

CLOSED-MINDEDNESS AND DOGMATISM

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ABSTRACT

The primary goal of this paper is to propose a working analysis of the disposition of closed-mindedness. I argue that closed-mindedness (CM) is an unwillingness or inability to engage (seriously) with relevant intellectual options. Dogmatism (DG) is one kind of closed-mindedness: it is an unwillingness to engage seriously with relevant alternatives to the beliefs one already holds. I do not assume that the disposition of closed-mindedness is always an intellectual vice; rather I treat the analysis of the disposition, and its status as an intellectual vice, as separate questions. The concluding section develops a framework for determining the conditions under which closed-mindedness will be an intellectual vice.

INTRODUCTION

Consider Donald, who believes that there was no genocide of Native Americans. Like many American children of his generation, Donald was taught to endorse the doctrine of Manifest Destiny and to believe that Native Americans died as a result of widespread disease rather than genocide. He has stuck with these beliefs throughout his adulthood, and is unwilling to engage seriously with any ideas or evidence to the contrary. Donald's *modus operandi*, at least in this domain, is to summarily dismiss any competing ideas that happen to cross his path without evaluating their merits. So, when the conversation turns to State-sanctioned militias that executed Native Americans, Donald deems it nonsense and shuts down, closing himself off. When he sees an article arguing that Native American boarding schools contributed to cultural genocide, he thinks it ridiculous, and skips past it or stops reading.¹ Donald recognizes that such ideas compete with his own, and unilaterally rejects them because (to him) they seem implausible, inferior, and perhaps even biased. Donald arguably exhibits an array of intellectual behaviors and qualities that are of dubious merit. One of these is closed-mindedness, at least with respect to the genocide of Native Americans.²

What is closed-mindedness, and if it is an intellectual vice, what makes it so? I intend this paper to contribute to the nascent field of vice epistemology, the goals of which include analyzing qualities that are likely to be intellectual vices – e.g. intellectual arrogance, epistemic injustice, closed-mindedness – and explaining what makes such qualities intellectually vicious when they are (Cassam 2016; Battaly 2017a). I do not assume that the disposition of closed-mindedness is always an intellectual vice; rather I treat the

1 See Lindsay (2012); <https://upstanderproject.org/firstlight/boarding>.

2 José Medina uses a similar example of the Armenian genocide (Medina 2013: 35).

analysis of the disposition, and its status as an intellectual vice, as separate questions. The primary goal of this paper is to propose a working analysis of the disposition of closed-mindedness. I argue that closed-mindedness (CM) is an unwillingness or inability to engage (seriously) with relevant intellectual options. Dogmatism (DG) is one kind of closed-mindedness: it is an unwillingness to engage seriously with relevant alternatives to the beliefs one already holds. The concluding section develops a basic framework for determining the conditions under which closed-mindedness will be an intellectual vice.

I. THE DISPOSITION OF CLOSED-MINDEDNESS AND CLOSED-MINDED ACTION

Donald is unwilling to seriously engage with alternatives to his belief that there was no Native American genocide. Dismissing relevant alternatives to a belief without weighing their merits is one paradigmatic way to be closed-minded. But, it isn't the only way. Closed-mindedness, as a disposition, is broader than this: (CM) it is an unwillingness or inability to engage, or engage seriously, with relevant intellectual options. I develop this working analysis by examining five features of Donald's case that are not necessary for closed-mindedness.

- (1) **Having beliefs about the topic.** Closed-mindedness does not require having already made up one's mind about the topic at hand. One can also be closed-minded in the ways that one *arrives* at one's beliefs and conducts inquiries.
- (2) **The locus of ideas and evidence.** The locus of closed-mindedness is not restricted to ideas and evidence. One can also be closed-minded with respect to other intellectual options: e.g., which sources one consults, which methods one uses, which questions one asks.
- (3) **Dismissing intellectual options.** In dismissing intellectual options, one engages with them, but doesn't take them seriously. The engagement is superficial. But, there are other closed-minded ways to engage superficially with intellectual options: e.g., instead of dismissing an option, one might highlight other options as a means of diverting attention.
- (4) **Engaging with intellectual options.** Nor does closed-mindedness require engaging with intellectual options, even superficially. One can be closed-minded by *failing* to engage with intellectual options: one might ignore them, be oblivious to them, or fail to seek them out.
- (5) **Unwillingness.** Closed-mindedness does not require an unwillingness to engage (seriously) with intellectual options. One might be willing, but unable, to engage (seriously) with intellectual options, and be closed-minded on those grounds.

Donald does have a particular and familiar species of closed-mindedness: he is dogmatic, at least with respect to the genocide of Native Americans. (DG) Dogmatism, as a disposition, is an unwillingness to engage seriously with relevant alternatives to the beliefs one already holds. But, closed-mindedness is broader than dogmatism, or so I will argue.

It is worth noting that an agent's closed-mindedness might be restricted to a particular domain (or domains). An agent might only be closed-minded about a single topic (e.g.,

whether her pets are well behaved) or about selected topics (e.g., whether her pets and children are well behaved), and not about anything else. She may thus have a domain-specific disposition to be closed-minded, while lacking a general disposition to be closed-minded across all (or nearly all) domains. An agent can also perform a closed-minded action as a one-off – e.g., on a particular occasion, she might dismiss evidence that her pet was badly behaved, even though she does not usually dismiss such evidence. She can thus perform a closed-minded action without possessing either a domain-specific disposition to be closed-minded, or a general disposition to be closed-minded.

1.1 Does closed-mindedness require having already made up one's mind?

Let's begin to develop our working analysis of closed-mindedness by arguing for (1): closed-mindedness does not require having already made up one's mind. Granted, one can be closed-minded, and paradigmatically so, with respect to *beliefs one already holds*. Thus, in willfully dismissing alternatives to his belief that there was no Native American genocide, Donald is being closed-minded. (It is Donald's willful dismissal of alternatives to his belief, rather than the content of the belief itself, that exhibits closed-mindedness.) Likewise, one can be *open-minded* with respect to beliefs one already holds. As William Hare puts the point: "a person who is open-minded is [among other things] disposed to revise or reject *the position he holds* if sound objections are brought against it" (Hare 1979: 9, my emphasis). Along similar lines, Linda Zagzebski argues that an open-minded person is (among other things) successful at considering the ideas of other people "including those that conflict with *her own*" (Zagzebski 1996: 185, my emphasis).

But, neither closed- nor open-mindedness *requires* already having a belief about the topic at hand. To see why, consider Jason Baehr's astute point that *open-mindedness* "need not involve the setting aside or suspending of any beliefs" (Baehr 2011: 143). Baehr rightly argues that a person can be open-minded in arriving at a belief about *p*'s truth-value, even if she doesn't currently have any beliefs to that effect. For instance, a judge can be open-minded in arriving at a belief about whether a defendant is guilty even though she approaches the case from a "neutral" standpoint – she currently lacks any beliefs about the defendant's guilt or innocence (Baehr 2011: 143). Hare and Zagzebski agree – they, too, allow for open-mindedness in cases where "the person presently has no opinion on [the] issue" (Hare 1979: 9). The same point applies to *closed-mindedness*. Imagine a person who, unlike Donald, has never learned about the history of Native Americans and has no beliefs about that history. Donatella is being confronted with evidence for and against the genocide of Native Americans for the first time. Even though she lacks beliefs about the topic, Donatella can still arrive at a belief about whether there was a Native American genocide by conducting a closed-minded inquiry. For instance, she might ignore, be relatively oblivious to, or fail to factor in evidence that supports the systematic murdering of Native Americans. Even if we don't have beliefs about the topic at hand, we can be closed-minded in the ways that we come to have such beliefs, and in the ways that we conduct inquiries into the topic.

