Question: What are the main features of an intellectual virtue? How do we get a grasp of this concept?

I. Start by thinking about moral virtues like benevolence, courage, justice.
   A. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.6: moral virtue is a “state of character…lying in a mean.”

B. Main features of the moral virtue of benevolence:
   1. **Action.** A benevolent person helps other people. E.g., donates money to hospitals, to charities for refugees; volunteers in a homeless shelter, Boys & Girls Clubs.
   2. **Motivation.** A benevolent person *cares* about helping other people. Her motivation for helping is not selfish! She helps because she cares about and values the welfare of the people she is helping. She isn’t donating time simply to improve her college apps; or donating money simply for PR purposes.
   3. **These actions and motivations are morally good.** They make the world a better place, and may even be valuable for their own sakes.
   4. **Disposition/Habit/Stable Character Trait.** A benevolent person is consistent!
      a. She consistently helps other people and consistently cares about their welfare. Volunteering one day doesn’t make a person benevolent!
      b. Because virtues are stable traits, it can be difficult to figure out whether someone has them—we need to observe the person over time. It is easier to figure out whether a particular action the person performs fits the pattern for that virtue. E.g., Oprah opened a school for girls in South Africa, and in so doing, performed an action that a benevolent person would perform. Capt Sully landed a plane on the Hudson River, performed an action that a courageous person would perform.
      c. A person, or student, or child can do what someone with the virtue of benevolence (courage, etc.) would do. But, the person, student, child can do this without having the virtue themselves. They can imitate the virtuous action, or do it as a ‘one-off’.
   5. **Lies in a Mean.** Aristotle thinks that each moral virtue lies in a mean between a vice of excess and a vice of deficiency.
      a. WRT benevolence: arguably, most people don’t help or care about others enough. We err on the side of deficiency—we don’t have the vice of cruelty, but we fall somewhere between cruelty and benevolence. But, it is also possible to overdo it—to err on the side of excess—to help and care about others too much, so much that one becomes a doormat.
      b. **The mean is contextual.** The benevolent person doesn’t always do exactly the same thing—she doesn’t always help and care about others, no matter what the context. Sometimes, she focuses on herself. The courageous person doesn’t always stand and fight no matter what the context—sometimes she runs away. Contra Shakespeare, sometimes discretion really is the better part of valor.
II. How does this help with grasping the concept of intellectual virtue? Analogy!

**Intellectual Virtues are going to have Analogous Features.** But, what does it even mean to perform intellectual actions and have intellectual motivations?

A. **Intellectual Action.** Before we get to the virtues, what is an intellectual action in general? They are actions of the mind. Actions that influence which beliefs we acquire. Actions that help us conduct inquiries, or figure something out. They can be invisible to outside observers. In general, they can be good or bad (virtuous ones are good, vicious ones are bad).

1. E.g. searching for evidence, jumping to a conclusion, asking a question, forming an hypothesis, seeking out alternative perspectives, ignoring alternatives, admitting you don’t know, pretending you do know, assuming you already know, defending a controversial belief, failing to stand up for a controversial belief, wondering whether ‘the received opinion’ is true.

2. Clip from *The Program* (2015), Director: Stephen Frears, 30:00-34:35. What intellectual actions does David Walsh perform in these scenes? What intellectual actions do the other journalists perform?

3. Can you give an example of an intellectual action that you performed today?

B. **Intellectual Motivation.** Before we get to the virtues, what is an intellectual motivation in general? Motivations that influence the way we conduct inquiries and the beliefs we acquire. In general, they can be good or bad (virtuous ones will be good, vicious ones will be bad).

1. e.g., wanting to get truth, knowledge, or understanding; wanting to believe whatever is easiest; wanting to believe whatever makes one feel good; wanting to believe whatever makes one fit in with the status quo; wanting to figure something out; wanting to learn something new; wanting to believe whatever will earn a good grade!


3. Excerpt from Doubt (2008), director John Patrick Shanley.

III. Some Paradigms of Intellectual Virtue: **Open-mindedness**

1. **Intellectual Action.** An open-minded person seeks out, generates, and weighs alternative ideas and perspectives. E.g., she seeks out the views of people who disagree with her; she considers objections to her ideas.

2. **Intellectual Motivation.** An open-minded person wants to find the truth, or to get knowledge, or to understand someone else’s point of view. She doesn’t want to believe whatever is easiest, or whatever will make her feel good; she wants to believe the truth.

3. **These actions and motivations are intellectually good.** They are likely to produce truths and discoveries, and to enhance understanding. They may even be valuable for their own sakes.

4. **Disposition/habit/stable character trait.** An open-minded person consistently cares about truth/knowledge/understanding. And, she consistently seeks out and
weighs alternative perspectives. She doesn’t just do this inside the classroom. An adult, child, student can do what an open-minded person would do, without having the virtue of open-mindedness themselves.

