Two Emphases of Virtue and Vice Epistemology

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Abstract

This paper discusses two important emphases of epistemology – of virtue and vice epistemology in particular – one concerning agency and patiency, and the other concerning self-regard and other-regard. The paper offers, for the first time in the literature, a framework in which four types of epistemological work can be categorized according to their respective dual emphases: Type 1 (agent/self-regarding), Type 2 (agent/other-regarding), Type 3 (patient/self-regarding), and Type 4 (patient/other-regarding). The paper also shows how four ways of doing epistemology can be categorized in terms of these four types and draws particular attention to one dubbed *other-centering*.

> In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich. It is very easy to overestimate the importance of our own achievements in comparison with what we owe to others.
> Bonhoeffer (1953, p. 46)

> It is fine to pay attention to the agential aspects of personhood. Agency, with the action, capability, and freedom it presumes, is a fine thing, in its place. But it is not fine to give agency all the attention, and to pretend that non-agential aspects of our life are somehow less human, less valuable, less our own.
> Reader (2007, p. 604)

1. Introduction

We live an important dimension of our epistemic lives as agents. As such, we sometimes generate and sometimes convey epistemic goods such as knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. We misconceive these lives, however, if we conceive of them solely, or even primarily, in terms of our agency. For we are also epistemic *patients* – recipients or beneficiaries of epistemic goods. However much as agents we engage in epistemic

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activities that affect ourselves and others, we are also frequently patients in the sense that we are *acted on* by others, and by ourselves.

In terms of being patients acted on by others, think of how as children we radically depend on, and are formed by, the epistemic agency of our parents, caregivers, teachers, friends, and sometimes even strangers. Our epistemic patiency, moreover, hardly ends with our entering adulthood. Think of how frequently we depend on, and are formed by, the expertise and ministrations of others whose knowledge, understanding, and wisdom concerning many matters surpass our own – these others may include mechanics, accountants, plumbers, lawyers, doctors, nurses, electricians, farmers, beekeepers, librarians, or neighbours who can tell you everything you want to know about… well, you get the picture.[1] Think of how, in collective or collaborative epistemic endeavours – so central, for instance, to modern science – researchers are inevitably and *à tour de rôle* agents and patients.

We are also patients in relation to our own agency when we acquire epistemic goods generated through such agency. For example, insofar as you engage in an inquiry as an agent that succeeds in generating an epistemic good, someone stands to benefit as a patient, whether it is just you yourself or others as well. An inquiry cannot be successful unless at least someone benefits from, or is a recipient of, an epistemic good it generates, and that someone is a patient even if an agent too.

If all this strikes you as just too obvious to be of interest, consider something curious. Given the amplitude of our epistemic patiency, one might expect the epistemological literature to emphasize, more or less equally, our agency *and* patiency. Oddly, this is hardly the case: the literature skews towards emphasizing our agency.[2] At least it does so explicitly.[3]

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[1] *Cf*. McPherson (1984, p. 179).
[2] For instance, as of 15 March 2023, the *Philosopher's Index* yielded 61 results (note the quotes) under the search query 'epistemic agent' and 93 results under 'epistemic agency', but yielded *not even one* result under 'epistemic patient' and 'epistemic patiency'. This dearth of results comes, surprisingly, despite the upsurge in recent decades of work in social epistemology, virtue and vice epistemology, and the epistemologies of trust and testimony. Relatedly, the *Philosopher's Index* yielded 539 results under 'moral agent' and 846 results for 'moral agency', but only 12 results for 'moral patient' and 4 results for 'moral patiency'. Even ethical theorizing, so it seems, has been far more concerned with moral agency and agents than moral patiency and patients, although at least some attention has been paid explicitly to the latter.
[3] I write 'explicitly' because, as I shall later argue, discussions of agency cannot but at least implicitly presuppose someone's patiency. Thus, while

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Why this skew? Perhaps at least one explanatory factor may be traced back to the vestiges of Cartesian methodology in epistemology with its emphasis (and focus) on the epistemic agent whose only, or at least primary, epistemic patient is himself.[4] Another broader factor may be what Reader (2007) has perceptively characterized as *the agential bias*, a pervasive tendency in philosophy and elsewhere to think of persons primarily as agents and insufficiently (if at all) as patients.[5] At any rate, reflecting epistemologically not just on our agency but our patiency helps render salient another important but orthogonal issue, namely whether epistemological work is *self-regarding* or *other-regarding* in emphasis (and focus).[6] For after all, if we are not epistemic egoists – to use Kawall's (2019) felicitous expression – the other-regarding, and not just the self-regarding, will matter to us epistemically.[7]

In light of such considerations, we can distinguish between at least two kinds of emphases in epistemology, particularly in virtue and vice epistemology, namely whether the *agent* or *patient* is emphasized, and whether *self-regard* or *other-regard* is emphasized.[8] Accordingly, a framework emerges composed of four types, each with its respective dual emphases: Type 1 (agent/self-regarding), Type 2 (agent/other-regarding), Type 3 (patient/self-regarding),

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discussions in the epistemological literature skew heavily toward emphasizing agency, someone's patiency cannot but be presupposed at least implicitly.

[4] Interestingly, although we might think of Descartes in the *Meditations* as being an epistemic agent whose sole epistemic patient is himself, even he envisages the possibility of being a patient acted on by (and vulnerable to) an agent other than himself (namely, the evil demon or genius).

[5] As she notes: 'The bias is profound. It is rare to find it stated in the form of the claim "person are agents", or to find philosophical arguments offered in support of it. Instead, it is presumed, mentioned if at all as a gesture in passing, a presumption, a shared starting point for any reflection on persons' (p. 579).

[6] Interestingly, Priest (2020, p. 191) notes that, for most of its history, epistemology seems to have been excessively focused on self-regarding excellence and not on other-regarding excellence – more on this distinction later. This suggests that epistemology has traditionally had a self-regarding emphasis.

[7] Moreover, even if we are epistemic egoists, insofar as what affects others affects us, the other-regarding will matter to us epistemically as well.

[8] I write 'at least two' because I do not claim that there are *only* two such kinds of emphases and I leave open the possibility of others.

