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VIRTUE ETHICS AND VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract: The aim of this essay is to test the claim that epistemologists—virtue epistemologists in particular—have much to learn from virtue ethics. The essay begins with an outline of virtue ethics itself. This section concludes that a pure form of virtue ethics is likely to be unattractive, so the virtue epistemologist should examine the "impure" views of real philosophers. Aristotle is usually held up as the paradigm virtue ethicist. His doctrine of the mean is described, and it is explained how that doctrine can provide a framework for an account of epistemic virtue. The conclusion of the essay is that a virtue epistemology based on analogies with virtue ethics, though well worth developing and considering, will face several challenges in fulfilling the significant promises that have been made on its behalf.

Keywords: Aristotle, epistemic virtues, epistemology, virtue, virtue epistemology, virtue ethics.

Over the past thirty or so years, since the publication in 1980 of Ernest Sosa's seminal paper "The Raft and the Pyramid," a debate has developed over whether epistemology might benefit from reflection on that broad movement in moral philosophy which has come to be known as "virtue ethics."[1] As someone inclined to view the increasing specialization in philosophy with some concern, I find this turn in epistemology intriguing.

These are, however, somewhat murky waters. A lot of writing in virtue ethics has been either primarily critical of other views or concerned to promote a particular substantive position. There has not been a great deal of discussion of exactly what virtue ethics is. On the face of it, this might seem no bad thing. Philosophers probably spend too much time on creating and polishing pigeonholes rather than getting on with answering fundamental philosophical questions. But the question is of course unavoidable when the claim under examination itself concerns a philosophical position. In what follows, then, I begin by saying a little about

[1] Sosa 1991a. Informative overviews of the course of the debate are found in, e.g., Axtell 1997; Battaly 1998, 2008; Zagzebski 1998; Greco 2002, 2004. The catalyst for virtue ethics is usually said to be another seminal paper: Anscombe 1958.

how virtue ethics is best understood. Aristotle's ethics is widely thought to be the closest we have to a canonical statement of the position, and, since it strikes me as both insightful and plausible, I then sketch in broad outline Aristotelian versions of virtue ethics and, by analogy, virtue epistemology. I end by asking whether, in light of my account of virtue ethics in general and Aristotelian virtue ethics in particular, virtue ethics has anything to offer epistemology, and if so what.

Substantive and Explanatory Virtue Ethics

What, then, is virtue ethics? One helpful two-stage way to categorize philosophical theories is (a) according to which questions the theories under consideration provide answers, and then (b) according to the answers they give. To which questions, then, is virtue ethics an answer? A fundamental one must be that of Socrates: "How should one live?" But there are many aspects to the living of a life, and hence there are more specific questions to be asked, including: "What kind of person should I be?" and "How should I act?" Virtue ethicists unproblematically can, and do, answer all of these questions, and so we should avoid the claim that virtue ethics focuses on the questions of how one should live or what kind of person one should be *rather* than on the question of how one should act (Zagzebski 1996, xiv, 6, 15; 1998, 618; Battaly 1998, intro.; Brady and Pritchard 2003, 2; Greco 2004, sec. 1, par. 1). It may well be that those commonly thought of as virtue ethicists focus on lives and persons, and non–virtue ethicists on actions, but this would not be a result of the constraints of ethical theory itself.

So a theory might be counted as a form of virtue ethics if it answers these questions as follows: "You should live the life of virtue, as a virtuous person, acting virtuously." But here we should note an important distinction between what we might call *substantive* and *explanatory* normative theories. We want to know both *how* we should live, and *why* we should live in that way. A straightforward explanatory version of virtue ethics will state not only that we should live the life of virtue and so act virtuously (which is what the merely substantive theory says), but also that the *ultimate* (that is, *non-derivative*) normative, justifying, or grounding reason for so living and acting is provided, in some way or another, by the virtues themselves.[2] An explanatory virtue ethicist may suggest, for example, that I should act generously. But an act utilitarian may well make the same claim, since acting generously will maximize expected utility. The explanatory virtue ethicist will then go on to distinguish her position from the utilitarian explanatory view by claiming that the reason

[2] Note that the claim here is not that the virtuous person herself be motivated by the virtue of her acts, or by thoughts of that virtue, or that virtue be a reason to which she herself need appeal in justifying her action. Rather, the thought is that the virtue of an act itself counts in favour of performing that act.

for acting generously is not that so acting maximizes utility but that it is virtuous. The view may allow that there are other ultimate reasons, but in its strict monistic version it will not. Further, monistic explanatory ethical theories imply their substantive analogues.[3]