1.2 Is the locus of closed-mindedness restricted to ideas and evidence?

This leads us to (2): the locus of closed-mindedness is not restricted to ideas and evidence. As Donald's case demonstrates, one can be closed-minded with respect to ideas and

evidence that compete with a belief one already holds. Donatella's case shows that one can also be closed-minded in the way one handles ideas and evidence in the process of arriving at a belief – Donatella ignores relevant evidence. But, her case raises a broader point: one can be closed-minded in the ways that one conducts inquiries more generally. For instance, one can be closed-minded with respect to which *questions* one asks, which *methods* or approaches one uses, and which *sources* one consults. To illustrate, in conducting an inquiry into whether there was a Native American genocide, one might fail to *ask* whether the federal government funded the murdering of Native Americans. Or, one might dismiss oral history as an inferior *method*, or refuse to consult Native American *sources*. In short, in conducting inquiries that aim at belief, one can be closed-minded in a variety of ways. It is also worth noting that not all inquiries aim at belief. Some inquiries aim at understanding a theory, or another person's experience or perspective, where this involves something more than or different from arriving at a belief (Baehr 2011: 146). Imagine trying to understand the experiences of a nineteenth-century member of the Pequot tribe. In conducting inquiries like these, one can likewise be closed-minded in a variety of ways; e.g., by ignoring sources, experiences, and questions in addition to (or, perhaps, instead of) ideas and evidence.

Along similar lines, Robert Roberts and Jay Wood have designed their analysis of 'intellectual rigidity' to apply not just to propositions (beliefs, ideas, and evidence), but to our conduct in inquiry more generally (Roberts and Wood 2007: 193–206). Particularly germane are their remarks about "comprehensional rigidity," which is exemplified by "chauvinism" with respect to "academic discipline," or "ethnic and cultural membership," or "historical period" (2007: 204). Their archetypes of comprehensional rigidity include:

the analytic philosopher who can make no sense of Plato or Hegel ... the continental philosopher unable to appreciate Quine, the neuroscientist who thinks that philosophers have nothing to contribute to the study of human emotions ... the nineteenth century Anglo-American who thought blacks were uneducable ... (Roberts and Wood 2007: 205)

Here, too, we see that one can be rigid or closed-minded in the methods one uses (e.g., rejecting the methods of another discipline or sub-discipline) and in the sources one consults (e.g., refusing to consult black people.) To this list of archetypes, we might add Neil deGrasse Tyson's one-off remark dismissing the discipline of philosophy, and (with apologies to deGrasse Tyson) President Trump's consistent dismissal of sources outside his own echo chamber as 'fake news.'³

A person who has the power to set her own intellectual agenda can be closed-minded in yet another way. She can be closed-minded in choosing which inquiries to conduct in the first place and which intellectual goals to pursue. Likewise, individuals and groups who have the power to set the intellectual agenda for others – e.g., educators, journalists, preachers, newspaper editors, content algorithms, school boards, governmental agencies (EPA) – can be closed-minded in (e.g.) selecting which topics to put in the curriculum, which stories to pursue, print, or post in a feed, and which proposals to fund.⁴ This

3 For an analysis of echo chambers, see Nguyen (2018).

4 Though my focus is on the closed-mindedness of individual agents, groups can also be closed-minded. Consider the closed-mindedness of school boards, governmental agencies, or (more dramatically) Orwell's Ministry of Truth. Thanks to Baron Reed for discussion.

sort of closed-mindedness may be especially worrying because it can facilitate closed-mindedness in others.

Relatedly, one can be closed-minded in refusing to conduct *any* further inquiries into an issue, whether or not one has already made up one's mind. Consider Donté who, after acquiring his belief that there was no Native American genocide, 'puts his fingers in his ears.'⁵ Donté closes himself off to *any* further evidence (competing or supporting) that might come in, and to *any* further sources, methods, questions, or inquiries into the issue. Or consider Donatella*, who is just like Donatella, except when Donatella* is confronted with evidence for and against the genocide of Native Americans for the first time, she 'hides her head in the sand' and refuses to conduct an inquiry.

In short, one can be closed-minded in dismissing methods, sources, questions, and inquiries. To capture these cases of closed-mindedness, we need to expand its locus beyond simple propositional items, like ideas and evidence, to include other intellectual options. I have not attempted to provide an exhaustive list of intellectual options; we can expect this category to be broad and include at least: sources, questions, ideas, evidence, methods, experiences, inquiries, and goals.

1.2.1 Open-mindedness, closed-mindedness, and default cognitive standpoints

My account of closed-mindedness shares several structural features with Baehr's analysis of open-mindedness. But, in invoking the category of intellectual options, my account diverges from his. Baehr argues that: "(OM) An open-minded person is characteristically (a) willing and . . . able (b) to transcend a default cognitive standpoint (c) in order to take up or take seriously the merits of (d) a distinct cognitive standpoint" (Baehr 2011: 152). Clearly, our accounts are in the same family, and Baehr's category of 'cognitive standpoints' is meant to cover many of the items I include in the category of 'intellectual options.' So, why don't I define closed-mindedness in terms of an unwillingness or inability to transcend a default cognitive standpoint so as to consider a distinct standpoint? For two reasons.

First, I worry that Baehr's account does not place sufficient restrictions on the distinct standpoints that are taken up, thus making his analysis of open-mindedness too broad. Imagine that a police detective in a remote town is currently investigating the homicide of a local woman – one whose husband is well known to have been convicted of domestic battery on more than one occasion. Suppose our detective transcends her default belief that the husband did it in order to consider the possibility that David Bowie's ghost did it. Our detective, it turns out, is a super-fan of Bowie. Is our detective being open-minded? Arguably not, since neither David Bowie nor ghosts (!) are at all relevant to the case at hand.⁶ Instead, we might describe her thinking as imaginative, fanciful, or naïve, or describe her mind as wandering.⁷ Imagine the reaction of the victim's friends upon

5 Thanks to Sarah Wright for this point.

6 More seriously, if we transcend our default beliefs to take up (e.g.) the racist alternatives of neo-Nazis, are we being open-minded? I think we are not, provided that such alternatives are irrelevant in our ordinary environment.

7 Baehr might respond that though our detective is being open-minded, her open-mindedness is not virtuous (Baehr 2011: 155–7). Let's clarify the point about which Baehr and I disagree. For starters, we agree that there is a distinction between: (1) analyzing the *trait* of open-mindedness and (2) determining

learning that David Bowie's ghost was a suspect! Similar worries would arise about an analogous account of closed-mindedness. Suppose our detective is unwilling to transcend her belief that the husband did it in order to consider the possibility that David Bowie's ghost did it. Is she being closed-minded? Again, arguably not, since David Bowie and ghosts are not relevant. This indicates that we need some relevancy restrictions on the distinct standpoints that are considered.⁸

Second, I worry that transcending, or failing to transcend, a default cognitive standpoint isn't necessary for open- or closed-mindedness. For starters, open-mindedness does not seem to require the agent to even have a default cognitive standpoint. Baehr himself has successfully shown that one can be open-minded while being neutral – while having no default cognitive standpoint to transcend. Recall the judge who is open-minded about the defendant's guilt or innocence even though she has no prior beliefs about the matter. Indeed, on Baehr's description, "the judge has no prior opinions or biases about any part of the case; nor does she have any stake in its outcome" (Baehr 2011: 143). In replying to a similar worry, Baehr argues that there is still a sense in which the judge transcends a default cognitive standpoint: whenever she entertains "a previously unconsidered possibility" she transcends her "present cognitive perspective" (Baehr 2011: 150). According to this reply, one always has a default standpoint – one's current standpoint, even where this is neutral – which one can 'transcend' by considering alternative possibilities. The problem is that this reply risks trivializing the notion of 'transcending' a default standpoint, thus making it superfluous to the account. To explicate, it is the considering of alternative possibilities – the guilt and innocence of the defendant and the relevant evidence – rather than the 'transcending' of a neutral standpoint, that makes the judge open-minded. (We don't ordinarily associate open-mindedness with *transcending* a neutral standpoint, but instead with *being* neutral, even-handed, or fair.) Or, to put the point slightly differently, it is the judge's engagement with *intellectual options* that makes her open-minded. Arguably, this point applies more broadly: what makes one open-minded is the disposition to engage seriously with (relevant) intellectual options, whether or not this engagement transcends default beliefs, biases, or comfort zones. Granted, in engaging seriously with intellectual options one usually does transcend default beliefs, biases, etc. But, the point is that one will be open-minded by engaging with intellectual options even when one is neutral with respect to a particular inquiry and has no default beliefs, biases (etc.) to transcend. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that agents who have acquired a high degree of open-mindedness will have chipped away at or rehabilitated many of their default biases; at the high end of the scale, open-mindedness doesn't sit easily with transcending a biased standpoint.

