

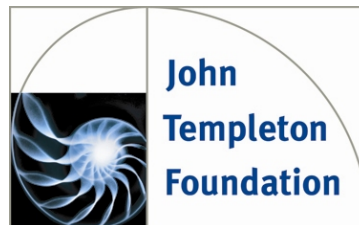
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IH: Intellectual Humility - Psychological and Evolutionary Dynamics



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Request for Proposals



Through a generous grant from The John Templeton Foundation, Fuller Theological Seminary's School of Psychology, Travis Research Institute, and Thrive Center, welcome proposals for the "Intellectual Humility: Psychological and Evolutionary Dynamics" funding initiative. We aim to support 16 research projects of up to 2 years in length, totaling \$4,000,000 in awards.

Deadline for Letters of Intent: July 1, 2012.

IH: Overview

This program will provide up to \$4.0 million in research support for empirical work on the virtue Intellectual Humility. "How little we know, how eager to learn" is the slogan of the intellectually humble. Unfortunately, the vice of intellectual pride is commonly displayed by both the ignorant (who know *little* and don't care that they don't) *and* the knowledgeable (who know enough to presume to *know it all*). In areas where public discourse is shot through with intellectual pride at so many different levels, the topic of intellectual humility is of crucial practical importance.

Although humility has received significant attention, its distinctively intellectual side needs much further exploration. Intellectual humility concerns how we come to hold and retain our beliefs. It is constituted by a state of openness to new ideas, receptivity to new sources of evidence and the implications of that evidence, and willingness to revise even deeply held beliefs in the face of compelling reasons.

This project thus seeks to:

- Support research on some under-explored areas in the psychology and evolution of intellectual humility/arrogance;
- Foster critical engagement between those who work in the cognitive and evolutionary sides of this topic;
- Digest the results of work in the field in order to advance its philosophical and theological significance;
- Assess the relevance of the results to determine the impediments to intellectual humility, and to identify concrete strategies for overcoming these native tendencies.

Investigators (individual or teams) from the psychological sciences and other relevant empirical sciences are invited to request from \$50,000 up to \$270,000 for a research project of up to two years in length. We anticipate making 16 awards. Award semi-finalists will be invited to participate in a "virtual" workshop in November 2012. Award winners will be invited to two conferences, one mid-project conference in May 2014 in Princeton, NJ, and one capstone conference in May 2015 in Los Angeles, CA. Inquiries should be directed to Rebecca Sok, at intellectualhumility@fuller.edu.

IH: Background

Our world is readily characterized by divisions within and between communities, along lines of nation, region, religion, political party, or “school of thought”. Many of these social divisions are alleged to be, at their heart, intellectual disagreements: we’re right and they’re wrong. Intellectuals, religious leaders, and politicians all call for tolerance, but can people simply decide to put aside intellectual differences? How do passionate and obstinate disagreements arise? Unfortunately, for all the threads of relevant research from the psychological sciences available, we know little about the psychological dynamics that lead us to be intellectually humble or arrogant. The rhetoric of intellectual humility is common, the science of intellectual humility is in its infancy.

The notion of intellectual humility has substantial connections to topics of contemporary relevance in philosophy and theology. For example, recent work in philosophy and theology has also highlighted the *theoretical* importance of intellectual humility in the context of a broader theory of “virtue epistemology.” Virtue epistemology represents a novel approach to questions about the nature of knowledge and the justification of belief. Traditional epistemology casts knowledge and justification in terms of the conditions under which individual beliefs are either properly foundational, or properly supported by evidence. Virtue epistemology focuses on the *process* by which beliefs are formed, looking specifically at whether or not the belief was formed by an *intellectually virtuous knower*. Some have claimed that intellectual humility is among these core intellectual virtues. In this way, intellectual humility can be seen as foundational to knowledge itself.

Another topic that has significance for both philosophy and theology is peer disagreement and its implications for our epistemic practices. Questions associated with this topic include whether and to what extent a person ought to maintain his or her position in the face of disagreement with persons who are equally intelligent and informed, and whether and to what extent *religious* disagreement supports the position known as “religious pluralism.”

There has been a great deal of work in recent years on what one might call the “Science of Intellectual Arrogance,” which work has two fundamental centers of gravity. The first center focuses on psychological evidence that humans have native dispositions towards intellectual arrogance. This arrogance takes the form of one or more cognitive biases (primacy, better-than-average, commitment, self-serving, etc). The second focuses on evolutionary pressures that might explain such biases. There has been a great deal of (highly contested) work on elucidating fitness pressures that might explain various pervasive cognitive dispositions towards false belief (dispositions towards agency detection or anthropomorphism for example). Some argue that these native dispositions towards false belief do not count as adaptations but rather arise as spandrels (if at all), while others make the case that at least some such dispositions were adaptive, and in some cases are still adaptive. Note that the work in view here is not evolutionary psychology generally, but rather evolutionary psychology which addresses native tendencies to over-estimate our cognitive abilities, tendencies to form beliefs in the absence of relevant evidence, and dispositions to form, retain, and defend beliefs in ways that are disproportionate to the strength of our evidence.