Note that this definition of explanatory virtue ethics leaves open—as I presume it should—exactly which traits are virtuous. This suggests that the standard way of introducing virtue ethics—as a clear alternative to views such as utilitarianism or Kantian deontology—is an oversimplification (e.g., Baron, Pettit, and Slote 1997). We have already seen how an explanatory utilitarian can be a substantive virtue ethicist, advocating the life of virtue on the ground of its promotion of well-being. And Kant himself, of course, recommends the virtues (O'Neill 1996). But an explanatory virtue ethicist, who believes that an ultimate reason for acting in some way is that so acting is virtuous, may believe also that there is only one virtue. And if that virtue is benevolence, impartially construed, on the one hand, or conscientiousness, on the other, his position will seem to most people utilitarian or Kantian, respectively. But as long as one keeps the substantive/explanatory distinction in mind, virtue ethics can be kept distinct. If it is claimed that the reason for performing a benevolent action, or for being benevolent, is that virtue itself provides ultimate reasons, and that benevolence is the only virtue, then this is explanatory virtue ethics and substantive utilitarianism. If no normative weight is attached to the virtues themselves, and what is said to favour benevolence is the maximization of well-being, then we have explanatory act utilitarianism and substantive virtue ethics.

Synchronic and Diachronic Accounts

An explanatory virtue ethicist believes that an action's being virtuous, in itself, counts as an ultimate reason—and perhaps can be the only ultimate reason—in its favour. But what is it for an action to be virtuous?

To some, an action's being virtuous requires only that the agent be in a certain state—that she be motivated in certain ways, experience certain emotions, feel certain feelings, or whatever—*at the time of action*.[4] A kind action, for example, is an action done in a kindly way, where kindness is understood as constituted by certain feelings, emotions, and so on, at some particular time.

[3] It would be self-contradictory to be a monistic explanatory virtue ethicist but to deny that one should live virtuously. But a pluralistic explanatory virtue ethicist may claim that in certain circumstances other sources of reasons might outweigh those grounded in virtue. For example, one might think that to avoid certain catastrophic outcomes, a life of vice might be called for, though there would be *something* to be said for the life of virtue nevertheless—viz., that it was virtuous.

[4] A weaker position will allow that an action is virtuous in so far as it is what the virtuous person would do (see Aristotle 2000, 2.4, 1105b5–7). On this view, the agent's motivation is irrelevant as to whether the action is or is not virtuous.

This *synchronic* view is very close to, and may even be seen as overlapping with, what is usually described as a form of deontology. When gratitude is required, for example, a deontologist may accept that the very fact that some action is one of gratitude counts in its favour. And he will also insist on the agent's performing the grateful action in an appropriate state—with knowledge, voluntarily, for the right reasons, with appropriate feeling, and so on.

Aristotle (2000, 2.4, 1104a28–33) draws a distinction between an action's being merely virtuous, on the one hand, and being done virtuously—"in accordance with the virtues"—on the other. Acting virtuously requires that the agent (a) act with knowledge, (b) act from rational choice of the actions for their own sake, and (c) *act from a firm and unshakeable character*. Take a case of generosity. The situation calls for a certain action: the giving away of a certain amount of money. For that action to be "in accordance with" the virtues—fully or properly virtuous, as we might put it—the agent has to fulfil conditions (a) to (c) above.

This account throws into doubt the claim that virtue ethics is to be understood in terms of the "direction of analysis" of virtues and right action—as the view that right action should be understood in terms of what the virtuous person would do, and not the other way round (Hookway 1994, 225; Zagzebski 1996, 15; Axtell 2000, xiii; Greco 2001, 136–38; 2004, sec. 8, par. 4; Battaly 2008, 1–2).[5] Right action is of course what the virtuous person would do; but as that is not what *makes* it right, the notion of "what the virtuous person would do" is insufficient to explain rightness. In the example of generosity, it is the situation—in particular, the needs of the recipient, and the financial capacities of the potential donor—that determine which action is right. Now it is indeed true that, on condition (c), what it is to *act rightly* is indeed to be understood in terms of the virtuous person, or at least her character. But it is equally true that the notions of a virtuous person and of virtuous character have to be understood partly by reference to right action and to acting rightly.

Several modern virtue ethicists clearly hold a diachronic position. Consider Rosalind Hursthouse: "What it is that makes the agent who does what is V [virtuous] for X reasons on a particular occasion both actually and counterfactually reliable and predictable, if she is—what it is for her to be 'really committed to the value of her V act'— is that she acts 'from a fixed and permanent state', namely the virtue in question" (1999, 135–36).