What about accounts that define *closed-mindedness* (partly) in terms of a failure to transcend a default cognitive standpoint? Do default standpoints get more traction

the conditions under which that trait is an intellectual *virtue*. Our disagreement lies in whether (e.g.) the detective above manifests the *trait* of open-mindedness. I think she does not manifest the trait of open-mindedness; she manifests a different trait.

- 8 Consider a skeptic, who is willing and able to engage seriously with relevant and irrelevant (ghost- or demon-inspired) intellectual options alike. Focus only on the options that the skeptic entertains, and not on the skeptic's conclusions or on his overly restrictive analysis of knowledge. I submit that in this domain, this skeptic: (1) is not closed-minded; (2) is open-minded insofar as he is disposed to engage seriously with *relevant* intellectual options; and (3) is imaginative or fanciful insofar as he is disposed to engage seriously with *irrelevant* intellectual options. Thanks to Michael Lynch for this suggestion.

here? Is failing to transcend them necessary for *closed*-mindedness? In my view, default standpoints get more traction in analyses of closed-mindedness than they do in analyses of open-mindedness, but they still aren't conceptually necessary for closed-mindedness.

Clearly, default standpoints get *more* traction in analyses of closed-mindedness. After all, we tend to think that closed-mindedness requires some kind of bias and a failure to transcend that bias. In this vein, one might argue that closed-minded Donatella *isn't* ultimately neutral – even though she has no beliefs about the history of Native Americans, there must be *something* that causes her to ignore relevant evidence. Isn't she failing to transcend a default inclination to ignore evidence (Baehr 2011: 151), or failing to transcend an implicit bias against Native Americans?⁹ Let's assume that she is. Indeed, let's assume that in most cases of closed-mindedness, agents harbor some kind of bias that they fail to transcend. In short, let's grant that there is a strong correlation between closed-mindedness and failing to transcend bias.

Still, failing to transcend a default bias won't be conceptually necessary for the disposition of closed-mindedness. To see why, consider the closed-mindedness of agents who find themselves in epistemically hostile environments – environments that are saturated with falsehoods, propaganda, and unreliable sources. For instance, imagine that you have just woken up in the Oceania of Orwell's *1984* (Orwell 1949). Now, suppose that in an effort to disseminate the true beliefs that you possess, you consistently ignore the intellectual options endorsed by the Ministry of Truth. You are thus, in this environment, closed-minded.¹⁰ But, you need not be biased. Closer to home, consider agents who don't have to imagine being in an epistemically hostile environment, since they already live in one. Our current epistemic environment routinely discredits women and people of color as sources of knowledge. In an effort to hold on to their true beliefs, and to design their own intellectual projects, members of non-dominant groups may ignore aspects of the dominant epistemic environment that would deny them these things. To that extent, they are closed-minded.¹¹ But, again, they need not be biased. In these cases, bias, and the failure to transcend it, are beside the point. All of this is just to say that Baehr's conditions (a), (c), and with appropriate qualifications (d), get at the conceptual heart of open- and closed-mindedness. Closed-mindedness conceptually requires being closed off to intellectual options. But, on my view, condition (b) is not conceptually necessary for (rather it is strongly correlated with) closed-mindedness. Clearly, we can count these objections as a family squabble.

1.2.2 Which intellectual options are relevant?

Defining closed-mindedness in terms of intellectual options comes with its own challenges. The most formidable of these may be figuring out which intellectual options are relevant. I said above that our police detective wasn't being closed-minded in ignoring the possibility that David Bowie's ghost committed the crime because this possibility wasn't relevant.

⁹ Thanks to Sarah Wright for this point.

¹⁰ Provided that the widespread presence of an intellectual option in an environment suffices to make that intellectual option relevant – see (E) below – the agent *is* being closed-minded in ignoring such options.

¹¹ Closed-mindedness may be an intellectual virtue for members of non-dominant groups and agents in epistemically hostile environments (see Alfano (MS), "Virtues for Agents in Directed Social Networks"; Battaly (2018)).

This possibility does count as an intellectual option, as I am conceiving of this category, since it is logically inconsistent with other instantiations of ‘only one person killed the victim, and it was [insert name here]’. (Intellectual options will be indexed to the inquiry being conducted.) But, it doesn’t count as a *relevant* intellectual option, and so in ignoring it, and an infinite number of similarly irrelevant options (Ronald Reagan’s ghost did it, etc.), our detective is not being closed-minded. But, even if we agree that this particular option is irrelevant, we will need to know why. We will likewise need to know which other options are relevant and irrelevant. If closed-mindedness is an unwillingness or inability to engage (seriously) with relevant intellectual options, we will need to get a bead on relevancy. Now, defining relevancy has been notoriously tricky in epistemology. Here, I flag some key questions about the relevancy of options for an agent who is conducting an inquiry.¹² I briefly compare internalist and externalist packages of relevancy conditions. I do not pretend to put forward an analysis of relevancy. But, I do think the below indicates that *in ordinary environments*, intellectual options like ‘ $2 + 2 = 5$ ’, ‘The earth is flat,’ and ‘The holocaust never happened’ are irrelevant, and so we are not closed-minded when we ignore them.

We can begin with the assumption that relevant intellectual options will be, in some way, connected to epistemic goods like true beliefs, knowledge, and understanding. But, in what way will they be connected? Here are some questions to consider:

- (A) Does an agent’s behavior dictate ir/relevance? Does an agent’s engagement with an option suffice to make it relevant? Does an agent’s ignoring an option suffice to make it irrelevant?
- (B) Does an agent’s believing that a particular option is likely, or unlikely, to be true or to be helpful in reaching the truth – or in reaching the goal of the inquiry – suffice to make that option relevant, or irrelevant?
- (C) Are options that are objectively likely to be true, or likely to be helpful in reaching the truth – or in reaching the goal of the inquiry – thereby relevant for the agent? Are options that are objectively unlikely to be true, or unlikely to be helpful in reaching the truth – or the goal of the inquiry – thereby irrelevant for the agent?
- (D) Does an agent’s believing, with good reason, that a particular option is likely, or unlikely, to be true or to be helpful in getting the truth suffice to make that option relevant or irrelevant?
- (E) Does the widespread presence of an option in the environment make it a relevant option for the agent? Does the absence of an option make it irrelevant for the agent?
- (F) Does the community’s reliably believing that a particular option is likely, or unlikely, to be true, or to be helpful in getting the truth, make that option relevant or irrelevant for the agent?

¹² Since we can be closed-minded in choosing which inquiries to conduct, we will also need relevancy restrictions on inquiries.