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	Agent Emphasis	Patient Emphasis
Self-Regarding Emphasis	Type 1	Type 3
Other-Regarding Emphasis	Type 2	Type 4

Figure 1. The Four Types Framework

and Type 4 (patient/other-regarding). Call this the *Four Types Framework*. Its types may be encapsulated as follows: Fig. 1.

Those familiar with the epistemological literature will recognize that much theoretical work has been of Type 1, namely with agential and self-regarding dual emphases. I have nothing against such work and plead guilty to having done some myself. I aim here, however, to draw attention in particular to Types 2, 3, and especially 4 which have hitherto received far less attention, for valuable theoretical work can be done in terms of the dual emphases of these types as well, and doing so stands to broaden and enrich epistemology. Since it would be too ambitious in one paper to show this for the full gamut of epistemological theory, I focus specifically on two of its flourishing branches: virtue and vice epistemology. I then turn to four broad ways of doing epistemology and consider in particular one in the spirit of Type 4, highlighting what I call *other-centering*.

My paper unfolds as follows. In section 2, I turn to the significant, though I think underappreciated, work of McPherson (1984) on moral patiency and agency to draw out lessons applicable to epistemic patiency and agency. In section 3, I discuss how Kawall 2002's important account of other-regarding epistemic virtues and duties should lead us to take epistemic other-regard quite seriously. In section 4, I offer some clarifications in the interest of averting possible misunderstandings of the framework articulated and defended here. In section 5, I discuss exemplars of work of each of the framework's four types, including Battaly's account of intellectual perseverance (2017), Priest's account of epistemic insensitivity (2020), my own account of receptive insouciance and souciance (2023), and Fricker's account of testimonial injustice (2007). In section 6, I adduce four grounds in favour of the framework. In section 7, I show how it can helpfully draw attention to other-centering which has hitherto garnered relatively little attention in the epistemological literature. In section 8, I defend the framework against a number of telling objections. I conclude in section 9 with some retrospective and prospective remarks.

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2. Agency and Patiency: Moral and Epistemic

McPherson (1984) underscored how, conceptually, there can be no agent without a patient, and vice versa. An agent acts on a patient, and a patient is acted on by an agent.[9] Accordingly, one cannot fully understand one without the other, the 'study of the patient is necessary for a full understanding of the agent' (p. 174), and a 'balanced view needs to give weight to both the patient and the agent' (p. 178). To be sure, McPherson made this point in the context of discussing moral agency and patiency. As he noted in this vein: 'The notion of a moral agent makes no sense in total isolation from that of the patient. This is a logical or conceptual point, not a moral one' (p. 173).[10]

Given its general nature, however, his logical or conceptual point can be extended beyond the moral variety to other forms of agency and patiency, including (as we are doing here) to *epistemic* agency and patiency. Being an epistemic agent is a matter of acting to generate and/or convey an epistemic good, whereas being an epistemic patient is a matter of being a recipient or beneficiary of an epistemic good. Being an epistemic subject should not be conflated with being an epistemic agent, for epistemic subjecthood properly understood comprises both agency and patiency.

Relatedly, Wolterstorff (2008) distinguished between two fundamental dimensions of the moral order: the agent-dimension and the patient-dimension. As he put it: 'To the moral status of each of us there are two dimensions, that of moral agent and that of moral patient or recipient' (p. 7). Following Wolterstorff's lead and drawing on his insight, we may likewise distinguish between two fundamental dimensions of the *epistemic* order: the agent-dimension and

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[9] Reader (2007, p. 588) made a similar observation: 'Actions always and as such have patients, beings which the action affects. The patient is the being at the receiving end, acted on when the agent acts. For every action, there is both an agent and a patient'.

[10] As McPherson added: 'In the end what really matters is that we should not overlook such obvious truths as that the agent-patient relationship is both two-ended and reciprocal. The situation of A's acting on B can be swiftly reversed; and often one has to say that A and B are simultaneously agent and victim. Certainly the patient in the agent-patient relationship very commonly *re*-acts; and in the case of at least some kinds of responses by the patient toward the agent we might well want to say that the patient has now become an agent. All this helps to explain why doing rather than being done to has tended to occupy the center of philosophical interest in morality. But patients exist too, and they deserve to be taken seriously' (p. 183).

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the patient-dimension; and with regard to the epistemic status of each of us, we may recognize two dimensions, that of epistemic agent and that of epistemic patient or recipient.

With these notions of epistemic agency and patiency in mind, we turn next to epistemic self-regard and other-regard.

3. Self-Regard and Other-Regard: Moral and Epistemic

Kawall (2002) argued that, with regard to epistemic or intellectual virtues, epistemologists have tended to focus on the study of the *self-regarding* variety:

> They have concerned themselves with how individual epistemic agents can flourish qua individual epistemic agents, attempting to determine which intellectual virtues lead to knowledge, what constitutes sufficient justification or warrant to attribute the status of knowledge to an agent's beliefs or acceptances, and so on. Thus, they have focused on each agent's own personal set of beliefs and its formation. (p. 259)

Given the distinction between *self-regarding* and *other-regarding* ethical virtues – as drawn for instance by Slote (1992) and Foot (1978) – Kawall noted a parallel distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding *epistemic* virtues:

> Just as the practice of ethics involves the development of both self-regarding and other-regarding ethical virtues on the part of ethical agents, the practice of epistemology may require epistemic agents to develop both self-regarding and other-regarding epistemic virtues. (p. 259)

As plausible candidates for other-regarding epistemic virtues, Kawall (pp. 259–60) proposed '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)'.

Positing other-regarding epistemic virtues would, according to Kawall, change the way we do epistemology in several ways:

> Perhaps most significantly, the study of teaching and testifying would become an essential part of epistemology. How can an agent best transmit information and knowledge to others in her epistemic community? What are our epistemic duties as testifiers? Just as we, qua epistemic agents, will be concerned to

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acquire the other-regarding epistemic virtues of good teachers and testifiers, we will be concerned qua epistemologists with the study and articulation of these virtues and duties. The study of the methods by which an agent can best convey information will become part of epistemology, akin to determining and studying the most effective (reliable) methods of belief formation. (pp. 271–2)

More generally, Kawall argued, emphasizing other-regarding epistemic virtues would encourage epistemologists to study how individual agents contribute to their communities and their goals of group knowledge.[11] In addition, epistemologists should

examine individual agents and their epistemic goals. What virtues should we develop, once we have removed the individualistic assumption that our sole epistemic goal is the accumulation of knowledge for ourselves alone? How do we compare the epistemic achievement of an effective teacher and a successful researcher – how do we balance distributing and acquiring knowledge? (p. 272)

Even some two decades after its publication, Kawall's 2002 case remains persuasive: epistemologists, insofar as they are not epistemic egoists, ought to pay attention not just to self-regarding epistemic virtues but to other-regarding ones as well, and our doing so changes how we do epistemology.[12] Allow me two observations in this connection.

