Jordan's (i.e., the individual's) status as open-minded than to establishing the stronger thesis that the inquiry or the collective whole is open-minded.

6 The Social to the Rescue

The main concern of the paper has been to show how an individual's exercise of open-mindedness can be social in nature. As far as I know, such an observation has not received much, if any, attention in the literature. I would like to conclude this

¹¹ An alternative response is to note that we can simultaneously maintain that *both* the person *and* the inquiry or the group are open-minded. For example, the characteristic psychology of open-mindedness can be instantiated by both the individual and the group.

paper by sketching an application of it. In the literature on open-mindedness, some critics have worried that open-mindedness may not be an epistemic virtue because its exercise can sometimes lead us away from truth or negatively affect the epistemic status of our beliefs (e.g., a reduction in confidence in our beliefs) (e.g., see Cohen 2009; Levy 2006; Carter and Gordan 2014; Madison 2017). This worry is sometimes cast in the context of epistemically hostile environments in which lies, bullshit, fake news, and misrepresentations abound. It also applies to ideas that are so complex and misleading that the lay person lacks the expertise and background knowledge to understand and assess them. If we exercise open-mindedness in these contexts, we will then unnecessarily subject our beliefs to risk, either by acquiring false beliefs or losing true ones. Against this, these critics recommend that we are epistemically better off by being dogmatic, that close-mindedness may be a virtue, and that we ought to refrain from considering certain ideas. Clearly, the implication of these recommendations is that open-mindedness may not be as epistemically virtuous as it is commonly thought.

Solutions to these worries have been proposed by defenders of open-mindedness (cf. see Baehr 2011; Riggs 2010; Kwong (2017)).¹² For example, Baehr notes that virtuous open-mindedness requires that a person know *when* to exercise open-mindedness, namely, when she reasonably believes that doing so stands a good chance of reaching the truth (see Baehr 2011, section 4). Faced with technical or misleading ideas, she could then choose *not* to exercise open-mindedness so as to preserve truth and knowledge. In my view, additional solutions to the critics' worries become available once we take seriously the social picture of open-mindedness as sketched in this paper. In what follows, I will briefly outline some of these.

An underlying source of the critics' worries is that the individual is incapable of or incompetent in completing some of the tasks demanded by open-mindedness, for instance, in detecting and assessing misleading ideas or in understanding complex issues that require expertise that she lacks. Under these circumstances, to insist that a person opens up her mind to give these ideas and positions serious consideration would be imprudent and reckless. However, if the central argument in this paper is tenable, then an individual can still exercise open-mindedness *without* opening up her mind at *every* stage of her inquiry, in particular, the *risky* ones.¹³ For instance, the open-minded person could intentionally delegate the task of assessing potentially misleading or complex ideas to her epistemic peers in the early stages, and keep her mind neutral or closed while they do so.¹⁴ That is, she could take up the 'Dogmatist' stance. Adopting this stance, of course, does not render her truly dogmatic

¹² It is important to note that these worries presuppose that open-mindedness is an intellectual virtue only if its exercise is, among other things, reliable. As such, one way to respond to them is simply to argue that its exercise need not be reliable but that it merely needs to be motivated in the right way (see, e.g., Montmarquet 1993). On such a response, this paper reveals several ways in which the properly motivated person could exercise open-mindedness by relying on other people to improve her chances of obtaining intellectual goods.

¹³ I have argued elsewhere that open-mindedness ought not to be equated with the mere opening of our minds (Kwong 2016, 2017).

¹⁴ The same argument could be made for the other profiles, *mutatis mutandis*.

or closed-minded, for she would merely be *acting* dogmatically at certain points of the inquiry. More importantly, doing so is her way of protecting the integrity of her inquiry while remaining open-minded because she knows that her peers are more capable of conducting the necessary tasks and that she will have to open up her mind to consider the challenge at a later point of her inquiry. When she does so, she is in an epistemically more responsible and stronger position to complete the inquiry to the end: Thanks to her epistemic peers, she will have a better grasp of the complex ideas in the challenge because these have been made more accessible to her. Insofar as a central rationale for recruiting the help of others is to correct and compensate for the open-minded person's lack of competence, the arguments advanced here can be used to make the case that her exercise of open-mindedness would be more reliable than it would otherwise be if she were to conduct all the relevant tasks by herself as an individual. Potential weaknesses and mishaps in the process could be minimized to pave the way for the open-minded person to epistemic goods.