(G) Does the community's believing, with good reason, that a particular option is likely, or unlikely, to be true or to be helpful in getting the truth make that option relevant or irrelevant for the agent?

Importantly, (A) is a non-starter, since relevancy and irrelevancy cannot be determined by the agent's behavior. Agents can engage with or entertain options that are irrelevant, e.g., Bowie's ghost did it; and they can ignore options that are relevant, e.g., Native American boarding schools contributed to cultural genocide. If they couldn't ignore (or fail to engage seriously with) options that were relevant, then agents would never be closed-minded. (B) is likewise problematic. Relevancy and irrelevancy cannot be determined merely by what the agent believes. After all, agents believe things for all sorts of reasons! As a result of her super-fanaticism, our detective might believe that Bowie's ghost actually commits all of the crimes in her town, or she might believe that Bowie-options are always likely to help one get to the truth. But, her beliefs don't make the option above relevant. Similarly, steeped in his commitment to Manifest Destiny, Donald might believe that Native Americans didn't have independent cultures before they were 'civilized' by boarding schools. But, Donald's beliefs don't make the above option irrelevant. If they did, too few people would count as closed-minded. Closed-minded people can have systems of belief that cohere with, support, and enable their closed-minded behavior.

Let's briefly compare the externalist condition generated by an affirmative answer to (C) with the internalist condition generated by an affirmative answer to (D). Each has its own advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantage of (D) is that it might still count too few people as closed-minded. According to (D), if an agent has good reason to believe that an option is false, then the option is irrelevant, and the agent isn't closed-minded in dismissing that option. But, what if an agent has good reason to believe that an option is false, even when that option turns out to be true? Suppose your best friend has been arrested for murder. Given everything you know about your best friend – he is generous, honest, and committed to social justice – you have good reason to believe that he didn't do it. Consequently, you dismiss the possibility that he is guilty. But, it turns out that he *is* guilty (he murdered a bad guy in the name of social justice). (D) claims that you are not closed-minded in dismissing this option. But, this will seem counter-intuitive to externalists. (C) avoids this problem by restricting relevance to options that are objectively likely to be true, and irrelevance to options that are objectively likely to be false. The disadvantage of (C) is that it might count too many people as closed-minded. Following (C), an agent will count as closed-minded whenever she dismisses an option that turns out to be true, even if she has every reason to believe that the option is false. To illustrate, we have every reason to believe that bacteria do not qualitatively feel pain. But, if it turns out that we are wrong, and bacteria do qualitatively feel pain, then we are being closed-minded in dismissing this option. In deciding to take antibiotics, we are being closed-minded in dismissing the option that bacteria feel pain. This consequence of (C) will seem counterintuitive to internalists. (D) avoids this problem by restricting relevance to those options the agent has good reason to believe are true, and irrelevance to those options the agent has good reason to believe are false. The good news is that whether we endorse (C) or (D), options like ' $2 + 2 = 5$ ', 'The earth is flat,' and 'The holocaust never happened' will be irrelevant. These options are in fact false,

satisfying C. Moreover, we have good reason to believe that these options are false, satisfying D. Arguably, not even holocaust deniers have *good* reason to believe that the holocaust never happened. Accordingly, we aren't being closed-minded when we ignore these options.

At least, we aren't being closed-minded when we ignore these options in communities that believe reliably, and with good reason, that these options are false. This brings us to (E), (F), and (G). What impact does the surrounding community or environment have on the relevance and irrelevance of an agent's options? Let's begin with affirmative answers to (F) and (G), both of which claim that the community's justified beliefs can act as a check on the agent's relevant options. (F) claims that the community's beliefs are externally justified, whereas (G) claims they are internally justified. Either could give a plausible explanation of Donald's closed-mindedness. According to (G), Donald counts as closed-minded because he is unwilling to engage seriously with options that the community has ample reason to believe are true. Specifically, even though Donald himself deems State-sanctioned militias nonsense, this option remains relevant because the community has good reason to think it is true. So far, so good; but, problems for (G) will arise when the community's internally justified beliefs diverge from the facts, or when the community is unreliable. Externalists might think that a community's internally justified, but false or unreliable, beliefs about which options are true won't dictate relevancy. (F) solves these problems. According to (F), Donald counts as closed-minded because he is unwilling to engage seriously with options that the community reliably believes to be true. But, problems for (F) will arise when the community reliably tracks which options are likely to be true, but has no evidence or argument to back up these beliefs.¹³ Internalists might think that a community's externally justified beliefs, for which they lack evidence, won't dictate relevancy. Again, the good news is that whether we endorse (F) or (G), options like ' $2 + 2 = 5$ ', 'The earth is flat,' and 'The holocaust never happened' will still be irrelevant, since our communities believe reliably, *and* with good reason, that these options are false. And, so, in ignoring these options, we won't be closed-minded. With respect to *these* options, we benefit from our membership in an epistemically hospitable community, which acts as a check on ir/relevancy.¹⁴

But, what about communities or environments that are epistemically hostile – that are saturated with falsehoods, distractions, and propaganda, or otherwise engineered to obstruct inquiry and knowledge? Which options are relevant and irrelevant in an Idiocracy, or in an environment controlled by the Ministry of Truth? Could hostile environments make options like 'The earth is flat' or ' $2 + 2 = 5$ ' relevant? This is where (E) comes into play. The problem is that we may have conflicting intuitions with respect to (E). On the one hand, we have reason to think that the absence of an option in the agent's environment does not suffice to make it irrelevant to her inquiry. After all, it seems that epistemically hostile environments can make us closed-minded by making some relevant options difficult to access. Consider Orwell's Ministry of Truth, which intentionally re-writes options, disseminating fabrications that support the party line, and destroying

13 See BonJour's example of Norman the reliable clairvoyant (BonJour 1985: 41).

14 This does not mean that our community is epistemically hospitable with respect to options that involve race, sex, and gender. Our community believes that ' $2+2=5$ ' is false, but still fails to see black people as credible sources. To put the point differently, members of non-dominant groups might often be in epistemically hostile communities.

facts that do not. Arguably, the facts that it destroys are still relevant options for agents conducting inquiries – e.g., we see Winston Smith struggling to reconstruct the events of his childhood without the benefit of any external record of them (all photos, newspapers, etc. from the past have been destroyed). In a similar vein, the Idiocracy of the eponymous 2006 satirical film also makes relevant options difficult to access, though it does so through neglect, laziness, and incompetence. Importantly, the Ministry of Truth and the Idiocracy both make their subjects *more* closed-minded, not less. They don't decrease the number of relevant options, instead they make those relevant options harder to find. Now, if this is right and the absence of an option doesn't suffice to make it irrelevant, then the presence of an option shouldn't suffice to make it relevant either. But, here comes the conflicting intuition: we also have reason to think that the widespread presence of an option in an environment might make it relevant to an agent's inquiry. Suppose the environment is thoroughly polluted with 'alternative facts,' intentionally disseminated in an effort to distract or misdirect agents. Or, suppose the agent is the subject of a meticulous gaslighting campaign. Arguably, the widespread presence of these options makes them relevant to the agent's inquiry – in the same way that the widespread presence of fake-barns makes that option relevant to the agent's inquiry. The option that a barn was fake wasn't relevant until one drifted into fake-barn country, where it became relevant and stayed relevant, even though one's beliefs ('That's a barn') were true.¹⁵ Likewise, the option that 'ignorance is strength' wasn't relevant until one woke up in Oceania, where it became relevant and stayed relevant even though one's beliefs ('Ignorance is not strength') were true.¹⁶ This puts the charge that we would be closed-minded in ignoring these options on the table. In short, we have some reason to think that the ubiquity of an option suffices to make it relevant.¹⁷ Accordingly, we may be closed-minded in ignoring these options, even when these options are false, and even when we have every reason to believe they are false. Now, arguably, we can't have it both ways. If the widespread presence of an option suffices to make it relevant, then contra the above, the absence of an option should suffice to make it irrelevant. At least, we can't have it both ways if we only get to choose one relevancy condition from (C)–(G) above, and we choose (E). But, this raises the broader question of whether we can and should be employing multiple conditions on relevancy. Is an intellectual option relevant when any of (C)–(G) apply: when an option is ubiquitous, or likely to be true, or an agent or the community has good reason to believe it is true?¹⁸

We have made some progress and flagged some issues along the way. To sum up thus far, we can say that closed-mindedness does not require having made up one's mind. Nor is its locus restricted to ideas and evidence, since agents can be closed-minded with respect to other kinds of intellectual options. Moreover, we can say that analyses of closed-

15 Recall that in fake-barn country, one looks at a real barn.

16 At the very least, the presence of these options makes the environment unsafe. Relatedly, see Lynch (2004: 162–3; Forthcoming).