Notice Kawall's *agent-centered* focus. Nowhere does he mention, explicitly at least, the epistemic patient. If qua epistemic agents we will be concerned to acquire self-regarding and other-regarding epistemic virtues, should we not also qua epistemic *patients* be concerned to acquire self-regarding and other-regarding epistemic virtues? The latter question also prompts another: do at least some self-regarding and other-regarding epistemic virtues pertain to us qua *patients*?

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[11] Kawall acknowledged that similar work is already being done by social epistemologists at least to some extent, but that their work focuses on the organization of groups, and the actions of individuals playing defined roles within organized groups.
[12] Even if the past two decades have witnessed more work on other-regarding epistemic virtues than at the time of Kawall's writing – Priest (2020) discussed in the next section provides a case in point – his general points still ring true.

Furthermore, if we take self-regarding and other-regarding epistemic virtues seriously, then presumably we should also take self-regarding and other-regarding epistemic *vices* seriously as well. The latter question also prompts another: do at least some self-regarding and other-regarding epistemic vices pertain to us qua *patients*?

4. Some Clarifications

Before proceeding further, seven clarifications merit consideration in the interest of averting misunderstandings.

First, it is worth bearing in mind the fluidity with which we are epistemic agents and patients: sometimes we are agents acting on others (e.g., in conveying epistemic goods) and sometimes patients acted on by others (e.g., in being the recipients of epistemic goods generated or conveyed by others).

Second, also worth bearing in mind, as noted earlier, is that we are sometimes patients in relation to our agency. Take reasoning, as in discovering that a conclusion follows from one or more premises. Doing so is an epistemic activity and so involves our agency, but it also involves our patiency when we are its beneficiaries, as acquirers or recipients of knowledge. Take learning through self-questioning, as when we learn by doing so a truth about ourselves. Such questioning is also an epistemic activity and so involves our agency, and it also involves our patiency insofar as we are its beneficiaries.[13] Accordingly, epistemic agency is *not* solely a matter of acting on others, and epistemic patiency is *not* solely a matter of being acted

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[13] See Smith (2012) for interesting discussion of how the process of thought itself requires our being the patient of our own agency across time. Also worth noting in this context is the role of self-trust or relying on own's own authority in reasoning or inquiring. (I thank a referee of this journal for pointing out to me the relevance of self-trust.) As Gibbard (1990, p. 178) for instance notes: 'Reasoning normally depends on trusting own's past conclusions. One must normally trust past conclusions without reviewing all of one's grounds. In effect one accords authority to one's past self […]. Indeed even setting out to ponder or investigate an issue requires reliance on one's own authority. Why should I bother to think about an issue when I do not yet have a firm opinion? I might inquire just for fun or to pass the time, but normally if I inquire, it is because I place some value on accepting the conclusions I may reach. In that sense, I rely again on my own authority: I accord probable validity to the conclusion I would accept if I investigated'. Self-trust thus presumably involves being one who trusts but also the one who is trusted.

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on by others: we are at least sometimes patients relative to our agency.[14]

Third, while epistemic patiency can be passive or non-active, it need not be so.[15] To be sure, given the conceptual link between agency and activity, it is easy to lapse into mistaking such patiency to be merely non-active or passive.[16] Consider an analogy. While to be a medical patient is to be a recipient or beneficiary of medical treatment or care typically (although not necessarily) provided by others, it would be a mistake to think that passivity or non-activity is essential to medical patiency. For one can also play an active role in receiving or benefitting from such treatment or care: one can, in a sense, exercise agency in one's medical patiency by actively carrying out medical recommendations and striving to inform oneself about one's condition and care. Essential to such patiency is not passivity but rather medical *receptivity* or (to coin an expression) *beneficiaryhood*: one's being the recipient or beneficiary of medical treatment or care afforded by medical providers.[17] Similarly, epistemic patiency should not be conflated or equated with mere non-activity or passivity. Essential to such patiency is not passivity but rather epistemic *receptivity* or *beneficiaryhood*: one's being the recipient or beneficiary of epistemic goods generated or conveyed by others or by oneself. One can, in a sense, exercise *agency in patiency* by being an active recipient or beneficiary of epistemic goods, and this shows an important way in which epistemic agency and patiency are not mutually exclusive categories. Attentive listeners, for instance, are not merely passive but active in their listening.[18] Careful recipients of testimony, to give

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[14] Although not on the topic of *epistemic* agency and patiency, Smith (2012, pp. 319–20) makes an interesting observation about how, when it comes to desires, one can be an agent and a patient in relation to oneself in that one can be in both the agent-place *and* the patient-place of one's own desires.

[15] I thus differ here from Reader (2007) who, in her admirable and profound discussion of agency and patiency, tends to conflate, mistakenly in my judgment, patiency with passivity.

[16] On the matter of this conceptual link, note that definition 1a of 'agent' in the OED defines it as follows: 'A person who or thing which acts upon someone or something; one who or that which exerts power; the doer of an action'.

[17] While medical patients are typically treated by medical providers other than themselves, in at least some cases medical patients treat themselves without other providers. In such cases, medical patients are their own medical agents.

[18] Daryl Davis, a black man who sought out and interviewed members of the Ku Klux Klan, represents a particularly instructive example of such

another germane example, may actively direct questions to testifiers in order to better understand the testimony and the testifier's background.[19] More generally, epistemic agency considerations need not exclude or preclude patiency considerations, and vice versa.