An additional benefit of addressing the critics' worries this way is that we can preserve our intuition that open-mindedness is an epistemic virtue: Its exercise, when properly motivated and, more to the point of this paper, responsibly shared with others, allows an open-minded person to close off her mind for a period of time. Doing so can help reduce the risk of losing true beliefs or acquiring false ones, especially during the early and precarious stages of the inquiry. We thus have a way to heed the critics' warning *and* continue to view open-mindedness as a virtue. Admittedly, more work is needed to turn these remarks into a more comprehensive response, a task which can only be attempted on a future occasion. In addition, it must be noted that my approach does not resolve all of their worries. For example, what is an open-minded person to do with complex ideas that no one in her epistemic community currently understands or with claims that are misleading but no one can presently dispel as such? When this occurs, none of the profiles sketched above—the 'Typical', 'Dogmatist', 'Critical' and 'Judicial'—would fit, as there would be no suitable person from whom to seek help. Might this not be an occasion when we should refuse to consider the challenge and stay closed-minded? Perhaps. However, the four profiles discussed here do not exhaust the possibilities and additional ones may be developed. It might be helpful, for instance, to think in terms of a 'Deferentialist' profile in which an open-minded person, when faced with these difficult or problematic ideas, defers their assessment to some future person with the requisite expertise for processing them. What makes her open-minded is that she does not dismiss these ideas out of hand, is on the lookout for such an expert, and is mentally and intellectually prepared to give these ideas serious consideration when these are made accessible to her. No doubt this fifth profile introduces new worries. What if, for example, such an expert is not to be found? Nevertheless, I hope the overall approach suggested in this paper is conducive to further exploration and development.

I would like to close by considering an objection that may be raised towards the solution on offer. Suppose that a person leaves the intellectual labor to experts with respect to a challenge that she lacks the requisite knowledge and abilities to understand and assess. The assumption so far has been that the challenge will have been digested by these experts in such a way that she can now process it. However, according to the objection, this outcome is not guaranteed. For instance, despite the

experts' input, the dispute involving the challenge may remain too difficult for her to process, or may be too controversial still for her to settle with rival views from experts.¹⁵ Were she to forge ahead and assess the challenge, she would risk losing truth and knowledge. A dilemma, then, emerges: She either outsources the labor to experts and accepts the verdicts of those she trusts, in which case open-mindedness is not needed because she no longer makes the assessment herself, or she assesses the challenge vis-à-vis her beliefs herself, in which case open-mindedness may cause her to lose epistemic goods.¹⁶

One way to resolve the dilemma is to maintain that outsourcing the epistemic labor to competent others and accepting their verdicts does not necessarily imply the absence of open-mindedness. Recall the requirement of open-mindedness that a person (like Jordan) is receptive to challenges to her beliefs, and is willing to give them serious consideration and to settle the dispute by making the necessary epistemic adjustments. The central claim in this paper is that she can outsource some of the intellectual tasks that constitute the characteristic psychology of open-mindedness to others. However, I have also posited that toward the end—that is, at the point when she receives the reports from experts—she will have to weigh the evidence herself and decide what to do with the challenge, viz. accept or reject it. The assumption is that she is competent to do this last task. Indeed, with help from experts, her chances of obtaining intellectual goods should be better than if she performs all of the relevant intellectual tasks herself. But what if, as the objection suggests, the person lacks the competence to perform even this final assessment of the challenge vis-à-vis her beliefs? I contend that she could outsource this task to others and still be deemed open-minded. Rather than treating the acceptance of expert testimony as lying *outside* the parameters of her open-minded inquiry (and thus, precluding an exercise of open-mindedness), we could instead construe such acceptance as an intellectual task that is a part of it. There is no reason to think that were she to do so, she would be any less open-minded. Just as we saw that there was no difficulty in attributing open-mindedness to the person who was not capable of critical analysis and thus delegated this task to others, the same may be said for the person who is not competent to assess the digested evidence (viz., to accept or reject it) and leaves it to others. After all, what open-mindedness demands is that she is receptive to challenges and settles these via intellectual tasks associated with the characteristic psychology of open-mindedness. Consistent with this requirement is her decision to rely on experts to make a judgement about whether to retain or discard her belief.¹⁷ Her open-mindedness, then, is evident in the fact that she settled the dispute in a way characteristic of open-mindedness, and with help from experts along the way.