[5] Zagzebski, for example, defines a "pure" virtue theory as one "that makes the concept of a right act derivative from the concept of a virtue or some inner state of a person that is a component of virtue" (1996, 79).

An explanatory virtue ethicist must, I suggest, accept such a *diachronic* account of virtue and right action. Virtue ethics may well be a theory about right action, but a virtue itself is an enduring trait of a person, and any theory which does not make essential reference to such traits in its explanatory account of right action is best not described as a form of virtue ethics.

Why should it matter in ethics whether the agent is "really committed" to the value of his act? The answer must be that such a commitment is in itself praiseworthy. So when we praise an action performed virtuously, the object of our praise is at least in part the disposition or virtue of the agent, or rather the agent himself for his possession of such a disposition (cf. Montmarquet 1993, 97–98). Consider Hume: "If any *action* be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character. Actions themselves, not proceeding from any constant principle, have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility; and consequently are never consider'd in morality" (2007, bk. 3, pt. 3, sec. 1, par. 4). Despite what Hume says here, there seems no reason why a diachronic explanatory virtue ethicist has to accept that actions themselves cannot be morally praiseworthy. Nevertheless, she surely must accept that, when an action is praised for being done rightly or done virtuously, implicit in that praise of the action is praise of the agent for being the sort of person to perform such actions.

Who Is a Virtue Ethicist?

A substantive virtue ethicist will claim that we should live and act virtuously. This position, however, is likely to be of less interest to an epistemologist looking for inspiration than an explanatory view, according to which the ultimate reason for performing a virtuous action is that it is virtuous.[6]

This simple view is perhaps the purest conceivable form of virtue ethics. But I can think of no philosopher who has advocated such an austere position; and this is not surprising. For a natural way to think of at least many virtues is as dispositions to respond in the appropriate way to normative reasons that can be characterized independently of the virtue itself. And this is certainly how the virtuous agent will often see

[6] We have seen that there are different accounts of what it is for an action to be virtuous. If it consists merely in the action's being what the virtuous person would do, then the explanatory virtue ethicist is claiming that the fact that a virtuous person would φ is itself a reason to φ. This has the odd implication that, in the case of the virtuous person, the fact that he is φ-ing is itself a reason to φ. If an action's being virtuous consists in its being done from certain motives or with certain feelings, and also perhaps on the basis of a firm character, then the view is that an action's being virtuous in this way itself speaks in favour of it. Here the "direction of analysis" is indeed from virtue to right action and not vice versa.

things. It may be that one reason for acting benevolently is that so acting will be benevolent. But the benevolent person's thoughts will be occupied with the suffering he can alleviate, and it is this to which he will refer if asked to justify his action.

Those I shall call *paradigmatic virtue ethicists* tend not to stop with the virtues alone when advocating the life of virtue or acts of virtue. Consider Aristotle again. The details of his position are of course a matter of some controversy, but it is clear that he has a battery of arguments in favour of the life of virtue, resting on the notions of happiness or *eudaimonia*, human nature, the noble or *to kalon*, pleasure, and so on. In fact, it is unclear even whether Aristotle is to count as an explanatory virtue ethicist at all. On one interpretation, for example, he might be seen as an egoistic eudaimonist, who thinks that ultimately our reasons rest on the promotion of our own happiness—which turns out to consist in exercising the virtues. On another, he is a perfectionist, who believes that the good of any member of a species consists in its perfecting its own nature—and in the case of human beings that turns out to be virtuous activity. More plausibly, perhaps, his text can be seen as indeterminate on these issues of priority. If our question is how we should live, then we should take into account happiness, human nature, the virtues, and much else in our answer, and not bother to press further questions about priority relations between these different concepts unless we have to.

In more recent times, Philippa Foot, in her earlier writings (e.g., 1978), argued in favour of the virtues from the perspective of an internalist conception of practical reasons, according to which the virtues would fulfil certain basic desires of the agent, while in *Natural Goodness* (2001) she developed eudaimonist and perfectionist arguments closer to those of Aristotle. Rosalind Hursthouse (1999) has likewise advocated a form of eudaimonism, though she gives the virtues a more instrumental role than Aristotle does and denies perfectionism. And so on. None of these writers is especially clear on whether the source of normativity in their positions includes the virtues themselves, and so we cannot be sure whether any of them should be described even as pluralistic explanatory virtue ethicists.