Fourth, the categories of the epistemically self-regarding and other-regarding do not exclude or preclude one another: for instance, traits and activities conducive to our acquiring epistemic goods for ourselves may lead others to benefit from them as well, and vice versa. For instance, your diligence in an inquiry on a matter of interest to you may result in your acquiring epistemic goods not just for yourself, but for others as well. Accordingly, an emphasis on epistemic self-regard need not exclude other-regarding considerations, and vice versa.

Fifth, emphases come in degrees. An epistemological theory may emphasize agency more strongly than patiency or vice versa, and/or self-regard more strongly than other-regard or vice versa. Similarly, broad ways of doing epistemology (more on this later) may also emphasize agency more strongly than patiency or vice versa, and/or self-regard more strongly than other-regard or vice versa.

Sixth, the Four Types Framework articulated here should *not* be taken as holding that *all* work in virtue and vice epistemology (or epistemology more broadly) can be categorized in terms of the four types of dual emphases it distinguishes, but rather that at least *some* significant work can be fruitfully so categorized.

Seventh, that a virtue or vice is epistemic need not exclude or preclude its being moral as well. At least some virtues (and vices) straddle both categories and may be seen as hybrids. For instance, an epistemic virtue concerned with the epistemic well-being of others may also have a moral dimension insofar as their epistemic well-being is integral to their well-being as a whole. Take intellectual (or epistemic) generosity. Baehr (2011, p. 111) characterizes an intellectually generous person as '(roughly) one who gives freely of her epistemic capacities or resources in order to benefit the epistemic situation of another'. On his conception, intellectual generosity, 'like other forms of generosity is inherently *others-regarding*; it is non-egoistic. Moreover, intellectual generosity is less likely to aim at respecting others' intellectual *rights* than it is at furthering their

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active listening. His receptivity in hearing out his opponents' (grossly flawed) reasoning is anything but passive. See Davis (1998).

[19] I thank a reviewer of this journal for suggesting this example of testimony.

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acquisition of particular epistemic *goods* or at their epistemic or cognitive well-being as a whole' (p. 111). Similarly, according to Roberts and Wood intellectual generosity is a:

> glad willingness to give intellectual goods, both intrinsic and extrinsic, to others, and this willingness is based on a dominance of two kinds of concerns: an interest in the intrinsic intellectual goods of knowledge, information, confirmation (or disconfirmation) of hypotheses, understanding, and other such goods; and an interest in the intellectual well-being of other people. In particular, these two kinds of concern dominate over the concern to have, for oneself, such extrinsic intellectual goods as position, honors, and wealth. (2007, p. 304)

As intellectual generosity exemplifies, the epistemic and the moral need not exclude or preclude one another insofar as epistemic goods are part of overall well-being and such well-being is also a matter of moral concern.

5. Exemplars of Work of the Four Types

With the above clarifications in mind, we turn to the four types described above, illustrating how worthwhile work can be, and has been done, with their respective dual emphases.

5.1 Type 1

Agent and self-regarding emphases overlap in work of this type. As an exemplar of such work, consider Battaly's insightful (2017) account of intellectual perseverance on which it is a disposition to overcome obstacles, so as to continue to perform intellectual actions, in pursuit of one's intellectual goals (p. 669). An agent thus acts to overcome obstacles in an epistemically self-regarding manner.[20] On her pluralist view, the trait of intellectual perseverance is sometimes, although not always, an intellectual virtue.[21] When a virtue, it

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[20]   To be sure, this pursuit need not be carried out in an *exclusively* self-regarding manner; nonetheless, the account emphasizes the pursuit of *one's own* intellectual goals.

[21]   *Cf.* the account in King (2014) of intellectual perseverance. According to King: 'The virtue is a matter of continuing in one's intellectual activities for an appropriate amount of time, in the pursuit of intellectual

contrasts with both a vice of deficiency (capitulation) and a vice of excess (recalcitrance).

Some intellectual virtues, such as intellectual courage and intellectual self-control, turn out, on this account, to be (at least *prima facie*) types of intellectual perseverance. Take intellectual self-control. On Battaly's conception, it 'is a type of perseverance that is directed at overcoming internal obstacles to the pursuit of one's intellectual goals' (p. 690). As she observes:

> Intellectual self-control is likely to involve the regulation of one's desires and emotions in one's pursuit of epistemic goods. Accordingly, it is likely to involve overcoming, or otherwise responding appropriately to, internal obstacles to pursuing epistemic goods. A person who has the virtue of intellectual self-control characteristically overcomes the desire to forsake an important project for a less important one that is more pleasurable. She overcomes the distractions of online surfing. She overcomes boredom, tedium, and frustration. She overcomes the urge to flit from one 'enticing' project to the next, without seeing any of them through. And, arguably, she overcomes these desires and emotions because she values and cares about epistemic goods. (p. 690)

Given its agential and self-regarding dual emphases, Battaly's account of intellectual perseverance exemplifies work of Type 1.[22]

5.2 Type 2

Agent and other-regarding emphases overlap in work of this type. Priest (2020) exemplifies such work. Influenced by, and sympathetic to, Kawall's account of other-regarding epistemic virtues, Priest usefully distinguishes between what she dubs 'athlete-like' and 'physician-like' virtues (pp. 190–1).[23] The former are personal and

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goods, despite obstacles to one's attainment of those goods' (p. 3379). King's account, like Battaly's, emphasizes agency and self-regard.

[22] The account of intellectual courage and caution in Roberts and Wood (2007) provides another example of an account that, in important respects, exemplifies the dual emphases of Type 1.

[23] Notice how Priest's distinction between athlete-like and physician-like virtues is *agent-centric*. Interestingly, although she does not point this out herself, her taking the physician to be a paradigmatic exemplar of one engaged in other-regarding activity suggests that the recipient of the

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self-regarding excellences, while the latter are interpersonal and other-regarding excellences. Priest notes that, just as there can be interpersonal virtues, so too there can be interpersonal vices. On her understanding, an interpersonal epistemic vice is '*a character trait that negatively influences the epistemic endeavors of others*. This negative impact is manifest by making it less likely that other epistemic agents will acquire knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and other epistemic goods' (p. 192, (italics in original).