Although these two lines of research are already underway they suffer from two weaknesses. First, those who carry out research on these topics rarely talk with one another. Second, and interestingly, scholars who work on these topics often claim, in scholarly and popular literature, that the results show that we are, in many domains, naturally irrational. However, these claims are made without sufficient attention to the relevant epistemology, the field that traces out the “normative” side of belief.

This project represents the first phase of a three-phase initiative on intellectual humility. The three phases are:

- Empirical Research on Intellectual Humility
- Philosophical and Theological Research on Intellectual Humility
- Research on Implications of Intellectual Humility in the Domain of Public Discourse

DRAFT

IH: Intellectual Humility - Psychological and Evolutionary Dynamics

The three phases represent three distinct disciplinary approaches to the study of intellectual humility, where it is hoped that each phase will benefit, and benefit from, the findings of the other phases. This project constitutes the “empirical phase,” and it has as its key concerns investigation of (i) the evidence that humans have natural dispositions towards intellectual arrogance or intellectual humility, (ii) the psychological and/or clinical significance of such dispositions, and (iii) the evolutionary pressures that might explain such dispositions.

IH: Illustrative Questions

Investigations of such concerns may include contributions from various areas of the psychological sciences and draw upon a diversity of perspectives such as clinical, cross-cultural, developmental, educational, and evolutionary. Projects from anthropological or behavioral economics approaches will also be considered. Below are illustrative research questions that successful proposals might consider.

General Psychological Issues

Many of the research questions suggested here presume that Intellectual Humility (IH) is a valid psychological construct or a natural kind. Is it? Is IH a unidimensional or multidimensional construct? Is IH an extreme position on a continuum or an optimum? For instance, it might be that IH is best characterized as strong meta-cognition (i.e., knowing what one knows and doesn't know) plus strong eagerness to learn. Is a deficit of IH characterized by intellectual arrogance or intellectual apathy, or just confusion? Is it a purely negative attribute, constituted by the *absence* of certain characteristics (e.g., dogmatism), or are there certain positive characteristics that mark the intellectually humble (e.g., curiosity)?

As a psychological construct, how is IH best characterized? One could compare IH to personality traits, implying certain stability across contexts and development; or to a character trait or skill that can be cultivated over time and used in some situations but not others. Perhaps rather than characterizing IH as a personal construct, it might be fruitfully explored in terms of situational factors. Is IH social context dependent, encouraged or discouraged by social, cultural, and other situational factors? Variable across various domains of knowing? It could be that someone exercises IH in only some areas (e.g., those in which they know they are ignorant) and not in others, or at some times but not others.

Does IH bear any regular relationships with well-established psychological constructs such as various personality traits or cognitive capacities? For instance, might IH be related to *submissiveness, openness, agreeableness, or need for cognition*, and if so, how? Is IH dependent upon meta-cognitive abilities? Is IH related to general humility or other character traits and virtues?

Is IH properly attributable to groups as well as individuals, or to individuals only?

Evidence for or against Natural Dispositions

Human beings are notoriously (and apparently naturally) disposed to over-estimate their intellectual strengths and under-estimate their weaknesses—indeed, the evidence is clear that there is a strong tendency even to under-estimate our liability to such biases! Do these biases show a natural tendency away from intellectual humility? Furthermore, we are susceptible to all sorts of biases that make intellectual humility difficult. For example, we tend to favor evidence or data received early in our inquiries (primacy biases) and we tend to discount the weight of evidence that counts against hypotheses we endorse (confirmation bias). On the other hand, children seem to come into the world eager to learn from others.

Evidence for or against there being natural dispositions for or against IH could come from many quarters. Cross-cultural evidence revealing relatively equally-distributed levels of IH would be suggestive of the naturalness of IH. Similarly, developmental research demonstrating a regular developmental course to IH, particularly one under-determined by social/cultural inputs, would bear

upon the naturalness claims. The tight link between IH and biological underpinnings such as selective impairment (or genius) or sex-link would likewise help build a case for naturalness.

Alternatively, it might be that IH is highly variable across cultures, its lifespan development is critically shaped by variable social/cultural factors, and it bears no strong genetic or biological link. If so, how is IH cultivated? What factors lead to its appearance or suppression?

