VIRTUES
OF THE
MIND

An Inquiry into
the Nature of Virtue and the
Ethical Foundations of Knowledge

Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski

Virtues of the mind

An inquiry into the nature of virtue and the ethical foundations of knowledge

LINDA TRINKAUS ZAGZEBSKI

Loyola Marymount University

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contents

Contents

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments

Introduction

The deepest disputes in epistemology focus on concepts that are quite obviously ethical and often are borrowed directly from theoretical moral discourse. We frequently find references to epistemic *duty* or epistemic *responsibility*, to the fact that we *ought* to form beliefs in one way rather than another, to the fact that one way of believing is *good*, or at least better than some other, and more recently to the idea of intellectual *virtue*. But these concepts are often used with little reflection, and rarely with any concern for the fact that they may be borrowed from a particular *type* of moral theory. Any problems in the theory may adversely affect the epistemological inquiry. On the other hand, the theory's advantages may be advantages for epistemology as well.

Almost all epistemological theories are modeled on act-based moral theories. When their model is deontological ethics, that is usually readily apparent. Less obvious is the fact that the popular theory of reliabilism is structurally parallel to consequentialism. To my knowledge, no epistemological theory is closely modeled on a pure virtue theory. The idea of intellectual virtue was introduced into the epistemological literature by Ernest Sosa, but Sosa does no more than mention an association with virtue ethics, and subsequently "virtue epistemology" has been used as another name for reliabilism. The works of Lorraine Code and James Montmarquet come closer to linking epistemology with virtue ethics, but neither one derives the concept of epistemic virtue from a background aretaic ethics or pushes the similarities be-

xiii

tempted, but to extend the range of moral concepts to include the normative dimension of cognitive activity. At the same time, this thesis is not simply a semantical quibble about the meaning of the word "moral." If I am right, normative epistemology is a branch of ethics. Either discipline ignores the other at its peril.

Finally, I will argue that intellectual virtue is the primary normative component of both justified belief and knowledge. The justifiedness of beliefs is related to intellectual virtue as the rightness of acts is related to moral virtue in a pure virtue ethics. In both cases it is the latter that is more fundamental. I define knowledge as cognitive contact with reality arising from what I call "acts of intellectual virtue." The theory gives a prominent place to the virtue of *phronesis*, a virtue whose primary function is to mediate between and among the whole range of moral and intellectual virtues. My hope is that this project will show how a virtue-based epistemology is preferable to a belief-based epistemology for some of the same reasons that a virtue-based moral theory is preferable to an act-based moral theory.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I is on metaepistemology. Part II is on normative ethics. Part III is on normative epistemology. In Part I, I examine some problems in contemporary epistemology and show the advantages of the virtue approach I take in the rest of the book. In Part II, I develop a theory of virtue and vice that is broad enough to handle the evaluation of cognitive activity. In this part I attempt to advance the analysis of the structure of virtue beyond its present point in the contemporary literature and to make a case for a view of human psychology in which cognitive activity cannot be sharply separated from feeling states and motivations. In this part I also argue for the thesis that intellectual virtues are forms of moral virtue. I then show how the deontic epistemic concepts of justified belief and epistemic duty can be defined in terms of intellectual virtue in the same way that the deontic concepts of right act and moral duty can be defined in terms of the traditional concept of moral virtue. In Part III I apply my account of intellectual virtue to the primary question of epistemology, namely, when is a person in a state of knowledge? I offer criticisms of some major recent theories that have been labeled "virtue epistemology," answer anticipated objections to my

theory, show how the theory I propose is immune to Gettier problems, and end with some conjectures on the connections among the sciences of ethics, epistemology, and cognitive theory.

In this inquiry I do not investigate such time-honored questions of epistemology as: What does a rational doxastic structure look like? That is to say, how are we to decide among the competing models offered by foundationalism, coherentism, and their variants? Neither do I attempt to answer the question: What is the origin of knowledge? That is to say, how are we to decide among empiricism, rationalism, and other theories on the basis for obtaining knowledge? Nor do I say very much about the kind of knowledge that cannot be subsumed under the category of knowing-that. Accounts of knowledge are often distorted by ignoring forms of knowledge other than knowing-that, and I will attempt to be sensitive to the dangers. A comprehensive theory of knowledge would have to include both the propositional and the nonpropositional, but the inquiry of this book will not go very far into the latter.