17 Sarah Wright has suggested that even if the analogy with fake-barns fails, options that are false and unjustified but ubiquitously endorsed may still warrant our engagement, insofar as they are the sincere views of epistemic agents whose epistemic agency deserves our respect. In "Can Closed-mindedness be an Intellectual Virtue?" I argue that *epistemically*, ubiquitous options like 'ignorance is strength' do not warrant our engagement; even if the agents endorsing 'ignorance is strength' do warrant our engagement *morally* and *politically*.

18 Thanks to Sarah Wright for raising this insightful question.

mindedness (and open-mindedness) will require relevancy restrictions on intellectual options. Whether we adopt an internalist or externalist package of relevancy conditions, options like ‘ $2 + 2 = 5$ ’, ‘The earth is flat,’ and ‘The holocaust never happened’ will be irrelevant, and we won’t be closed-minded in ignoring them (provided that we aren’t in epistemically hostile environments). Importantly, relevancy restrictions and the role that hostile environments play in them, warrant discussion in their own right.

1.3 *Does closed-mindedness require dismissing intellectual options?*

Let’s explore (3): closed-mindedness does not require dismissing intellectual options. Recall Donald, who summarily dismisses competing ideas that cross his path without evaluating their merits. When the conversation turns to State-sanctioned militias that executed Native Americans, Donald deems such ideas nonsense, and exits the discussion. When he runs across an article arguing that the US federal government funded such executions, he thinks it ridiculous and scrolls past it. In dismissing competing ideas that happen to cross his path, Donald is engaging with these ideas, though he is not engaging with them seriously (Baehr 2011: 151). He is engaging with them insofar as he recognizes and rejects them. He recognizes that these ideas compete with his own, and rejects them since they seem wildly implausible. Donald’s engagement is entirely superficial – he does not weigh or evaluate the merits of these ideas, or the arguments for them, in any way. He simply finds them implausible and judges them to be false on those grounds. Since these ideas are relevant, he is closed-minded.

But, there may be other ways to superficially engage with relevant intellectual options that are also closed-minded. Perhaps, one need not dismiss or reject an idea *i*; one might instead highlight a different idea, as a means of diverting attention from *i*. To illustrate, suppose that President Trump’s press secretary is a Trump-loyalist and ‘true believer’ – she believes that the Trump campaign did *not* collude with Russia. In answering questions about this topic at press conferences, she does not lie or knowingly deceive. But, she does emphasize the illegality of intelligence leaks in an effort to divert the public’s attention from the content of those leaks. Suppose that she wants the public to believe what she thinks is true (that the Trump campaign is innocent); and that she thinks the public would end up with false beliefs if her press conferences further engaged the content of the leaks. She, thus, highlights their illegality. She *can* do all of this without publicly rejecting (dismissing) the content of the leaks or further engaging with that content; after all, she thinks further engagement with the content of the leaks – perhaps just mentioning that content – would lead the public down the path to falsehood. She *can* also do all of this without privately rejecting (dismissing) the content of the leaks – without herself judging them to be false. (She may apply the same reasoning to herself.) So described, our press secretary does engage with relevant intellectual options – she does recognize the content of the leaks and mount efforts to divert attention from them.¹⁹ This engagement is entirely superficial, even though it is not (technically) dismissive. Accordingly, it, too, may count as closed-minded.

19 She does not privately (or publicly) engage with the content of the leaks in any further way. She is *not* privately open-minded. Thanks to Dennis Whitcomb and Nathan Kellen for this worry.

Of course, in the real world, President Trump's staff often do both – they divert attention away from an option *and* dismiss it. They dismiss the claim that there was inappropriate contact between the Trump campaign and the Russians as ‘fake news,’ while simultaneously calling attention to leakers in the intelligence community. This leads to a further observation. The Donald of our example dismisses competing ideas that happen to cross his path. He does not seek out competing ideas simply to shoot them down or to ‘control the message.’ Nor does he try to prevent other agents from having competing ideas. But, these ways of superficially engaging with intellectual options are also closed-minded. ‘True believers’ can actively seek out relevant intellectual options and reject them, in an effort to prevent others from believing them.²⁰ In going on the offensive, these agents are closed-minded vigilantes.

1.4 *Does closed-mindedness require engaging with intellectual options?*

In the examples above, agents are closed-minded because they engage superficially with intellectual options. But, as (4) points out, one can also be closed-minded by failing to engage with intellectual options. For instance, one could ignore, rather than dismiss, intellectual options. In dismissing an option, one recognizes that it is an option, and rejects it. In this manner, Donald recognizes competing ideas, finds them implausible, and judges them to be false. But, consider Donovan, who differs from Donald only in *ignoring* ideas and evidence that support the genocide of Native Americans. When confronted with these intellectual options, Donovan recognizes that they compete with his own views and immediately directs his attention elsewhere. He refuses to further attend to or engage with them in any way, nor does he render any further judgments about them or their truth-value. He closes himself off from these competing ideas, perhaps because he feels threatened. Granted, it will be difficult to fully distinguish ignoring from dismissing (and from the behavior of the press secretary above); there may even be a range of states in between. Consider an agent who recognizes competing options, realizes that she doesn't know how to reply to them, and for this reason closes herself off from them. She seems to be neither ignoring those options (she engages with them enough to realize that she doesn't know how to reply) nor dismissing them (she doesn't judge them false), though she is still closed-minded (she closes herself off from them).²¹ A full analysis might benefit from work on illocutionary acts. For now, the key point is that one can be closed-minded by failing to engage with relevant intellectual options. Ignoring such options is one way to fail to engage with them.

Note that in ignoring intellectual options, Donovan is still aware of them – he recognizes them as competing with his own views. A different way to fail to engage with intellectual options is to be unaware of them or oblivious to them – to fail to see or notice them. Options may fail to register as such on one's radar, or fail to register on one's radar at all. To illustrate, one might be so invested in a relationship that one is oblivious

20 I assume that they seek out and reject relevant options both publicly and privately. They are *not* privately open-minded.

21 This may be true of our press secretary. Similarly, one might close oneself off to options that one thinks might be true and might demand revision of one's beliefs. Or, one might close oneself off to options that one thinks might undermine one's interests in the long run. Donovan never gets this far – he doesn't make any such judgments.

to evidence that one's partner is cheating. Or, one might be so committed to one's published theories that one fails to notice anomalous results. In a similar vein, Roberts and Wood argue that agents can be "perceptually rigid": when their "perceptual acuity is stuck within certain categories, outside of which [they are] 'blind' or 'deaf'" (Roberts and Wood 2007: 202). In failing to see competing ideas and evidence, the perceptually rigid agents above are being closed-minded.