The particular other-regarding epistemic vice she explores is what she calls *epistemic insensitivity*. On her view, this vice is an epistemic agent's tendency to overlook factors that influence 'epistemic uptake' on the part of others, and is a consequential vice in having significant and negative epistemic effects.[24] Emphasizing epistemic agency, Priest (2020, p. 191) notes, 'if we are to care about inquiry and how people acquire various sorts of epistemic goods, then we ought to care about how some epistemic agents affect the epistemic lives of other epistemic agents. We should care not only that individual epistemic agents have habits that help themselves personally, but also that epistemic agents are successful in aiding others to acquire the same'.[25]

Although Priest focuses on the vice of epistemic insensitivity, presumably there can also be a corresponding *virtue* of epistemic sensitivity as well. Building on her work, I take such a virtue to amount to an epistemic agent's tendency to be actively mindful of, or attentive to, factors that influence epistemic uptake on the part of others, and as such is a consequential virtue in having significant and *positive* effects. Epistemic sensitivity, like insensitivity, involves dual agent and other-regarding emphases.[26] It is accordingly related to what

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physician's ministrations – namely, the *medical* patient – is a paradigmatic recipient of this activity. By analogy, this raises the question whether there can be (medical) patient-like virtues.

[24]   Priest distinguishes four breeds of this vice: expertise insensitivity, value insensitivity, interest insensitivity, and physiological insensitivity. See Priest (2020) for more on these four breeds.

[25]   Although Priest emphasizes agency in her account of epistemic insensitivity and nowhere mentions patients except in the medical sense, worth noticing is the epistemic patiency dimension of this vice, for it is a vice concerned with epistemic *uptake*. More on this later.

[26]   Paralleling the vice, four breeds of this virtue can be distinguished: expertise sensitivity, value sensitivity, interest sensitivity, and physiological sensitivity. Notice, moreover, how Priest's notion of the vice of epistemic insensitivity, and the notion of the virtue of epistemic sensitivity that I have

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Roberts and Wood (2007, p. 165) characterize as the intellectual virtue of truthfulness:

> a love of the intellectual goods as they may be lodged in other people by way of one's own communication. It is a concern that what one tells the other is true, not just in some legalistic sense of being a true proposition, but that what one is communicating actually become a true belief or correct understanding lodged in the other person – that she know or understand the truth. Here love of knowledge is not just a love of epistemic goods as such, but of other people's having them.[27]

5.3 Type 3

Patient and self-regarding emphases overlap in work of this type. As an example, consider my account of the epistemic vice of *receptive insouciance* and the virtue of *receptive souciance* (2023), an account that builds on, refines, and extends Cassam's (2018, 2019) work on the epistemic vice of insouciance.

On this account, the epistemic vice of receptive insouciance is a posture – manifested by one's epistemic conduct – toward truth, evidence, or inquiry. As an epistemic vice it obstructs the gaining, keeping, and/or sharing of epistemic goods such as knowledge. It manifests, and is partly constituted by, an indifference or lack of concern with the truth of what others are communicating to one. Those who are receptively insouciant do not care (epistemically speaking) whether what they are hearing or reading (or being communicated to by other means) is true (Le Morvan, 2023, p. 3).

Is receptive insouciance nothing but gullibility on this account? No: for while related in being epistemic vices that involve an excessive and uncritical receptivity, they differ in that:

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extrapolated from her account, both have an agent emphasis. But could there not be patiential epistemic insensitivity and sensitivity? We will return to this later.

[27]   *Cf.* the account in my article (2023) of the epistemic virtue of *expressive* souciance as distinguished from *receptive* souciance. This account of expressive souciance emphasizes agency and other-regard, as do the accounts of intellectual generosity offered by Baehr (2011) and Roberts and Woods (2007) discussed in section 4.

> the gullible are at least receptive to what they think are truths, to that extent care about knowing the truth, and believe what they take to be truths; the receptively insouciant by contrast do not care if what is being communicated to them is true, and this in-difference to truth seems incompatible with belief insofar as belief aims at truth. Receptive insouciance may thus be even more epistemically perverse than gullibility given how the former but not the latter involves an indifference to truth. (p. 3)[28]

The epistemic virtue of receptive *souciance* is also a posture – mani-fested by one's epistemic conduct – toward truth, evidence, or inquiry. As an epistemic virtue, by contrast, it promotes the gaining, keeping, and/or sharing of epistemic goods such as knowl-edge. It manifests, and is partly constituted by, a concern with the truth of what is being communicated to one by others (p. 6). Those who are receptively souciant *do* care (epistemically speaking) whether what they are hearing or reading (or being communicated to by other means) is true.

Notice how patient and self-regarding emphases overlap on this account of the vice of receptive insouciance and the virtue of receptive souciance; it thus exemplifies work of Type 3.[29]

5.4 Type 4

Patient and other-regarding emphases overlap in work of this type. Consider in this vein Miranda Fricker's (2007) account of testimonial injustice which involves prejudice that leads one to 'give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word' (p. 1). Take her example of a woman in a business meeting who makes a good case, but, in virtue of her gender, is not believed by her listeners whose prejudice leads them to discount her competence and the credibility of her ar-guments. Not only may this woman suffer an injustice such as missing out on a deserved promotion, but she also suffers testimonial injustice, namely 'a kind of injustice in which someone is wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower' (p. 20). The woman is wronged in not being afforded the credibility that she deserves as a

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[28] Receptive insouciance is particularly pernicious when instantiated by the powerful, for what becomes of the efficacy of speaking truth to power if the powerful simply do not care about the truth?

[29] A number of accounts of open-mindedness also emphasize patiency and self-regard. For a helpful overview of accounts of this virtue, see Speigel (2017).

knower (pp. 4–5). She suffers, so to speak, a kind of *epistemic alien-ation* in being unjustly excluded from being rightfully acknowledged as a knower, as a source of knowledge.

Notice that Fricker's account of testimonial injustice has a patient-ial dimension in being a matter of receptivity – a receptivity deformed or obstructed by the prejudice of the testimonially unjust; her notion also has an other-regarding dimension insofar as others are categorized as harmed in their capacity as knowers. If we construe being testimonially unjust as (at least partially) an epistemic vice, Fricker's work on testimonial injustice can be seen as being of Type 4 where patient and other-regarding emphases overlap.[30]

If being testimonially unjust counts (at least partially) as an epistemic vice, this suggests by contrast that being testimonially *just* – namely, the tendency to give due or deserved credibility to someone's testimony in a way unobstructed or undeformed by prejudice – counts (at least partially) as an epistemic virtue, and work on such a virtue can also be seen as being of Type 4 where patient and other-regarding emphases overlap.