In my approach I take seriously the treatment of the concept of knowledge throughout the history of philosophy, but at the same time I connect it with the main concerns of contemporary epistemology (e.g., the internalism/externalism dispute, Gettier problems). In my approach to the analysis of virtue I attempt the same combination of concern for the historical tradition with an awareness of the theoretical questions lately considered most interesting in ethics (e.g., moral luck, the scope of the moral). My illustrations and counterexamples are not limited to the singularly peculiar world of philosophers' fiction but may be drawn from literature, from the history of philosophy, or from ordinary experience. My aim is to show how it is possible for a pure virtue theory to be rich enough to provide the foundations of normative epistemology.

Part I

The methodology of epistemology

The nature of knowledge is arguably the central concern of epistemology and unarguably one of the major interests of philosophy from its beginning. Ever since Plato and no doubt long before, knowledge has been held in high regard. Plato called knowledge the most important element in life (*Protagoras* 352d) and said that the only thing truly evil is to be deprived of it (*Protagoras* 345b). Even today, few deny that it is the chief cognitive state to which we aspire, and some claim that it is the chief state of any kind to which we aspire. The possession of knowledge is one of life's great joys – or, at least, one of its benefits. In short, knowledge is valuable.

The valuational aspect of knowledge and of the related states of justified, rational, or warranted belief has led to numerous parallels between moral and epistemic discourse. As Roderick Chisholm observed years ago, "many of the characteristics philosophers have thought peculiar to ethical statements also hold of epistemic statements" (1969, p. 4). Since then epistemologists have routinely referred to epistemic *duty* and *responsibility*, to epistemic *norms* and *values,* and to intellectual *virtue.* On occasion they also use forms of argument that parallel arguments in ethics. In some cases this is done consciously, but in other cases it appears to be unnoticed, and the epistemological discussion is carried on without attention to the fact that the corresponding

1

discussions in ethics have by now become more advanced.[1] Section 1 will be devoted to an examination of these parallels. In 1.1 I argue that when epistemologists borrow moral concepts, they implicitly borrow the types of ethical theory in which these concepts are embedded. An awareness of the fact that moral concepts function in different ways in different types of moral theory can illuminate their use in epistemology. Almost all contemporary epistemic theories take an act-based moral theory as their model, even most of those that use the concept of intellectual virtue. But I argue in 1.2 that a virtue-based epistemic theory has certain advantages over a belief-based theory that parallel some of the advantages of a virtue-based ethical theory over an act-based ethical theory.

In section 2 I defend the desirability of a virtue approach from a different direction – from problems in contemporary epistemology. First, there are the problems surrounding the concept of justification, which have led to the present impasse between internalism and externalism. I suggest that since justification is a property of a belief, it is very difficult to adjudicate disputes over this concept if the belief is treated as the bottom-level object of evaluation. Instead, if we focus on the deeper concept of an intellectual virtue and treat the justifiability of a belief as derivative, these problems no longer loom so large and we may hope that the internalism/externalism dispute will lose much of its sting. Another problem in epistemology is the worry that making the single belief state of a single person the locus of evaluation is too narrow. For one thing, it has led to the neglect of two epistemic values that have been very important in the history of philosophy: understanding and wisdom. For another, the social basis for knowledge and justification needs to be recognized, as well as the

---

[1] Jonathan Dancy has made a similar point in discussing the analogies between ethics and epistemology: "In general, ethics as a subject has been more exhaustively investigated, and the tendency has been for epistemologists to use for their own purposes results which they take to have been established on the other side. Since they are commonly ill-informed about the solidity of these 'results,' the resulting epistemology is often unstable" (Dancy and Sosa 1992, p. 119). Dancy goes on to mention virtue epistemology in particular and the desirability of its being informed by results in ethics.

connection between epistemic states and noncognitive states of the believer. These concerns can be handled more readily by a virtue approach. Then in section 3 I look at a particular form of the connection between cognitive and noncognitive states: the connection between believing and feeling. There are numerous ways in which believing includes or is caused by feeling in the broad sense, including emotion and desire, and this gives us another reason to use ethics, particularly virtue ethics, in analyzing the normative aspect of belief states.

I will make a close association between theoretical ethics and normative epistemology in this book. But before that can be done convincingly, one objection to connecting moral and epistemic evaluation should be considered. This is the claim that whereas acts are voluntary, beliefs are not, so there is an important disanalogy between the primary object of moral evaluation – the act – and the primary object of epistemic evaluation – the belief. In 4.1 I argue that since the point of a virtue approach is to shift the locus of evaluation from the act/belief to the virtue, it follows that this objection largely misses the point, but I then go on to argue in 4.2 and 4.3 that in any case, beliefs and acts are sufficiently similar in voluntariness in a wide range of cases to permit similar types of evaluation.