Less directly, some cognitive attributes related to learning or belief formation might work against or with IH. Do various reasoning biases (e.g., primacy bias, confirmation bias, accessibility bias) encourage or discourage IH? Various social ‘context biases’ have been identified that inform who we choose to learn from and submit to, such as conformity (i.e., tendency to go along with the others), prestige bias (i.e., the tendency to pick out prestigious individuals to imitate), and similarity bias (i.e., the tendency to find people like oneself to imitate). How does IH interact with these various biases?

Consequences of Intellectual Humility/Arrogance

Part of our interest in IH is the possibility that its expression is positive for individuals and communities, but what are the effects of IH and intellectual arrogance? For individuals, it might be that IH is critical for successful learning and maintains relational harmony through facilitating repentance and forgiveness. IH individuals might have different interpersonal relations such as in their avoidance or handling of conflict. Communities characterized by IH might have higher levels of civility and less acrimony. But perhaps IH isn’t all good. The IH person might be an easy mark for Machiavellian operators. The IH person might lack epistemic stability and be prone to social conformity. IH communities tend toward polarization and *group-think*. Communities with a wealth of IH might be peaceful but, perhaps, lag in innovation and stable group identity because of a failure to fight for ideas. Perhaps a deficit of IH is a virtue in certain professions. For example, the scholar or inventor lacking in IH might show more perseverance in the face of negative evidence and thereby make breakthroughs that otherwise would not have been made; the effective judge might epitomize a balance of open-mindedness with aggressive curiosity.) These are all open questions.

We might wonder, too, how IH relates to other virtues. Is IH an instrumental virtue, facilitating the acquisition and expression of other virtues? If so, which ones and how? For instance, it has been suggested that IH is related to willingness to forgive others, a lack of aggression, and helpfulness. But are these consequences of IH, causes of IH, or mutually caused by other factors?

The presence or absence of IH might result in poor psychological or social adjustment, perhaps even to clinical degrees. To illustrate, it has become conventional wisdom that overestimating one’s knowledge or intellect is typical of humans (an instance of the “Lake Wobegon Effect”), and that something akin to intellectual arrogance is necessary for maintaining mental health (a claim subject to empirical critiques). Might the intellectual humble, who see themselves and their condition with unmitigated clarity, be more susceptible to forms of depression, for example, or otherwise could IH be bad (or good) for mental health? In the other extreme, perhaps people lacking enough IH are socially maladjusted, prone to know-it-all-ism or being a crank--unable to recognize the limitations of one’s own ideas and perspectives.

Evolutionary Perspectives

Many of the questions above can be framed in terms of evolutionary dynamics. If intellectual humility/arrogance produce maladjustment, they might also be maladaptive for the individual. If children come into the world with great intellectual humility, but teens are regularly notorious for “knowing everything,” perhaps such a developmental regularity reflects a useful adaptation for learning and consolidation of socially-acquired knowledge.

Evolutionary perspectives generate their own questions as well. If adaptive (even if only for children) is IH an adaptation or an evolutionary byproduct? Perhaps instead, intellectual arrogance is an adaptation (or byproduct) and IH requires special cultural scaffolding and cultural evolution to

DRAFT

IH: Intellectual Humility - Psychological and Evolutionary Dynamics

survive and spread. Evolutionary psychologists have produced some evidence and analyses suggesting that certain cognitive dispositions or biases that lead to epistemic over-confidence might be adaptive. Does this mean that intellectual arrogance is both an epistemic vice and a “biological virtue”? Perhaps instead through evolution, people are very well-adapted to the environment, but barriers to intellectual humility remain difficult to surmount because of lacking access to relevant information that would make them aware of their intellectual limitations. If so, intellectual arrogance may be remedied most directly by improving access to relevant information.

IH: Timeline and Application Instructions

Letters of Intent are due July 1, 2012. Early August 2012 semi-finalists will be notified with an invitation to a web-based “virtual” workshop to be held November 2012 that will provide additional support for preparing full proposals. **Submission of full proposals are due no later than January 15, 2013.** Final award decisions will be issued March 1, 2013 for research to begin April or May 2013. Mid-project conference will be May 2014. Final project conference will be May 2015, with all projects completed and final reports submitted by May 20, 2015. Articles for a special journal issue of the *Journal of Positive Psychology* are to be submitted by May 30, 2015.