5. **It lies in a mean between closed-mindedness and naïveté.**
   a. Arguably, most people err on the **side of deficiency**—we don’t care enough about getting the truth, we don’t consider as many alternatives as we should. When the going gets tough, we stop looking for alternatives and stick with what we already believe. We fall somewhere between open- and closed-mindedness.
   b. But, it is also possible to overdo it—to consider too many alternatives, to take seriously an alternative that is obviously false, that we have shown again and again to be false, or an alternative that is irrelevant. These people err on the **side of excess**—the fall somewhere between open-mindedness and naïveté.
   c. **The mean is contextual.** The open-minded person doesn’t always do the same thing. She usually seeks out and considers alternatives. But, not in every case—sometimes she ignores alternatives. E.g. 1. Guy with the sign. 2. climate scientists can be open-minded and ignore the claim that the recent increase in temperature is due to the earth’s natural cycles (asked and answered).
   d. After our visit to the Pequot museum, can you think of any claims—perhaps ‘received opinions’—that one could ignore and still be open-minded? If one considered these claims, one would be naïve, erring on the side of excess?
   e. **Example of an open-minded person:** Dr. House. Can you think of examples?

IV. Some Paradigms of Intellectual Virtue: **Intellectual Courage**

1. **Intellectual Action.** An intellectually courageous person stands up for and defends her beliefs in the face of opposition and criticism from others, even when her beliefs are controversial or contradict the ‘received opinion.’ E.g., she speaks up, she does not remain silent. She responds to criticisms.

2. **Intellectual Motivation.** An intellectually courageous person wants to find the truth, or get knowledge, and wants to help others get knowledge, too! She doesn’t want to believe whatever is easiest; she wants to believe the truth, and wants others to do so, too!

3. **These actions and motivations are intellectually good.** See above.

4. **Disposition/habit/stable character trait.** An intellectually courageous person consistently cares about truth/knowledge. And, consistently stands up for the beliefs she thinks are true. An adult, child, student can do what an intellectually courageous person would do, without having the virtue of intellectual courage.

5. **It lies in a mean between intellectual cowardice and intellectual rashness.**
   A. Again, most people err on the **side of deficiency**—we don’t care enough about getting the truth, or getting others to believe the truth, and so we don’t stand up for beliefs when we should. We fall somewhere between int. courage and cowardice.
B. But, it is also possible to overdo it—to defend claims that you don’t really think are true, or to defend claims that you merely want to be true (GWB: ‘Mission Accomplished’), or to continue to defend a claim even after you have realized that it isn’t true. These people err on the side of excess—they fall somewhere between int. courage and rashness.

C. The mean is contextual. The intellectually courageous person doesn’t always do the same thing. She usually stands up for and defends her beliefs. But, if she comes to realize that she was wrong, she capitulates.


7. One way to be an upstander is to be intellectually courageous. Upstander: “A person who stands up, speaks out, and/or takes action in defense of those who are targeted for harm; one who aims to prevent or stop harm and/or injustice and transform situations where individuals or groups are mistreated”

V. Some Paradigms of Intellectual Virtue: Intellectual Humility

1. Intellectual Action. An intellectually humble person is aware of, and owns her intellectual limitations. E.g., She admits when she doesn’t know something, or has made a mistake, or doesn’t understand. She doesn’t deny her limitations, nor is she oblivious to them.

2. Intellectual Motivation. An int. humble person wants to get truth, knowledge, or understanding. She is not motivated to look smart in front of other students.

3. These actions and motivations are intellectually good. See above.

4. Disposition/habit/stable character trait. An int. humble person consistently cares about truth/knowledge/understanding. And, she consistently owns her intellectual limitations. An adult, child, student can do what an int humble person would do, without having the virtue of int humility.

5. It lies in a mean between intellectual arrogance and intellectual servility.
   a. Again, most people err on the side of deficiency—we aren’t aware of our intellectual limitations—we are somewhat oblivious, we under-estimate our limitations—or even when we are aware, we don’t admit our limitations to others. These people fall somewhere between int humility and arrogance.
   b. But, it is also possible to overdo it—to over-emphasize one’s int. limitations, to focus on them too much, or to over-ascribe limitations to oneself. These people err on the side of excess—they fall somewhere between int humility and int servility.
   c. The mean is contextual. The int humble person doesn’t always do the same thing. She doesn’t always focus on her limitations, or ascribe limitations to herself, or admit them. If she did, she would be servile, rather than humble.
   d. After our visit to the Pequot museum, can you imagine a context or situation that illustrates erring on the side of excess—toward servility? Where someone over-ascribes or over-estimates her own int. limitations?
   e. Example of an intellectually humble person: Dalai Lama