So there has been and is no consensus among paradigmatic virtue ethicists on the role of the virtues at the level of explanatory theory. This leaves at least two options for the virtue epistemologist. One would be for her to work out her own explanatory account in ethics. That might turn out itself to be virtue ethical, or it may not, and the kind of analogies to be drawn will depend importantly on the explanatory theory in question. For example, those attracted to broadly utility-maximizing explanatory positions are perhaps more likely to accept those reliabilist accounts of knowledge that seek to explain attributions of knowledge in terms of the (epistemic) value of the states produced by the operation of certain faculties; while those who accept virtue ethical explanatory accounts are

more likely to explain knowledge in terms of the virtuous exercise of those faculties itself.[7]

A second strategy for the epistemologist is of course to examine accounts offered by other philosophers. Aristotle's is beyond doubt the account most cited as authoritative by contemporary paradigmatic virtue ethicists. So let me turn to it.

Aristotelian Virtue Ethics

Aristotle (2000, 2.5–6) sees virtues as *hexeis*, or dispositions, of two broad kinds: to *act* as one should (which requires the agent to be in a certain state); and to *feel* as one should (where "feelings" are to be understood broadly, to include emotions, desires, and so on). Note that at this level of abstraction there is still the option of, say, a utilitarian position, if we were to state that the acts one should perform and the feelings one should experience are those that maximize utility.

Aristotle's framework for his account of the virtues is his famous doctrine of "the mean." His ethics is indeed an attempt to answer the Socratic question. But he noticed that human lives could be analysed into several significant "spheres," each of which could be characterized in terms of the feelings or actions characteristic of those spheres (see Nussbaum 1993, 243–47; Zagzebski 1996, 221–22). These spheres are significant, and all but universal, aspects of human experience. At least some of them are characterized by emotions, and the virtuous person will be the one who feels those emotions "correctly." But how should we understand correctness and incorrectness? Aristotle says: "For example, fear, confidence, appetite, anger, pity, and in general pleasure and pain can be experienced too much or too little, and in both ways not well. But to have them at the right time, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the mean and best; and this is the business of virtue. Similarly, there is an excess, a deficiency and a mean in actions" (2000, 2.6, 1106b18–24).

So, to take anger as an example, the even-tempered person will be the one who feels anger at the right time, about the right things, towards the right people, and so on. But how should we understand the vices between which even temper is a mean? Quite often, commentators have sought to do this in a purely quantitative way: the bad-tempered person is the one who feels too much anger, and the person with the deficient vice feels too little. But that is only part of the story, as the passage above makes clear. One can go wrong by feeling anger at the wrong time, about the wrong things, towards the wrong people; and likewise by *failing* to feel anger at the right time, and so on. And, as Aristotle frequently points out, because

[7] See, e.g., the broadly pragmatist possibility outlined in Blackburn 2001.

there are many factors that the virtuous person gets right, there are many ways to go wrong, in the direction either of excess or of deficiency.

We can now see how actions feature along with feelings in the Aristotelian account. Several virtues are characterized in terms not of an emotion but of a type of action. An example is generosity, one of its characteristic actions of course being to give away money. The virtuous person will give away money to the right people, at the right time, for the right reasons, and in the right way (which, recall, involves knowledge and rational choice of the action for its own sake, as well as a causally active disposition). The stingy person will fail to act in these various ways, while the wasteful person will give away money to the wrong people, in the wrong way, and so on. Thus, one cannot plot a person's character on a spectrum from excess to deficiency passing through the mean. For there is nothing to prevent a person's possessing both an excessive and a deficient vice in the same sphere. This happens often in the sphere of money, as Aristotle notes. The wasteful person will give money at the wrong times and to the wrong people, and this will result in his not having the money to give at the right times and to the right people, so that he will end up stingy as well.

The doctrine of the mean is often criticized. One common objection, often thought especially devastating for Aristotle's account, is that the doctrine of the mean just fails with regard to certain virtues—in particular, justice (Williams 1980). Aristotle (2000, 5.3–5) does himself seek to incorporate justice into the doctrine of the mean, but his attempts are almost universally seen as failures. In particular, he tries to attribute a specific feeling or emotion—*pleonexia*, greed—to the unjust person. This is where he went wrong. If he had reflected further upon the doctrine of the mean as he himself describes it, he would have seen that justice is like, say, generosity, in that it will have to be characterized primarily in terms of actions, understood in a certain context. There are certain things that just people will do: take their fair share; make fair distributions, according to, for example, merit; fairly rectify unfair transactions. Now it might be thought that we cannot place these actions on the kind of spectrum required by the doctrine of the mean: either you are just or you are unjust. There are no vices of excess and deficiency. But this would be too swift. Someone may make a fair distribution, for instance, but at the wrong time (too early or too late, perhaps), or for the wrong end, motivated perhaps by a desire to ingratiate herself with the beneficiaries. These are cases of *excessive injustice*. Likewise, someone may *fail* to make a fair distribution at the right time, and this would be a case of *deficient injustice*. In fact, the doctrine of the mean seems to me a major insight into the nature of virtue. Morality, Aristotle is suggesting, is not to be understood merely in terms of a set of negative prohibitions or constraints. Rather, there are certain areas of life in which all of us will be put to the test, and to live our lives morally well we must act and feel appropriately within those areas.