Importantly, we can also be oblivious to relevant sources. In her groundbreaking book *Epistemic Injustice* (2007) Miranda Fricker argues that testimonial injustice is a failure on the part of hearers to see speakers as credible (when they are) – a failure that is caused by identity prejudice in hearers. Agents who are testimonially unjust are oblivious to relevant sources; e.g., they fail to see women and people of color as credible. Accordingly, they are closed-minded. I think this is the right result. Though it is worth pointing out that testimonial injustice is highlighting an important kind of closed-mindedness about sources – one that is caused by identity prejudice and systematically tracks women and people of color across domains. We can be oblivious to the credibility of sources for other reasons that are less systematic. For instance, due to disciplinary prejudice, a physicist might fail to see a philosopher of physics as a credible source about quantum mechanics. This, too, is closed-minded.²²

A third way to fail to engage with intellectual options is to disengage from inquiry altogether. Recall Donté and Donatella* who hide their heads in the sand. In contrast with Donovan, who is aware of competing evidence and closes himself off from it, Donté and Donatella* are unaware of, and have closed themselves off from, any and all further evidence, sources, methods, and questions. They have refused to conduct further inquiries.

In defense of (4), I have argued that agents can be closed-minded by ignoring intellectual options, or by failing to see or notice them in the first place, or by opting out of inquiry altogether. Agents can also be closed-minded by failing to seek out or generate intellectual options. Consider a doctor who, like Dr. House of the eponymous television series, sees patients whom nobody else can diagnose. But, unlike House, our doctor is unwilling to generate lists of probable diagnoses. She is unwilling to generate probable diagnoses not because her cases are easy, or because she has already made up her mind about the afflictions of her patients, but because she is lazy. Or, consider a politically progressive activist who fails to seek out conservative sources of any kind; she only looks for sources and evidence that confirm her progressive perspective (thus exhibiting confirmation bias). Robert Audi's (2018) distinction between virtues of pursuit and virtues of responsiveness may be helpful in developing this point. Open-mindedness is arguably both a virtue of responsiveness (whereby one engages seriously with relevant intellectual options that cross one's path), and a virtue of pursuit (whereby one seeks out relevant intellectual options).²³ Accordingly, in failing to generate or seek out relevant intellectual options, the doctor and activist above are closed-minded when it comes to pursuit.

It is worth noting that failing to engage with intellectual options *can* involve action, some of which is quite effortful, though it need not. Being oblivious to relevant sources

22 An agent can see a source as credible, but still be closed-minded with respect to that source – by ignoring or dismissing the source.

23 Audi himself argues that open-mindedness is a virtue of responsiveness, but not a virtue of pursuit.

and evidence may not require action or effort on the part of the agent: oblivion, absorbed from the environment as a child, may now be engrained and automatic. Nor does our doctor's failure to generate lists of probable diagnoses require action and effort; it may instead be due to laziness and act-omission. But ignoring is another matter – it requires the action of directing attention away from relevant options and can be quite effortful. In Medina's words, it can involve an "intense but negative cognitive attention" (Medina 2013: 34). Opting out of inquiry can also be effortful. Medina argues that one can go to great lengths to avoid exposing oneself to alternative ideas and sources, and to avoid situations and conversations in which one might see and notice intellectual options. Some "experiences, perspectives, or aspects of social life . . . require an enormous amount of effort to be hidden and ignored" (Medina 2013: 34). In short, it can take effort to hide one's head in the sand and keep it there.

1.5 *Does closed-mindedness require unwillingness?*

Finally, let's consider (5): closed-mindedness does not require an unwillingness to engage seriously with intellectual options. Though Donald is unwilling, one can also be closed-minded by being willing, but unable, to engage seriously with intellectual options (Hare 1979: 8). To illustrate, consider Wayne Riggs's ingenious cases of Oblivia and Smugford. On Riggs's description, although Oblivia is perfectly willing to engage with cognitive standpoints that differ from her own, she "persistently fails to recognize" that such standpoints exist (Riggs 2016: 24). Because she moves through the world unaware of the existence of alternative standpoints, it is no surprise that she consistently fails to engage with them. Oblivia is, indeed, closed-minded. Now, Riggs's Smugford is aware of cognitive standpoints that differ from his own, and is willing to engage with standpoints that seem plausible to him. Nevertheless, he consistently fails to engage with alternative standpoints because not enough of them seem plausible to him. In Riggs's words: "Alternative views never meet Smugford's criteria of worthiness to be granted a sympathetic consideration, even when they should" (Riggs 2016: 25). Smugford, too, is closed-minded.

I want to address three worries about the claim that closed-mindedness can be an inability to engage seriously with intellectual options. All of these worries contend that the mere *inability* to engage is insufficient for closed-mindedness. First, one might object that an agent's environment can prevent him from engaging with intellectual options, but that this alone shouldn't render him closed-minded. An agent may have the bad luck of growing up in an epistemically hostile environment – an environment that severely restricts relevant intellectual options, making them disappear, or at least difficult to come by. It may be an environment in which the dissemination of information is strictly controlled, and the internet and books are banned. Or, an environment in which credible sources are systematically maligned. Imagine an agent who, despite these conditions, somehow manages to become the sort of person who is willing to engage with intellectual options. Nevertheless, he fails to do so because his environment restricts his ability to access them.²⁴ What should we say about this agent – is he closed-minded? First, we

24 See Callan and Arena's example of a 1930s teacher who is tasked with educating his students about Canada's indigenous people. He is willing to and does investigate, but only has access to materials that represent indigenous people in a derogatory way (Callan and Arena 2009: 114).

can say that he is not *disposed* to be closed-minded, provided that he *would* engage with intellectual options were he in a hospitable environment. But, second, we can also say that he *is* closed-minded relative to his current environment. This point is important. Our environments can make us closed-minded.²⁵ For instance, they can make us testimonially unjust, and they can do so even when we, like Fricker's card-carrying feminist (Fricker 2007: 37), do not want to be testimonially unjust. Our environments can also be epistemically engineered to produce values and motives that support closed-mindedness. Children raised by the Hitler Jugend, or ISIS, or the Klan may become adults who not only dismiss perspectives that conflict with their own, but who *value* conformity, stability, and obedience in their beliefs. They may even think that their intellectual practices are good ones, that they are models of intellectual virtue, and that they are being open-minded.²⁶ Such agents are, in Medina's words, "meta-blind": they are blind to competing perspectives, *and* blind to the fact that they are closed-minded (Medina 2013: 75).²⁷ Third, we can add that when agents are unlucky in their environments, they are not blameworthy for being closed-minded, at least they are not blameworthy in the traditional voluntarist sense of blame that entails control.

Second, one might object that hard-wired impairments can prevent an agent from engaging with intellectual options, but that these alone shouldn't render him closed-minded. What should we say about cases like this? For starters, let's assume that there *are* hard-wired impairments that can result in an agent's being unable to engage with intellectual options. We can say that when an agent has such a hard-wired impairment, one consequence is that the impairment makes the agent closed-minded. Granted, this may be one of many consequences of the impairment, it may not be the most important consequence, and it may even be trivially true. There are two important addenda. First, this agent's closed-mindedness is not a character trait. That is to say, it doesn't reflect the agent's values or motives in any way. Rather, it is at best a personality trait that is caused by a hard-wired impairment (Battaly 2017b). Second, this agent is not blameworthy for his closed-mindedness, since he is unlucky in his constitution. Further, if there *are* hard-wired cognitive biases that prevent us from engaging with intellectual options, we want to be able to count them as cases of closed-mindedness. For, if we can't count *them* as cases of closed-mindedness, then we shouldn't count implicit biases that are produced by the environment as closed-minded either. But, we should count the latter as cases of closed-mindedness. And, since lack of blameworthiness does not prevent us from counting the latter as closed-minded, it shouldn't prevent us from counting hard-wired biases as closed-minded. All of this is just to say that both our environments and our constitutions can make us closed-minded.