1 USING MORAL THEORY IN EPISTEMOLOGY

The relationship between ethics and normative epistemology is both close and uneasy. The so-called ethics of belief debate has called attention to the idea that we can be commended or criticized for our beliefs and other cognitive states, but it is disputable whether the sense of evaluation intended is distinctively moral. As we have already seen, moral terminology is often used, but epistemic evaluation is conducted within practices that do not include some of the characteristic components of moral evaluation, most significantly, a system of rewards and punishments. Still, it is worth considering the indications that we think of ourselves as responsible for our epistemic states in a sense at least close to that of the moral. Michael Stocker (1982) has presented a

3

prima facie case for the affirmative, arguing that responsibility for physical acts is linked with responsibility for mental goings-on, including beliefs, but this position is controversial, and since it makes responsibility for cognitive activity derivative from re-sponsibility for overt acts, it limits the scope of cognitive responsi-bility in a way I believe seriously underrates the true extent of our cognitive responsibility. More recently, Christopher Hookway (1994) has argued that epistemic evaluation ought to focus on the activity of inquiry rather than on beliefs, and that the ethics of inquiry will show the proper place of self-controlled personal responsibility in epistemic evaluation.[2] This approach seems to me a promising one.

The ambivalence about our responsibility for having knowl-edge or justified belief is dramatically exemplified in the present impasse between internalism and externalism. The internalism/externalism distinction can be applied either to theories of justifi-cation or to theories of knowledge. Clearly, no matter how we define knowledge and justified belief, they will turn out to be highly desirable and important cognitive states, and this means there is something good about these states. But the type of good intended is not always clear, and this confusion is at the root of the internalist/externalist debate. Internalists about justification require that the factors needed for justification be cognitively accessible and internal to the believer, whereas externalists deny this, maintaining that the believer need not be aware of the fea-ture or features that make her belief justified. A parallel distinc-tion has been made in the account of the normative component of knowledge.[3] Internalists think of knowledge or justified belief as

---

[2] In this connection Kenneth W. Kemp has told me that he thinks that the root of the difference between me and Aristotle is that the form of intellectual activity which is my paradigm is that of inquiry, while for Aristotle the paradigm is that of contemplation. The work that follows may serve to confirm Kemp's appraisal.

[3] There are many different ways of drawing the distinction between internalism and externalism. Probably the most common one is to define internalism as the view that *all* justifying features of a belief be cognitively accessible and internal to the agent, whereas externalists claim that *some* justifying features are external or inaccessible. But it is clear from the discussion of reliabilism, the most popu-

good in a sense similar to the way we think of acts, motives, and persons as good. These are the objects of praise when they are good and blame when they are bad. Externalists think of knowledge or justified belief as good in the sense we think of eyesight, hearing, intelligence, or musical talent as good. We may, in some circumstances, praise very high quality in these faculties, but we tend not to blame deficiencies in them and generally neither praise nor blame them when they are normal. Given this fundamental difference in the senses in which epistemic states can be good, it is not surprising that the internalism/externalism dispute has so far been intractable.

Later we will consider the problem of the extent to which our behavior of any kind is under our control, but at the outset it is worth remarking that we do think our cognitive behavior as well as our overt behavior can be favorably affected by effort and training on our part. Some of the most important questions we ask about our lives include "What should I think about?" and "What should I believe?" as well as "What should I want?" and "What should I do?" Furthermore, we criticize others for their beliefs as well as for their actions, and we probably are even more inclined to criticize their beliefs than their feelings and desires. For example, a person who cannot help feeling envious but attempts to control such feelings is not criticized as much as someone who permits his envy to influence his beliefs on the morality of social and economic arrangements. The same point applies to beliefs formed, not out of undue influence by the passions, but by a more obviously "mental" error. So we blame a person who makes hasty generalizations or who ignores the testimony of reliable authority. Such criticism is much closer to *moral* criticism than the criticism of bad eyesight or poor blood circulation. When people call others shortsighted or pigheaded, their criticism is as much like moral criticism as when they call them offensive or

lar version of externalism, that externalists generally believe that the most important or salient justifying features typically are inaccessible to the agent's consciousness. This permits hybrid positions according to which some important justifying features are and some are not cognitively accessible. See Laurence BonJour's contribution to Dancy and Sosa 1992, p. 132, for an explanation of the way this distinction is used in the contemporary literature.