Interestingly, a connection may be drawn here back to Priest's work. Recall that her account of epistemic insensitivity emphasized agency and other-regard, but looking at matters from a patient-centric vantage point can lead us to discern a patiential kind of epistemic insensitivity whereby *recipients themselves* fail to acknowledge or recognize factors that impede their *own* epistemic uptake (or intake). Racial, gender, and other forms of prejudice presumably fill the bill here. Thus, taking a patient-centric vantage point reveals an interesting way in which significant elements of Priest's work and Fricker's may be recognized and linked.[31] Moreover, insofar as there can be a vice of patiential epistemic insensitivity, so too can there presumably be a *virtue* of patiential epistemic sensitivity – namely, a

[30]   Worth noting, as a reviewer of this journal has pointed out to me, is that Fricker and others would also emphasize that recipients of testimony need to pay attention to their own roles, statuses, or identities, the roles, statuses, or identities of testifiers, and the relationship between them. For instance, if one is a police officer questioning a youth from a marginalized racial group, it is not enough just to focus on one's own role, status, or identity – for its relationship with the testifier's role, status, or identity matters.
[31]   Interestingly, an important element of Mills's (2007) account of how white ignorance impedes or obstructs the receptivity of white people to the epistemic goods of non-whites can be recast, at least in part, as a form of patiential epistemic insensitivity. See also Medina's (2013) account of meta-lucidity which has patiential and other-regarding emphases. I intend to explore these positions in more depth elsewhere.

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tendency to acknowledge or recognize (and assumably an effort to overcome) the factors that may impede one's own epistemic uptake (or intake).

6. Grounds for the Four Types Framework

I have explained and illustrated the Four Types Framework, but explaining and illustrating do not all by themselves justify the framework. So what then can be said in terms of grounds for it? At least four such interrelated grounds can be adduced in its favour.

6.1 Enrichment of Epistemology

Contemporary epistemological theory, as shown especially in virtue and vice epistemology, has been enriched via borrowings of insights from ethical theory. Think back, for example, to Kawall's insistence on how, as in ethics, the other-regarding matters (or should matter) in epistemology. Recall also how we saw that the agent-patient distinction in ethical theory (as emphasized by McPherson, Wolterstorff, and Reader) has an important epistemological analogue. Given that ethics and epistemology both have normative or evaluative dimensions, it makes sense that there should be analogues in epistemology to the agent or patient emphasis and the self-regarding or other-regarding emphasis in ethics. The framework articulated and defended here makes explicit, for the first time in the literature, four ways in which such emphases come in tandem, and thereby furthers the enrichment of epistemology via insights from ethical theory.

6.2 Reorientation and Broadening of Epistemology

Since at least Montaigne and Descartes, it is fair to say that epistemology has tended in its theorizing to emphasize agency and self-regard (the Type 1 dual emphases), although some important work, particularly more recently, has been patient-centric and/or other-regarding (even without always being called this explicitly). The framework articulated and defended here helps us to recognize where work already abounds (as in work of Type 1) but also where much more work merits attention (as in work of Types 2, 3, and 4). Such a reorientation can be conducive to helping us decide where to invest our time and effort when it comes to our epistemological

work, and to broadening our epistemic horizons beyond theorizing about epistemic agency and/or self-regard.

6.3 Fruitfulness

Related to the previous ground, the framework is fruitful in terms of linking epistemology in interesting ways with work and insights in feminist philosophy and the philosophy of race concerning (for instance) the importance of being epistemically receptive to the epistemic contributions of the differently-gendered and the differently-racialized.[32] Its fruitfulness, moreover, can be seen in terms of its implications for how we do epistemology – take, for example, other-centering addressed in the next section. Such a notion has heretofore received little to no attention in mainstream contemporary epistemology.

6.4 Pedagogical Applications

That a conceptual framework has pedagogical applications is, all other things considered, a ground in favour of accepting or adopting it. The framework presumably has such applications. Consider, for example, how, given this framework, epistemology could be taught in interesting new ways: instead of focusing solely or even primarily on Type 1 work, it could be taught in a more expansive and inclusive way by extending the focus to more neglected or overlooked types, encouraging students to explore them for themselves. The framework also allows us, when teaching epistemology, to deepen analogies and connections between epistemology and ethical theory, and between epistemology, feminist theory, philosophy of race, and the philosophy of education.[33]

[32]   I only here hint at such connections given space constraints, but intend to explore them more fully elsewhere. Other linkages can be made as well. The work here could be usefully compared to and contrasted with Lévinas' work on the other (*l'autrui*).

[33]   Recall Kawall's point that if the other-regarding were taken seriously in epistemology, the study of teaching would become central to it. We may add that if patiency were taken seriously in epistemology, the study of being a student (or learning) would become central to it as well. Connections to the philosophy of education thus become salient. Philosophers of education had made and make extensive use of the work of epistemologists – see Noddings

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7. Ways of Doing Epistemology and Other-Centering

The Four Types Framework allows us not only to characterize epistemological theorizing into four types according to their respective dual emphases, but broad ways of doing epistemology as well. Consider the following four-fold typology.

The *Type-1 way* emphasizes agency over patiency, and self-regard over other-regard. Descartes in the *Meditations,* in his solo endeavour to secure an indubitable and sceptic-proof foundation for his beliefs, paradigmatically exemplifies this way of doing epistemology.[34]

The *Type-2 way* emphasizes agency over patiency, and other-regard over self-regard. Socrates, as depicted in numerous Platonic dialogues including *Euthyphro* and *Laches* (amongst others), paradigmatically exemplifies this way of doing epistemology in his striving to help others through probing questioning attain epistemic goods such as greater understanding, even if this understanding sometimes only amounts to a greater recognition of their own ignorance.