Third, one might point out that it will sometimes be extremely difficult to generate or weigh relevant intellectual options, and that falling short in such cases shouldn't render one closed-minded. Consider an agent who is willing to generate and weigh options, and tries to do so, but fails because the problem she is working on is just hard. For instance, it may take years and teams of experts to generate relevant options with respect

25 Ian Kidd's (2018) calls environments that can make us epistemically vicious 'epistemically corrupting environments.'

26 Callan and Arena agree (2009: 116).

27 For Medina, meta-blindness is not restricted to Nazis and Klan members; he suggests that we are meta-blind insofar as we, e.g., think that color-blindness is epistemically good (Medina 2013: 36–39, 152).

to various theories in medicine, or robotics. And, once relevant options are generated, it may be difficult to determine what each option entails or predicts, and thus difficult to compare and weigh them. Are such failures to generate and weigh relevant options *instances* of closed-mindedness? Perhaps, they are, but this with four caveats. First, agents are not blameworthy for these failures – it isn't their fault that the problems are hard; indeed, they should be commended for pursuing hard problems in the first place. Second, if the problems are so hard that generating options is beyond human comprehension (only an omniscient being could do it), then these agents do not count as closed-minded.²⁸ Third, their failures with respect to hard-but-solvable problems are not *dispositions* of closed-mindedness – we can assume that when working on easier intellectual problems, the same agents will consistently succeed in generating and weighing relevant options. To put the point differently, in agents who are otherwise open-minded, the impact of these failures will be relatively self-contained. Now, agents *do* fail to generate and weigh relevant options when problems are extremely difficult. This should surprise no one; we expect it. These are instances in which an individual or group just can't figure out how to open up their minds. And, so, these are instances of closed-mindedness, if we understand open- and closed-mindedness to be contradictories. But, fourth, in agents who are otherwise open-minded, these instances of closed-mindedness do no more than signal that they have fallen short of human perfection – a standard of open-mindedness we never expected them to reach.

The replies above distinguish between individual instances of closed-mindedness and the disposition of closed-mindedness. Individual actions can be closed-minded – an agent might occasionally dismiss an intellectual option, even though she is not generally disposed to do so: as a one-off, an agent might dismiss evidence that her pet was badly behaved. But, importantly, closed-mindedness can be a disposition. As a disposition, it tells us what an agent would consistently do in a given type of situation: she would consistently fail to engage (seriously) with intellectual options, when confronted with them or when conducting inquiries. Some agents may be closed-minded in some domains, but not others: e.g., a philosopher may be willing and able to engage seriously with options pertaining to all manner of topics, except when the conversation turns to her pets, whose behavior she takes to be beyond reproach. Other agents may be closed-minded when it comes to *seeking out and generating* intellectual options, but be entirely willing and able to engage seriously with options that are pointed out to them. Accordingly, we can expect possession of the general disposition of closed-mindedness to be a matter of degree.

The scope of one's closed-mindedness – the degree to which one possesses it as a general disposition – will be influenced by one's motivations. Closed-mindedness can have multiple motives, some of which are broader in scope, and others of which target specific domains. Closed-mindedness with respect to beliefs about one's pets may be the result of emotional attachment to those particular beliefs or to the pets themselves.²⁹ Whereas, when closed-mindedness is a more general disposition, spanning multiple domains, it might be motivated by a general need for closure (Cassam [Forthcoming](#)), or by a general lack of curiosity. Or, by a general disposition to be lazy, or arrogant, or to mistrust other people. Closed-mindedness that takes the form of testimonial injustice, and thus influences

²⁸ Thanks to Alessandra Tanesini for this point.

²⁹ Compare Callan and Arena (2009: 111), who think that closed-mindedness is always motivated by emotional attachment to beliefs.

behavior in multiple domains, may be the result of fear, or feeling threatened, or of “needing not to know” (Medina 2013: 34). One might also be closed-minded because one values conservatism and stability in one’s thinking, or (less commonly) because one is consciously pursuing closed-mindedness.³⁰ One might even be closed-minded because one has a *de dicto* motive to pursue truth, but falsely believes that the truth is something one already has. Or, because one is *de re* motivated to hold on to one’s true beliefs in an epistemically hostile environment. Whatever one’s motive, closed-minded agents are unwilling or unable to engage seriously with relevant intellectual options.³¹

2. WHAT IS DOGMATISM?

Dogmatism is a sub-set of closed-mindedness: (DG) it is an unwillingness to engage, or engage seriously, with relevant alternatives to the beliefs or views one already holds. In *believing* that there was no genocide of Native Americans, and refusing to engage seriously with alternatives to this belief, Donald is dogmatic. Roberts and Wood argue that dogmatism is a kind of intellectual rigidity; the kind that applies to dogmas – to beliefs that are fundamental doctrines about the general character of the world or about some generally important aspect of the world (Roberts and Wood 2007: 194). They define dogmatism as “a disposition to respond irrationally to oppositions to [such] belief[s]: anomalies, objections, evidence to the contrary, counterexamples, and the like” (Roberts and Wood 2007: 195). Though I am in general agreement with this definition, I do not think that dogmatism requires beliefs to be general or important. Of course, one can be dogmatic with respect to (e.g.) beliefs about religious doctrine (which are general and important), but one can also be dogmatic with respect to the belief that one’s pet is well behaved (which is neither general nor especially important). Nor is dogmatism limited to the way one *responds* to intellectual options. One could also be dogmatic in failing to generate or seek out alternatives to one’s beliefs. We can add that dogmatism differs from closed-mindedness in its restriction to an *unwillingness* to engage with intellectual options. Agents who are willing to engage seriously with intellectual options to their beliefs, but who are unable to do so, are not dogmatic. In the concluding section below, I begin to address Roberts and Wood’s claim that dogmatism is a disposition to respond *irrationally* to opposition.

First, let’s explore the concept of *engaging seriously* with alternatives to one’s beliefs. Recall that Donald engages with alternatives to his belief, but only insofar as he unilaterally dismisses them. He does not engage seriously with alternatives, since he does nothing to evaluate their merits. Compare David Irving, the holocaust denier who plays the starring role in Roberts and Wood’s analysis of dogmatism. Unlike Donald, Irving has mounted elaborate arguments against alternative views and in defense of his own. To the untrained eye, Irving may *look* as if he is engaging seriously with alternative views, and thus *look* as if he is willing to do so. But, Irving isn’t engaging seriously and isn’t willing to do so. In the words of Roberts and Wood, Irving’s methods include:

30 Medina (2013: 36) and Callan and Arena (2009: 116) allow for the possibility that closed-mindedness might be consciously pursued, though both think this is rare.

31 Thanks to Heidi Grasswick and Matt Stichter for discussion.

tendentious summary . . . omitting material that runs contrary to his beliefs, hiding information in footnotes, removing material from one context and placing it in another to change its import, misreading handwriting, translating texts tendentiously, exaggerating inconsistencies or errors in evidence so as to draw far-reaching conclusions from them, and raising implausible doubts about the reliability of material that disagrees with this views. (Roberts and Wood 2007: 197)

These are not the methods of a person who engages seriously with alternative views or is willing to engage seriously with alternative views; they are the methods of a person who systematically mischaracterizes alternatives in order to push his own view. Despite his efforts to *appear* willing to engage seriously with alternatives, Irving clearly meets the conditions of dogmatism.³² He and Donald are paradigmatic cases.