5

of reliabilism, structurally parallel to consequentialism. In re-
liabilist theories the epistemic goal is to bring about true beliefs
and to avoid bringing about false beliefs, just as on consequential-
ist theories the moral goal is to bring about good states of affairs
and to avoid bringing about bad states of affairs. And like most
consequentialist ethics, reliabilism understands the good as quan-
titative. Whereas the utilitarian aims to maximize the balance of
pleasure over pain, the reliabilist aims to maximize the balance of
true over false beliefs.

So both deontological and reliabilist theories in epistemology
have structural similarities with act-based ethics. An interesting
variant is the theory of Ernest Sosa, who, in his well-known paper
"The Raft and the Pyramid" (1980), proposed that epistemologists
focus on intellectual virtue, a property of a person, rather than on
properties of belief states, and argued that the concept of intellec-
tual virtue can be used to bypass the dispute between founda-
tionalists and coherentists on proper cognitive structure. I find
Sosa's suggestion illuminating but have been disappointed that
he has not adapted his concept of virtue from a virtue theory of
morality. Rather, his model of a moral theory is act-based, and his
definition of virtue is consequentialist: "An intellectual virtue is a
quality bound to help maximize one's surplus of truth over error"
(1985, p. 227; reprinted in Sosa 1991, p. 225). On the other hand,
Sosa's idea of justification is more deontological, involving the
adoption of a belief through "cognizance of its according with the
subject's principles, including principles as to what beliefs are
permissible in the circumstances as viewed by that subject" (1991,
p. 144). Sosa's theory, then, combines consequentialist and deon-
tological approaches with an informal concept of virtue that is not
embedded in aretaic ethics. Like a virtue ethicist, he is sensitive to
the importance of the social environment in his understanding of
intellectual virtue, but Sosa does not go very far to connect his use
of the concept of intellectual virtue with its use in ethics, and he
apparently believes Aristotelian ethics to be generally inapplica-
ble to his concerns.[4] In any case, he makes no attempt to integrate

---

[4] In "Intellectual Virtue in Perspective" (1991, p. 271) Sosa dissociates his use of
the concept of a virtue from the Aristotelian sense. In referring to the faculty of

intellectual virtue into the broader context of a subject's psychic structure in the way that has been done by many philosophers for the moral virtues. What's more, Sosa's examples of intellectual virtues are faculties such as eyesight and memory, which are not virtues at all in traditional virtue theory. It turns out, then, that his plea for a turn to the concept of intellectual virtue actually has little to do with the concept of intellectual virtue *as* a virtue in the classical sense.

In fairness to Sosa, however, it ought to be pointed out that virtue ethicists have had little to say about intellectual virtue either. Generally the only intellectual virtue that gets any attention is *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, but that is examined only because of Aristotle's connection of *phronesis* with the distinctively *moral* virtues. The intellectual virtues that have direct relevance to epistemic evaluation are typically ignored altogether, so it is no wonder that Sosa has not found much help in virtue ethics for the analysis of the concept he believes is central to epistemology. Virtue theory simply has not kept pace with the needs of epistemology if Sosa is right. I think, then, that Sosa's insight that it would be fruitful for epistemology to make the primary object of evaluation intellectual virtues and vices and to

sight, he says, "Is possession of such a faculty a 'virtue'? Not in the narrow Aristotelian sense, of course, since it is not a disposition to make deliberate choices. But there is a broader sense of 'virtue,' still Greek, in which anything with a function – natural or artificial – does have virtues. The eye does, after all, have its virtues, and so does a knife. And if we include grasping the truth about one's environment among the proper ends of a human being, then the faculty of sight would seem in a broad sense a virtue in human beings; and if grasping the truth is an intellectual matter then that virtue is also in a straightforward sense an intellectual virtue." In this passage Sosa seems to treat sight as the virtue of the eye, but in Plato and Aristotle sight is the function of the eye, not its virtue. Plato (*Republic* 352e–353c) and Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* [hereafter abbreviated *NE*] II.6.1106a14–27) both accept an analogy according to which a person's (or soul's) virtue is related to his function as the eye's virtue is to the eye's function. The eye's virtue is a trait that enables the eye to see well. Extending the analogy in the way Sosa desires, we should say that grasping the truth is a function of the intellect, not its virtue. The virtues would be those traits whereby the intellect is enabled to grasp the truth well. I thank Charles Young for noticing this problem in the way Sosa relates the concept of virtue to that of a function.