The *Type-3 way* emphasizes patiency over agency, and self-regard over other-regard. Take, for example, Laches in the eponymous Platonic dialogue. Open to being taught and confuted by Socrates and to have his ignorance about courage exposed, he willingly and courageously submits to undergoing challenging and discomfiting Socratic questioning with the goal of his thereby achieving greater self-understanding.[35]

The *Type-4 way* emphasizes patiency over agency, and other-regard over self-regard. If the Type-1 and Type-2 ways are probably the most familiar in epistemology, and the Type-3 way probably less so, the Type-4 way is likely the least familiar by far.[36] What I mean by

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(2015) for instance; it is fair to say, however, that the converse has not been the case.

[34]   To be sure, Descartes was also the intended beneficiary of his agency; the point is that this way emphasizes one's own agency (in activities such as reasoning and introspection) in the quest for an epistemic good for oneself.

[35]   Of course, Laches also exercises some agency here in answering Socrates' questioning; the point is that this way of doing epistemology, as Laches exemplifies, stresses one's patiency (and self-regard) in relation to someone else's epistemic ministrations.

[36]   In fact, it is not clear what would be, from the historical epistemological literature, a clear-cut paradigmatic and familiar exemplar of this way of doing epistemology. This may suggest that the Four Types Framework affords us an innovation in conceptualizing how to do

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other-centering instantiates it. I expand on it below with the aim of further exemplifying the fruitfulness of the Four Types Framework.

Consider circumstances where someone A (this may be an individual or a group) enjoys a power or privilege not shared by B (another individual or a group) and where A's conveying an epistemic good can crowd out or occlude B's doing so: say, A's conveying A's understanding of a matter precludes, whether intentionally or not, B's conveying B's understanding of that matter. This could happen, for instance, in conversational, publishing, or other contexts in which understanding is disseminated if A's exercising A's agency crowds out or occludes B's exercising B's agency, whether intentionally or not, because of A's advantages over B in terms of power or privilege (be it socioeconomic, gender-based, racially-based, age-based, status-based, or other). Insofar as A, in the conveyance of an epistemic good, crowds out or occludes B's conveyance, we (including even A) may all be worse off epistemically.[37] Conversely, insofar as A, in prioritizing (other-regardingly) in such circumstances A's patiency over A's agency to leave space for B's agency, we (including even A) may all be better off epistemically.

Other-centering thus involves giving precedence (whether at the individual or supra-individual level) to our epistemic patiency over our agency in the other-regarding interest of fostering or promoting the agency of others. Presumably, in at least some circumstances, other-centering is warranted, and in those circumstances we should emphasize our patiency over our agency. There are, after all, times for us to speak; but so too there are times for us to be quiet, to listen, and to let others be the focus and locus of attention.[38] Focusing on our epistemic agency and self-regard to the neglect of our epistemic patiency and other-regard can result in a failure to recognize or appreciate the importance of centering others.

To be clear, such other-centering is *not* always warranted. The point here is *not* to valorize or lionize our being 'epistemic doormats'

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epistemology, or at least it renders more salient a way that has gone under-recognized.

[37] This is especially true where B's understanding is richer, deeper, more insightful, or more original than A's.

[38] I have put epistemic other-centering in terms of the conveyance of epistemic goods, but it could also be put *mutatis mutandis* in terms of the generation of epistemic goods insofar as one agent may crowd out or occlude another agent in such generation.

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perpetually predisposed to self-effacement in deference to others.[39] Our agency certainly does matter; but my point is that so *too* does our patiency. Worth noting in this context is that other-centering can be a matter of graciousness, respect, and humility. A matter of graciousness in our being gracious in, and open to, receiving the epistemic goods (even gifts) that others have to offer us. A matter of respect in our respecting others as bearers of epistemic goods (even gifts) worth receiving. A matter of humility in recognizing that others may be wiser than we.[40]

Accordingly, other-centering can help us to draw from the margins to the center of our attention those who have been epistemically marginalized. It can thus exemplify, when put in practice, what Lackey (2022, p. 73) calls *epistemic equity*. As she notes in a related vein:

> When we are urged to center the voices of those most harmed or wronged by our social institutions, this is not just a moral request; it is also an appeal to provide space within the epistemic community for those who have been systematically erased or distorted within it. Indeed, it would inflict further epistemic wrongs on those who are unjustly invisible to render them visible only by lifting up the voices of those already in positions of power or privilege (pp. 73–4).[41]

By giving precedence to one's patiency over one's agency in the other-regarding interest of promoting the agency of others, other-centering can serve to foster epistemic equity by centering the voices of those most harmed or wronged by our social institutions.[42] This is

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[39]   Nor is the point to always agree with others, or to quickly abandon positions of ours when someone else happens to disagree with them. Other-centering is compatible with what Roberts and Wood (2007, pp. 183–214) characterize as the intellectual virtue of firmness, a kind of mean between flaccidity and rigidity.

[40]   Note that such graciousness, respect, and humility need not be seen in exclusively moral terms but in epistemic terms as well since in this context they pertain to *epistemic* goods.

[41]   As a case in point, Lackey gives the example of a recent symposium in the *Journal of Political Philosophy* devoted to the Black Lives Matter movement that failed to have a single paper authored by a philosopher of colour. As she observes: 'Attention to Black lives, without hearing from a single Black voice, fails along a number of dimensions, at least one of which is with respect to epistemic equity' (p. 74).

[42]   Note that giving precedence to one's patiency over one's agency does not mean choosing to cease being an agent. It is far from clear that such a putative choice is even psychologically possible. It involves prioritizing in

particularly the case when it is practiced by those who are epistemically privileged and who have benefitted the most from these institutions.[43]

8. Objections and Replies

Having argued above for the Four Types Framework, I consider below a variety of telling objections to this framework and/or to significant elements of it.

8.1 Objection

Is your thesis concerning the Four Types Framework really a substantive one? Who would disagree that epistemology has agent/patient and self-regarding/other-regarding dimensions? Why belabour the obvious?

Reply. If it were obvious that epistemology has agent/patient and self-regarding/other-regarding dimensions, one would expect that epistemological work would be more evenly distributed across the four types delineated here, and yet that has heretofore not been the case, given the lopsided amount of work of Type 1 relative to the comparative paucity of work of the other types. This tells against thinking that the framework is somehow obvious (at least to most epistemologists) and not a substantive thesis in need of elucidation and argument. In any case, if the thesis I have argued for here is so obvious, perhaps it is time for epistemologists to spend much more time and effort precisely on the obvious.