Letter of Intent (LOI) Stage

Applicants are required to submit:

1. A complete curriculum vitae for the PI and for all major team members (if applicable). A single project leader for communication purposes must be specified. CVs should be attached as a separate document from the Letter of Intent.
2. A letter of intent that includes the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions, the way in which the project addresses a key question or aspect of Intellectual Humility, and a summary of the research design. The letter should not exceed 1,000 words (references do not have to be counted in this total; please specify word count at top of letter).
3. The amount of funding requested (one sentence is adequate). No budget narrative or justification is needed at this stage. The amount can be revised at the full proposal stage plus-or-minus 20%.

Application materials should be submitted by e-mail attachment, if possible, to intellectualhumility@fuller.edu. “LOI” should appear in the e-mail subject line. The only acceptable file formats are .doc and PDF. Questions about the application process can be sent to the same address. All LOI materials must be received no later than July 1, 2012. An acknowledgement email will be sent within two days of receiving the materials. If you do not receive such an acknowledgement please write again to intellectualhumility@fuller.edu and to rsok@fuller.edu.

Semi-finalist Workshop

Approximately 32 applicants will be selected as ‘semi-finalists’ and invited to participate in a web-based workshop. The aim of the workshop will be to give semi-finalists tools to better situate their projects in the broader area of Intellectual Humility, its empirical streams, and its potential philosophical and theological implications. In awardees we are looking for empirical projects that speak to timely philosophical and theological implications, and so this workshop will be helpful for successful applicants.

Full Proposal Stage

Those applicants invited to submit full proposals must include:

- A cover letter with the title, amount requested, duration of the project (not to exceed two years), and team members (if applicable).
- A description of the work to be carried out, not to exceed 5,000 words (references do not have to be counted in this total). The description should include the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions, the way in which the project importantly addresses the nature of Intellectual Humility, and a summary of the research design.

- A project abstract of up to 500 words which explains the project and its significance to non-academics, and which would be published on the Intellectual Humility website and possibly in Templeton materials, and included in publicity materials if the proposal is funded.
 - A time line.
 - A detailed budget, between \$50,000 and \$270,000 in total costs (direct and indirect), with accompanying narrative explaining line items, not to exceed two single-spaced pages. Overhead is limited to 15%, and funds cannot be used for major equipment purchases. Necessary project-specific costs for lab/space use and administrative support may be included as direct costs but must be justified.
 - Approval of the relevant university signing officials.
- CVs submitted at the LOI stage do not need to be resubmitted. Full proposals should be submitted by e-mail attachment, if possible, to intellectualhumility@fuller.edu. The words "Full Proposal" should appear in the e-mail subject line. The only acceptable file formats are .doc and PDF. Questions about full proposals can be sent to the same address. Full proposals will be accepted only from applicants who have been invited to submit by the fellowship director on the basis of the LOI phase. Full proposals must be received no later than January 15, 2013. An acknowledgement email will be sent within seven days of receiving the materials. If you do not receive such an acknowledgement please write again to intellectualhumility@fuller.edu and to rsok@fuller.edu.

IH: Grant Eligibility

The PI must have a doctorate and be in or contracted to a faculty position at an accredited college or university before April 15, 2013 (exceptions may be made on a case by case basis). Applicants from any country are welcome to apply. Selection criteria will include: feasibility of the project in the specified timeframe, prior research accomplishments of the PI and other team members, relevance of the project to the project foci, originality and interest of the intended project, quality of the budget justification, and coherence of the intended research plan. Applicants of all levels of seniority are encouraged to apply but some preference will be given to applicants in their first 10 years post-doctorate. All applications must be submitted in English and all payments will be made in US dollars.

The PI of a funded project must commit to the following:

- 1) Submit semi-annual and final reports, as well as semi-annual and final expenditure reports. The reports should not exceed 2 pages, and should detail the outcomes of the funded project.
- 2) Attend and present preliminary findings at the two-day conference in May 2014, in Princeton, NJ, where PIs from the philosophical & theological funding initiative will be in attendance. Your expenses will be covered.
- 3) Attend and present conclusions of research at the three-day final Intellectual Humility Research Conference in May 2015 in the Los Angeles area, where the PIs from all funding initiatives will each present their conclusions. Your expenses will be covered.
- 4) Consent to have their presentation at the final conference be videotaped for The Intellectual Humility website.
- 5) Submit an article-length paper for a special issue of the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, by May 15, 2015.
- 6) Notify the Project at intellectualhumility@fuller.edu of all conference presentations, papers, and books that arise from the funded research.

All questions should be directed to:

intellectualhumility@fuller.edu

or The Intellectual Humility Project, The Thrive Center, Fuller School of Psychology, 180 N. Oakland Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91101.

IH: Program Staff and Advisors

DRAFT

IH: Intellectual Humility - Psychological and Evolutionary Dynamics

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