An Aristotelian Virtue Epistemology

Let me now consider whether the Aristotelian model of the moral virtues just outlined might serve as the basis for an account of epistemic virtues.[8] Our original and overarching question may then be specified as: "How should one live, epistemically?"—one response being: "In accordance with the epistemic virtues." And an explanatory form of virtue epistemology will claim that the epistemic virtues themselves, either on their own or more probably in conjunction with and in relation to other items, ground reasons.

As regards the synchronic/diachronic distinction,[9] there seems no difficulty in carrying across the distinction to epistemology in cases where the actualization of a disposition makes it appropriate. So the thought would be that this particular instance of creativity, open-mindedness, or believing is admirable partly because it is caused—in an appropriate way—by a stable or reliable disposition. And (Gettier problems aside) this will surely provide one with a reasonably secure notion of justification—or at least objective justification—for any account of knowledge that employs that notion.

In the case of the virtues we have been discussing, the right response to their possession is praise, since their exercise is noble. Likewise, since the exercise of the vices is *aischron*, or disgraceful, the correct response is blame. I take it that if epistemic traits are plausibly to count as virtues, then they should at the very least be appropriate objects of some pro-attitude or other (more on this below). We should nevertheless retain a distinction between moral and epistemic virtues.[10] Moral virtues are closely related to the happiness of the agent and others in her society, or *polis*. Epistemic virtues may also be central to happiness on some conceptions of that notion, but conceptually they find their place in what we might call the *epistemic enterprise*—that is, within activities and practices that involve the acquisition of knowledge or understanding. This distinction reflects that commonly drawn between practical reasons or values, and epistemic reasons or values. There can be reasons for belief of both kinds. To take an example of Sosa's (1991a, 165), an ill person may have a practical justification for believing he will recover (the belief

[8] For other broadly Aristotelian conceptions of virtue epistemology, see Code 1987; Montmarquet 1993; Zagzebski 1996.

[9] For a clear statement of the diachronic position, see, e.g., Sosa 2001, 193–94. Cf. Sosa 1991b, 225: "Whatever exactly the end may be, the virtue of a virtue derives not simply from leading us to it, perhaps accidentally, but from leading us to it reliably." See also Greco 1993b, 414. Greco brings out well how the stability of dispositions has to be understood in terms of possible worlds: see, e.g., his response to Kvanvig at Greco 2003, 470–71. For the objection that the notion of reliability can do the work here without any reference to virtues, see Dancy 2000, 77–78.

[10] Even on a Platonic conception of the moral virtues as "unified" in knowledge, we are likely to want to distinguish moral knowledge from knowledge of other kinds.

itself is likely to aid that recovery) and a theoretical or epistemic reason provided by the results of tests, the doctor's opinion, and so on. And of course Aristotle himself (2000, 1.13) drew a clear distinction between moral and intellectual or epistemic virtues, resting on his differentiating separate parts of the soul.

If we return to the Aristotelian account of the moral virtues, we may note first that epistemic considerations can themselves affect what is morally right. Consider courage, understood as the correct feeling of fear. Aristotle tends to limit courage to the battlefield, but there is no reason—even by Aristotle's lights—to restrict its scope in this way. Now imagine someone who is inquiring into a cover-up by her employer. She may come to a point in her inquiry at which she realizes that continuing with it will involve risking her job and reputation. But it may well be right for her to continue with this part of the epistemic enterprise. This is a case where knowledge is perhaps only of instrumental value. But an analogous situation might be found in pure research about some highly significant topic, when a researcher realizes that his well-founded hunches are leading him down a path likely to damage his reputation in the intellectual community in which he works. Or consider an intemperate, angry, or wasteful scholar, whose research is hindered by vice. The moral virtues, in other words, can play an executive role in the epistemic enterprise (see Hookway 2003a, 76–77).

Aristotle's moral virtues concern actions and feelings. Some actions and feelings are intrinsic to the epistemic enterprise itself, so that their role is not best understood as executive. Consider creativity. It is clear that this can be a virtue, and it has its two opposing vices: uncreativeness, and misguided creativity (there are times when one should stop creating and just get on with the epistemic job at hand). Other action-focused virtues in this area might include perseverance, listening to others (the virtue here would be something like open-mindedness), or self-doubt, while a feeling-based virtue might be joy in inquiry or discovery. This final virtue might be said to be merely a particular case of a more general virtue, involving pleasure in activity. And indeed the action-related virtues just mentioned will be found outside the epistemic enterprise as well. There may be some action- or feeling-related virtues, however, such as "proper inquiry" or curiosity, which are specifically epistemic.