8.2 Objection

Why would epistemologists have any need for this putative framework? Have you not yourself shown that work has already been done in terms of all four types?

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a given situation one's being a recipient of epistemic goods that others have to offer over being a generator or conveyor of epistemic goods.

[43] A danger of emphasizing epistemic agency to the neglect of patiency, and epistemic self-regard to the neglect of other-regard, is that doing so can result in a blind-spot or failure to recognize – not just in theory but in practice – those circumstances in which we should give, in an other-regarding manner, our patiency precedence over our agency. This blind spot may be particularly grave for those who are privileged. *Cf*. Medina (2013) on how privilege can lead to epistemic blind spots.

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Reply. I have not argued that epistemologists *need* this framework; epistemology can be and has been done without it. My point is rather that the framework can be helpful and beneficial, for instance in re-orientating epistemology from the well-worn dual emphases on the agent and the self-regarding toward other dual emphases worth further exploring.

8.3 Objection

At least since Montaigne and Descartes, an important (and to some the central) preoccupation of epistemology has been how to respond to the problem of scepticism. Your framework simply assumes that epistemic goods such as knowledge, understanding, and wisdom can be generated and conveyed. Does this not beg the question against sceptics?

Reply. Any account, including this one, that assumes that epistemic goods such as knowledge, understanding, and wisdom can be generated and conveyed does in some sense beg the question against at least some variety of scepticism. The goal of the framework, however, is not to answer such scepticism. Doing so is a separate task, one too large to address here.[44] In any case, if the objection assumes that the sole (or even central) task of epistemology is to answer sceptics about epistemic goods, the objection itself begs the question against those like me who think that answering such sceptics is not the sole (or even central) task of epistemology. Why should it be?

8.4. Objection

The framework you defend takes for granted that other-regard matters epistemologically. Does this not beg the question against epistemic egoists who think that only self-regard matters epistemologically?

Reply. Yes, the framework does take for granted that other-regard matters epistemologically, and in that sense begs the question against (at least some form of) epistemic egoism. Refuting epistemic egoism is a task far too large to undertake here. Howbeit, simply assuming epistemic egoism begs the question against the framework defended

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[44]   I have addressed scepticism in my (2020, 2019, 2011), and will not rehash my case here.

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here. Why should we assume from the get-go that epistemic egoism is true, or that other-regard does *not* matter epistemologically?

8.5 Objection

Does not the notion of epistemic self-decentering rest on erroneous zero-sum reasoning when it comes to the generation or conveyance of epistemic goods? My generating or conveying epistemic goods need not crowd out yours or that of others, and vice versa.

Reply. The objector is right to caution against zero-sum reasoning with regard to the generation and conveyance of epistemic goods. The notion of other-centering does not, however, rest on any zero-sum reasoning. It also does *not* presuppose that it is *always* epistemically beneficial to engage in other-centering. Its point is rather that, at least *sometimes*, it may be epistemically beneficial to do so, to encourage others to engage in epistemic activities, and to be receptive to what they have to offer in terms of epistemic goods. Have you ever had to suffer the quite unpleasant company of a conversation monopolizer, someone who just loves to hear himself talk, who will not stop talking, is oblivious to what others have to say, and who crowds out other would-be conversationalists?[45] Are there not sometimes epistemic analogues of conversation monopolizers? Insofar as there are, other-centering on their part is called for.

8.6. Objection

It may not always be clear when to other-center. How does this notion provide us any guidance about hard cases in which it may not be clear when to do so? For after all, there is no guarantee that, if I other-center to leave space for the agency of others, they will deliver epistemic goods that outweigh in value the ones that I could have conveyed had I not other-centered. Moreover, is there not something condescending or high-handed for an agent to decide to be a good patient in order to promote the agency of others?[46]

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[45]   Some women philosophers have complained that some male philosophers have acted this way. See https://beingawomaninphilosophy.word-press.com/. In fairness, conversation monopolizing is hardly unique to one gender.
[46]   I thank a reviewer of this journal for suggesting that I address this point.

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Reply. It's also not always clear when to be courageous or to manifest self-restraint either, but sometimes courage or self-restraint are called for. As with courage or self-restraint, other-centering is a matter of practical wisdom: we become adept at it by striving to do it and by modelling ourselves on those who do it well. Consider by comparison the Aristotelian account of courage. We can point to reasonably clear cases of courage, but there will also be grey cases too. Similarly, while there may be reasonably clear cases of where other-centering is warranted, so too will there be grey cases. In such matters, we are wise to follow Aristotle's counsel not to seek more precision than there is to be had.[47] Nonetheless, in considering comparatively clear cases, we can derive some general principles that serve to guide us in less clear cases, even if, as in most things in life, there are unfortunately no guarantees. As for other-centering being high-handed or condescending, I see no good reason to think that it has to be so, or is even likely to be so. And even if there are some circumstances where it may be so, this is no good reason to reject it altogether, any more so than rejecting (say) the notion of helpfulness just because it may sometimes be done high-handedly or condescendingly.

8.7 Objection

Do we not run the risk that promoting other-centering could have bad unintended consequences such as its being deployed to encourage the silencing of those perceived as privileged or to encourage self-censorship?

Reply. Possibly, but are such bad unintended consequences probable? I am doubtful. Moreover, would we by structurally similar reasoning also reject (say) the promotion of courage because it could have bad unintended consequences such as its being deployed to encourage recklessness or militarism? Just as courage requires practical wisdom, so too presumably does other-centering. Besides, are there not bad consequences, whether intended or not, of doing without it, such as in at least some cases a predisposition towards epistemic egoism?

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[47] As Aristotle noted in *Ethica Nicomachea* 1094b13: 'Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts'.

9. Conclusion

I have articulated, and argued for, an epistemic framework composed of four types. The first of these types (with its agent and self-regarding dual emphases) has hitherto received the most attention in epistemology. I have aimed to draw attention to the significance of the three other types with their respective patient and/or other-regarding dual emphases.

To be sure, much more needs to be done in articulating and defending the framework. This task has begun but not ended here. Accordingly, I am more than happy to welcome the epistemic goods that others have to contribute to this endeavour. Sometimes 'tis better to receive than to give.[48]

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