But, even if Irving himself isn't willing to engage seriously with alternatives, aren't there some conspiracy theorists who are? And, wouldn't this show that these conspiracy theorists aren't dogmatic?³³ Here, I offer a two-part reply. First, a conspiracy theorist could have beliefs that are false or repugnant without being dogmatic about his beliefs. Granted, the examples above have featured beliefs whose contents are false and repugnant. But, dogmatism does not pertain to the *contents* of beliefs. It pertains to the agent's unwillingness to engage seriously with relevant alternatives to her beliefs, whatever their content. This means that an agent can be dogmatic about beliefs that are true; e.g., I might unilaterally dismiss my husband's suggestion that I left my keys in the car, because I seem to remember (and, in this case, happen to veridically remember) leaving them on my desk.³⁴ It also means that an agent can believe things that are false or repugnant, or otherwise loony, without being dogmatic. For instance, one *could* endorse racism, or sexism, or deny climate-change without being dogmatic. Likewise, one *could* endorse a conspiracy theory about (e.g.) 'the deep state' without being dogmatic. To explicate, one *could* have acquired racist or sexist beliefs in an environment that restricted access to alternatives, while still being willing to engage seriously with alternatives. One might even have looked for alternatives to one's racist or sexist beliefs, but not found any in the environment (Callan and Arena 2009: 114). Similarly, one *could* have acquired conspiratorial beliefs about the 'deep state' from one's isolated and controlled environment, while still being willing to engage seriously with alternatives. One might even engage seriously with alternatives – evaluating their merits – as soon as one leaves one's isolated environment (and goes to college). Now, we can and should expect an empirical correlation between conspiracy theories and dogmatism. But, this is an empirical, rather than a conceptual, connection. To the extent that we can conceptually distinguish between the contents of conspiratorial beliefs and the agent's willingness to engage seriously with alternatives, we can allow for conspiracy theorists who are not dogmatic.

32 Here, I am assuming that Irving *believes* that the Holocaust (or key aspects of it) did not occur. If Irving is instead deliberately lying – if he doesn't believe the things he says – then he isn't dogmatic. See the 2016 film *Denial*, directed by Mick Jackson.

33 Thanks to Branden Fitelson for this point.

34 Are there any true beliefs about which we *cannot* be dogmatic? Whether we are dogmatic in dismissing alternatives to our true beliefs depends on whether those alternatives are relevant. If the alternatives are relevant, then we are being dogmatic; if the alternatives are irrelevant, then we aren't being dogmatic. To illustrate, I *am* dogmatic in dismissing the alternative that I left my keys in the car because it is a relevant alternative. Whereas, ordinary agents in ordinary environments who believe that '2 + 2 = 4' and 'The holocaust happened' are *not* dogmatic in dismissing '2 + 2 = 5' and 'The holocaust never happened'. They are not dogmatic because these alternatives are irrelevant.

Now, what if these conspiracy theorists are willing to engage seriously with alternatives, but unwilling to revise their beliefs? Suppose a ‘deep state’ conspiracy theorist seeks out and weighs evidence against his belief, and even recognizes this evidence to be conclusive. Nevertheless, he balks when it comes to belief-revision. He just isn’t willing to give up his belief that there is a ‘deep state.’ Isn’t this conspiracy theorist dogmatic?³⁵ The second part of the reply admits that he is dogmatic, and that the above analysis of dogmatism requires a codicil. Thus: (DG*) Dogmatism is an unwillingness to engage (seriously) with relevant alternatives to a belief one already holds, or in the rare case where one is willing to engage seriously with alternatives, it is a subsequent unwillingness to revise a belief one already holds.

Returning to Roberts and Wood’s analysis, does dogmatism – or closed-mindedness more generally – require a disposition to respond “irrationally” to opposition? Are irrational responses vicious, and is closed-mindedness thereby a vice? In closing, I suggest a basic framework for determining the conditions under which closed-mindedness will be an intellectual vice.

3. INTELLECTUAL VICE AND CLOSED-MINDEDNESS

I have proposed a working analysis of the disposition of closed-mindedness, and have argued that dogmatism is a species of it. This analysis does not presuppose that closed-mindedness is an intellectual vice. To figure out whether, when, and why closed-mindedness is intellectually vicious, we need an account of intellectual vice.

Very roughly, intellectual vices are cognitive dispositions that make us bad thinkers. Arguably, there is more than one way for cognitive dispositions to make us bad thinkers and more than one kind of intellectual vice (Battaly 2014). For starters, cognitive dispositions might produce a preponderance of bad epistemic effects (e.g., false beliefs) or prevent us from achieving good epistemic effects (e.g., true beliefs). Such dispositions are effects-*vices*. Accordingly, we can ask:

(CMV₁) Does closed-mindedness sometimes (perhaps, often) take the form of an effects-vice? Does closed-mindedness sometimes (perhaps often) produce a preponderance of bad epistemic effects?

And, relatedly:

(CMV₂) What bad epistemic effects might closed-mindedness produce for the agent who possesses it?

(CMV₃) What bad epistemic effects might closed-mindedness produce for other agents and for the epistemic environment?

There are other kinds of intellectual vice. A disposition could also (or instead) be a responsibility-vice; roughly it could involve bad epistemic character – bad epistemic

35 When we engage seriously with the arguments of holocaust deniers (in trying to convince them to change their minds) but we are unwilling to revise our beliefs about the Holocaust, are we being dogmatic? In ordinary environments, we are not being dogmatic because ‘The holocaust never happened’ is not a relevant alternative. Now, if we are in hostile environments where this alternative is relevant, then we are being dogmatic, but our dogmatism is not an intellectual vice. Thanks to Paul Bloomfield for discussion.

motives and values – for which the agent in question is blameworthy. Responsibilist vices will be individuated (in part) by their different motives and values; the motives and values that are characteristic of closed-mindedness will differ from those that are characteristic of distinct vices, like epistemic self-indulgence (Battaly 2010) and epistemic malevolence (Baehr 2010). Accordingly, we can ask:

(CMV4) Does closed-mindedness sometimes take the form of a responsibilist-vice?

And, relatedly:

(CMV5) What bad epistemic motives and values are characteristic of the closed-minded agent?

(CMV6) In what way is the closed-minded agent blameworthy for these motives and values?

The above distinction should be relatively familiar since it corresponds to the distinction between reliabilist- and responsibilist-virtues. Arguably, there is a third kind of intellectual vice that is less familiar: one that involves bad epistemic character – epistemic motives and values – for which the agent is not blameworthy (in the voluntarist sense). These personalist-vices constitute a *via media* between effects-vices and responsibilist-vices. Like responsibilist-vices, personalist-vices must be character traits – they must express who the agent is as a person or (more specifically) as a thinker. But, like effects-vices, an agent need not be blameworthy for possessing them. We can find personalist-vices in the indoctrinated (Battaly 2016). Accordingly, we can also ask:

(CMV7) Does closed-mindedness sometimes take the form of a personalist-vice?

The framework above enumerates some key questions we can ask in determining whether, when, and why closed-mindedness is an intellectual vice.³⁶ But, even if closed-mindedness is often an intellectual vice of one, or more, of the above kinds, we should also ask:

(CMV8) Is closed-mindedness *always* an intellectual vice?

(CMV9) Are there conditions in which closed-mindedness might even be an intellectual virtue?

(CMV8) and (CMV9) are important because the analysis above – (CM) – makes closed-mindedness more common than we might have thought. If (CM) is correct, we frequently act in closed-minded ways.³⁷ And, yet, we may resist the suggestion that intellectual vice is this common. Accordingly, we need to ask whether our closed-minded actions are always intellectually vicious. I hope that all of the questions above warrant further exploration, and I suspect that our answers to (CMV8) and (CMV9) will show that closed-mindedness is sometimes an intellectual virtue.³⁸

³⁶ See Battaly (Forthcoming).

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