The question now arises whether there might be epistemic virtues concerned with items other than actions and feelings—in particular, of course, belief. The epistemically virtuous person, we may assume, will believe in the right way, for the right reasons, and so on, while failures will consist in not believing when or in the way one should, or believing when or in a way one should not. Is believing an action? Judging plausibly is, but not the state of belief itself, which is essentially passive. Further, belief is most plausibly seen as involuntary, and so, if it is an action, not a candidate for praise and blame on the Aristotelian picture (see Audi 2001a).

In *Ethics* 3.5, Aristotle argues that people are responsible for the way they turn out. If I become unjust, it will be because I have done unjust things in the past, and if intemperate, because I have spent my time in drinking and so on. I presume that Aristotle would want to extend this account to feelings also. So if I end up bad-tempered, it will be because I have given in to feelings of anger in the past, acting on them when I should not and failing to adopt strategies to curb my feelings. Consider now what Aristotle says about vices of the body as opposed to those of the soul: "Nobody blames someone unattractive by nature, but we do if he is so through not exercising and looking after himself. The same goes for weakness and disability; nobody would criticize a person blind by nature, or as the result of a disease or an injury, but rather pity him; everyone, however, would blame a person who was blind from drinking or some other intemperance. So bodily vices in our power are blamed, while those not in our power are not. And if so, then in other cases the vices that are blamed will be those in our power" (2000, 3.5, 1114a23–31).

It is true that we do not blame someone blind by nature for her blindness. But, as Aristotle notes, we may pity her, and this is an evaluating response: blindness is something regrettable. Likewise, though we may not blame the naturally weak, we may pity them, and admire another's strength. What I suggest, then, is that we allow the scope of epistemic virtues to be fixed not entirely by praise and blame but by pro and con attitudes more broadly—including pity and admiration. Such an account is more consistent with the attitudes we do take to epistemic virtues and vices, and allows us to bypass the problem of the apparent involuntariness of belief and other cognitive states. We can admire open-mindedness, for example, *even if* we know (in the case at hand) that the possession of that trait is not the responsibility of the open-minded person.

This suggests that we might extend epistemic virtues to cover epistemic capacities, such as perception and memory.[11] There is value in seeing things in the right way (not through veridical delusion, say) and at the right time (without a delay), and corresponding deficient and excessive vices. Failure to see through blindness would be a deficiency, while blurred vision might be an excess. But what we tend to admire is the very possession of the virtuous capacity: 20/20 vision, or an excellent memory. And this does take us beyond the doctrine of the mean: either you possess that capacity or you don't.

[11] See Sosa 1991c, 271, and Sosa's broad definition of a "competence" as "a disposition, one with a basis resident in the competent agent, one that would in appropriately normal conditions ensure (or make highly likely) the success of any relevant performance issued by it" (2007, 29; see discussion in Battaly 2008, 5–6). See also Kvanvig 1992, 111–12. For an argument for extension in the other direction, see Baehr 2006.

Here, reflection on epistemic virtues enables us to see an aspect of Aristotle's *ethical* position which remains largely hidden, through his emphasis on the exercise of the virtues in particular actions and episodes of feeling (see Hookway 2003b, 189). We do praise justly performed actions and appropriately felt anger. But we also admire people for the mere possession of the virtuous dispositions towards such actions and feelings, and this is implicit in Aristotle's own condition (c) on acting or feeling virtuously—that the agent must act or feel from a stable disposition. If those dispositions do not matter, then why impose condition (c) on virtuous action? It is perhaps because he approaches the virtues through his eudaimonism, and takes the view that happiness must involve activity, that Aristotle, unlike Plato, plays down the possession of the virtues, making it a mere necessary condition of acting or feeling virtuously rather than something admirable in itself. A life in a coma, even if one possesses the virtues, cannot, he suggests, be a happy one (2000, 1.5, 1095b32–1096a2). That may be right—but it could nevertheless be, to some extent, an admirable one. Further, we may be prepared to extend moral admiration to certain traits regardless of whether the agent is or is not responsible for possessing them. This, of course, will ease the passage of any analogy between epistemic and moral virtue.