¹⁵ Notice that under such circumstances, the person also has the option of adopting the *Deferentialist* stance just noted, and not process the challenge at this point. She could return to it once she has a better grasp of the challenge or when there is some consensus among disputing experts.

¹⁶ I would like to thank an anonymous referee for *Erkenntnis* for raising this objection.

¹⁷ A different way of stating this point is that she makes the final assessment of the challenge vis-à-vis her beliefs *by* accepting the relevant expert testimony.

Does open-mindedness enter the picture in other ways in this scenario? I think so. Presumably, the open-minded person does not just accept any expert testimony but only those from experts whom she trusts and regards as reliable. Importantly, the considerations she takes into account in deciding which experts to trust are ones that reflect open-mindedness. These include ensuring that the experts, among other things, are fair, impartial and objective in their analyses and assessments, and that all relevant viewpoints in the dispute have been given serious consideration. The verdict that the open-minded person eventually accepts is one she has reasons to believe results from an open-minded inquiry and specifically, one in which all of the aforementioned intellectual activities that constitute the characteristic psychology of open-mindedness are satisfied (whether by the expert in question or by all those involved in the person's open-minded inquiry). In short, open-mindedness is at play in deciding which experts to trust.¹⁸ If her acceptance of expert testimony is in fact based on these considerations, then it reflects her open-mindedness.¹⁹ By contrast, consider those who simply accept expert testimony blindly or randomly, or do so based on reasons that have nothing to do with open-mindedness (e.g., appealing to famous experts or those her friends trust). These individuals may end up settling the challenge and acquiring (or retaining) knowledge, but their acceptance of expert testimony cannot be regarded as open-minded in nature.

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¹⁸ Two additional points should be noted. First, her decision to accept expert testimony, as opposed to making the final assessment herself without it, is itself reflective of her open-mindedness. She is well aware that were she to weigh and assess the evidence herself, she may fail to adequately settle the challenge vis-à-vis her beliefs. Out of considerations pertaining to open-mindedness, she thus chooses to appeal to experts. Second, her acceptance of expert testimony is defeasible in that were she to discover that the testimony did not reflect the intellectual tasks associated with the characteristic psychology of open-mindedness, she would reject it.

¹⁹ Interestingly, some of the considerations advanced by critics of open-mindedness can also be used by the open-minded person in deliberating which expert to trust. For instance, Levy argues that we should not exercise open-mindedness on controversial issues insofar it imposes on us a duty to actively seek out evidence that undermines our existing beliefs (Levy 2006). Rather, he recommends that we appeal to and trust the testimony of experts, in particular those whose moral outlook which we take to be correct. In his view, possessing the right moral beliefs increases the chances of one's beliefs on these controversial issues of turning out true. My view is that we can incorporate Levy's advice *without* accepting his injunction that we should not exercise open-mindedness. As noted, a person can decide which experts to trust out of considerations pertaining to open-mindedness. Specifically, what she is centrally concerned with is to give challenges serious consideration, and to assess them vis-à-vis her beliefs. There is no reason why an appeal to an expert's moral outlook cannot be used by the open-minded person in determining and assessing whether the expert in question is really giving the views in question serious consideration.

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