

HUMILITY & CONVICTION

IN PUBLIC LIFE

What is Intellectual Humility?

This trait can be understood as involving the owning of one's limitations, a healthy recognition of one's intellectual debts to others, a willingness to improve one's knowledge of the world, and low concern for intellectual domination and certain kinds of social status. It is closely allied with traits such as open-mindedness, a sense of one's fallibility, and being responsive to reasons. Thus, intellectual humility advocates for conviction through critical self-reflection. Below are some of the primary aspects of the intellectually humble person, and some simple exercises helpful in maintaining an intellectually humble character and approach to the world.

- **Awareness of Bias:** The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines bias as “an inclination of temperament or outlook; especially: a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment.” There are many forms of bias to be aware of, such as explicit bias (which reflects the attitudes or beliefs that one endorses at a conscious level), implicit bias (which reflects an automatic judgment and/or behavior that results from beliefs that one is unaware of), and confirmation bias (the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms one's preexisting beliefs). How does it feel to be called biased? What does it mean to acknowledge one's bias?
- **Awareness of Ignorance:** Ignorance is often thought of as a state or mindset in which we lack knowledge or understanding. Sometimes it is used to mean a lack of education. How does it feel to be called ignorant? Does being ignorant really mean being uneducated? What does it mean to acknowledge one's ignorance?
- **Aiming for Fairness:** This aspect involves treating all viewpoints alike, without reference to one's own feelings or vested interests, or the feelings or vested interests of one's friends, community or nation; it implies adherence to intellectual standards without reference to one's own advantage or the advantage of one's group.

Common Exercises for Practicing Intellectual Humility:

1. Can you construct a list of your most significant prejudices?
2. Can you name a way in which a prior view you had has changed? Improved?
3. Do you ever argue for or against views when you have little evidence upon which to base your judgment?

4. Do you ever assume that your (family, religion, nation, etc.) is correct and or superior even though you have not looked at the matter from the point of view of others with whom you disagree?