Conceptual space is now available for introducing Aristotle's own epistemic virtues, analysed in the sixth book of the *Ethics*: skill, scientific knowledge, practical wisdom, wisdom, intellect, and so on. These are capacities the mere possession of which is admirable, and the lack of which is the appropriate object of a negative attitude. But of course one can also construct an analysis of these virtues in terms of the mean, so that the virtuous person is the one who exercises his skill in the right way, and so on. The only virtue for which this will not work is practical wisdom. But that is because the life of practical wisdom just is the life of virtue, and there can be no wrongful exercise of *it*.

We have then at least the beginning of an outline of a broadly Aristotelian account of the epistemic virtues, which, though consistent with the doctrine of the mean, goes beyond it, through respecting a broader range of response than praise and blame alone, to cover cognitive states and their exercise as well as actions and feelings. To return to the foundational question—How should one live, epistemically speaking?—we have an answer. One should act, feel, cognize, possess the capacities so to act and so on, as appropriate to the epistemic enterprise.

Virtue Epistemology: Challenges and Prospects

Though the above is only a sketch of an epistemology modelled on a form of virtue ethics, it does seem to support the idea that analogies between epistemology and ethics in this area could be fruitful. But let me mention

some issues, both methodological and substantive, that arise for anyone developing such an analogy (see Baehr 2008, esp. final sec.).

The kind of virtue ethics that epistemological proponents of the analogy have in mind is what I have been calling "paradigmatic virtue ethics," including historical as well as contemporary theories under that heading. Since most paradigmatic virtue ethicists would not accept virtue epistemology, virtue epistemologists who are not prepared to accept without question ethical positions based on epistemologies they themselves reject will be required to develop their own version of virtue ethics based on virtue epistemology, and then draw analogies between that account of ethics and epistemology. And of course they would have to be ready to show that their procedure was not circular in any vicious way.[12]

In his own dialectical epistemology of ethics, Aristotle puts a lot of weight on common sense (see esp. 2000, 7.1, 1145b2–7), and this explains why his ethics can plausibly be seen as a systematization and development of common-sense morality. Modern paradigmatic virtue ethicists say less about epistemology, but the fact that they tend to advocate common-sensical positions suggests that they also are inclined to attach weight to common-sense morality. This inclination could be questioned.[13] (i) Serious ethical disagreements have arisen and continue to arise between those who accept common-sense morality, both within and across cultures and sub-cultures. (ii) There are powerful evolutionary explanations available of central components of common-sense morality, and while these are not automatically debunking they do demand more epistemological support for common-sense morality than is usually provided. (iii) As Sidgwick pointed out more clearly than anyone else, our own common-sense morality contains various contradictions and peculiarities that require more systematization of the position than is commonly found in paradigmatic virtue ethics.

These three problems are likely to carry over to virtue epistemology. Indeed, recent epistemology as a whole contains many examples of appeals to common-sense intuitions which seem functionally quite similar to the same sort of appeals in ethics in arguments against ethical theories which go against common sense (so the brain lesion or demon arguments against reliabilism remind one of, say, the sheriff case against utilitarianism, or the hospital visit case against Kantianism).

Even more worrying, perhaps, is the possibility that there is no analogue to common-sense morality in epistemology. We do not, it might be suggested, set out explicitly to teach our children epistemological principles in the way that we teach them moral principles. Nor does there

[12] They would also have to explain the epistemology they use in epistemology, and ward off concerns here about a regress. But this is a problem for any epistemologist. For a virtue epistemological account of virtue epistemology, see Lehrer 2001.

[13] For a defence of common sense in this context, see Lemos 2001.

appear to be anything analogous to rights or other deontological restrictions that might put obstacles in the way of a "truth-maximizing" position such as reliabilism, in the way that these notions pose problems in ethics for welfare-maximizing views such as act utilitarianism. This leaves it open for a reliabilist to claim that she is in fact defending a more secure area of common sense against less respectable intuitions about particular cases, such as the demon. Quite how those involved in such disagreements should proceed is itself a substantial and difficult question.

The advantages claimed for an epistemology that mirrors virtue ethics in certain key respects are many (Greco 1993a, 521; Zagzebski 1998, 618; Baehr 2008, 3–4). They include an expansion of the scope of epistemology beyond individual beliefs to epistemic traits more generally and the intellectual virtues in particular, especially understanding and wisdom. The hope of a unified axiology, which collapses any distinction between moral and epistemic values, has been raised. It has been suggested also that various philosophical difficulties—in addition to the obvious one of re-inventing the wheel—can be avoided, including scepticism, Gettier problems, and the apparent stand-offs between epistemic internalism and externalism, on the one hand, and between coherentism and foundationalism, on the other (Greco 2004, intro.; Battaly 2008, 1).

The way forward, however, is not entirely clear. One general lesson of the discussions of virtue ethics and virtue epistemology above is that any plausible virtue epistemology is going to have to say quite a lot about individual beliefs and their grounding and justification. So any attempt to avoid philosophical puzzles about beliefs by focusing instead on epistemic traits is unlikely to succeed.

There are more specific potential difficulties. Consider first the foundationalist-coherentist debate (or indeed stand-off) (see esp. Sosa 1991a). Here, the essence of the Sosa-influenced position that has emerged is that, since the justification (that is, the justifiedness) of some belief will depend on its being the result of the exercise of a virtuous trait, the question does not arise of whether justification must end with some foundational or self-evident belief or proposition or consists rather in relations of coherence between beliefs. Unfortunately, however, the move to virtue epistemology avoids the foundationalist-coherentist stand-off not through a mere change of focus from beliefs alone to traits but through the importation of a particular conception of the virtues. Reliabilism, as a form of externalism, can indeed claim to sidestep the stand-off. But because of their externalism, reliabilist traits will appear to many to be too distant from what we understand by "virtues" to deserve that name. The reliabilist can probably anyway do without attributing reliability to virtues in particular. Further, because epistemic traits include the disposition to believe, there is nothing to prevent a foundationalist and a coherentist rephrasing their debate in terms of the virtues, with each describing as virtuous the dispositions towards the beliefs he holds to be justified.

Similar problems arise in the attempt to avoid the internalism-externalism debate. That debate concerns which beliefs are justified. And since according to virtue epistemology one central epistemic virtue will be a disposition to believe with justification, there will be both internalist and external accounts of virtue epistemology available.[14] It is true that a virtue epistemologist may claim that aspects of each position are correct, with internalists having latched onto certain properties of certain virtues, and externalists certain properties of certain others (see Zagzebski 1998, 621; Bloomfield 2000, 35–40). But again this hybrid view does not require expression in terms of the virtues.

What about scepticism? It is clear how a reliabilist virtue epistemologist can allow a person to have knowledge without her having an answer to the sceptical question, and how the reliability of the trait that results in knowledge is intended to provide justification. But note again how this position relies on a particular conception of a virtue, one of which many virtue ethicists would be unhappy to accept an ethical analogue. Virtue ethicists are likely to require that the virtuous agent have some kind of access to her justification for action, and not wish to permit luck to play such a role in the determination of moral value. For them, a virtuous believer deceived by an evil demon will be no less virtuous for that, just as the virtuous actor whose entirely justifiable and reasonable action leads to unforeseeable disaster is not to be criticized.[15] We cannot, then, assume that the virtues have to be "successful" in any sense that requires them to achieve some external goal.[16]

Finally, it is not clear that virtue epistemology provides any special opportunities for a unified axiology.[17] Aristotle's notion of the noble could perhaps be carried over to epistemology. But it is hard to see how virtue epistemology could provide the resources to collapse the distinction between practical value, on the one hand, and epistemic value, on the other. Consider again Sosa's ill patient. Her reasons to believe that she will recover appear to come from two entirely different sources: her own well-being, and the evidence (see Driver 2003, 110).

What, then, of the prospects for an analogy between virtue ethics and virtue epistemology, given all these issues awaiting resolution? I suspect the difficulties here will turn out to be no harder to surmount than those

[14] Virtue epistemologists have been resistant to the claim that virtues are dispositions to have justified beliefs (where justification can be explained in terms of foundationalism, coherentism, internalism, externalism, or whatever), on the ground that this is to get the "direction of analysis" backwards. But just as virtue ethics requires a notion of right action independent of virtue, so virtue epistemology requires a notion of belief which can be justified on grounds independent of epistemic virtue.

[15] For helpful discussion, see Audi 2001b, 88.

[16] *Pace* Zagzebski (1996, 137, 176–84, 248, passim). See Annas 2003, 23–31.

[17] Cf. Zagzebski 1999, 94. The success of the programme here is related to that promoting the idea of the unity of the virtues.

in many other areas of philosophy, and much progress has already been made by several thinkers in outlining strategies for dealing with them. Further, just as in philosophical ethics modern virtue ethics raised especially clearly questions that were largely being ignored—What is a virtue? Which traits are virtues? and so on—the same is true in epistemology of virtue epistemology. Developing various different answers to these questions, along common-sense "responsibilist" or more radical reliabilist lines, seems to me a very promising strategy for epistemology. But what is urgently required in both ethics and epistemology is further reflection on the methodology, and especially the epistemology, of those disciplines themselves. It would unwise to expect convergence within these disciplines in advance of consensus on how they are to be pursued. Epistemology, in this sense, is prior to both virtue ethics and virtue epistemology.

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