9

attach secondary justification to individual beliefs because of their source in intellectual virtues is a significant contribution to the field. In addition, his suggestion that "[w]e need to consider more carefully the concept of a virtue and the distinction between moral and intellectual virtues" (1980, reprinted in Sosa 1991, p. 190) strikes me as exactly right and is advice I am following in this book.

In the years since Sosa introduced the concept of intellectual virtue into the epistemological literature, the term "virtue epistemology" has become known as another name for reliabilism and related theories such as Plantinga's theory of proper function (Greco 1992, 1993; Kvanvig 1992). But as we have seen, reliabilism is structurally parallel to consequentialism, not virtue theory, and although Plantinga's theory does not have a consequentialist structure, it is not modeled on a virtue theory either, and, like Sosa, Plantinga focuses on faculties, not virtues.

Like Sosa, Greco defines an intellectual virtue in terms of its propensity to achieve a certain consequence:

> What is an intellectual virtue or faculty? A virtue or faculty in general is a power or ability or competence to achieve some result. An intellectual virtue or faculty, in the sense intended above, is a power or ability or competence to arrive at truths in a particular field and to avoid believing falsehoods in that field. Examples of human intellectual virtues are sight, hearing, introspection, memory, deduction and induction. (1992, p. 520)

It is quite obvious that sight, hearing, and memory are faculties, and (as mentioned in n. 4), the Greeks identified virtues, not with faculties themselves, but with the excellences of faculties. The sense in which Greco's examples can be considered virtues, then, is misapplied if it is intended to reflect the way the concept of virtue has been used in ethics. In fact, it has little connection with the history of the concept of intellectual virtue, although that history is quite sparse, as already noted. Aristotle's examples of intellectual virtues include theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), practical wisdom (*phronesis*), and understanding or insight (*nous*). Hobbes's list includes good wit and discretion; Spinoza's primary

intellectual virtue is understanding. Many more examples of intellectual virtues will be discussed in what follows. None of these qualities are faculties like sight or hearing.

Kvanvig (1992) also treats reliabilism as the primary example of virtue epistemology, giving special attention to the theories of Armstrong, Goldman, and Nozick. None of these theories attempts to analyze intellectual virtue on the model of the concept of virtue operative in an aretaic moral theory, nor do they make much, if any, use of the work of moral philosophers in understanding the nature of virtue. Even when Kvanvig traces the roots of virtue epistemology to Aristotle, it is to Aristotle's epistemology that he briefly turns, not to Aristotle's theory of virtue. Kvanvig's attack on the turn to virtues in structural epistemology therefore has no bearing on the project I am developing here any more than do the objections offered by Greco.

Ironically, although Kvanvig devotes most of his book to establishing the bankruptcy of what *he* calls "virtue epistemology," the position he urges at the end of his book is one with which I wholeheartedly agree. There Kvanvig urges us to give up the "Cartesian perspective" that evaluates beliefs singly, attempting to cement them together to form a cognitive structure, and ignoring the social conditions of believing and the importance of intellectual models. What is needed, he says, is a paradigm shift from the atomistic approach to one that focuses on knowledge as a communal effort, extended in time and embedded in all the theoretical and practical activities that characterize human life. When such a shift is made, he argues, the true importance of the virtues will emerge. I find this suggestion agreeable and have made an independent attempt to carry out such a shift in the theory that follows. But, unlike Kvanvig, I will argue that a virtue-based epistemology is well suited to analyze the traditional concepts of epistemology, namely, justification and knowledge.

Two theories that come closer to the one I wish to develop are those of Lorraine Code and James Montmarquet. In her book *Epistemic Responsibility* (1987), Code gives a provocative account of intellectual virtue, stressing a "socialized" approach to epistemology, pointing out the connections between epistemology

and moral theory, and exhibiting a sensitivity to the epistemological importance of aspects of human nature other than the purely cognitive. Code credits Sosa with the insight that epistemology ought to give more weight to the knowing subject, her environment, and her epistemic community than it had previously, but Code argues that Sosa's reliabilism does not go far enough in that direction. She urges a move to what she calls a "responsibilist epistemology":

> I call my position "responsibilism" in contradistinction to Sosa's proposed "reliabilism," at least when *human* knowledge is under discussion. I do so because the concept "responsibility" can allow emphasis upon the active nature of knowers/believers, whereas the concept "reliability" cannot. In my view, a knower/believer has an important degree of choice with regard to modes of cognitive structuring, and is accountable for these choices; whereas a "reliable" knower could simply be an accurate, and relatively passive, recorder of experience. One speaks of a "reliable" computer, not a "responsible" one. (Pp. 50–1)

This suggestion is promising and there are insights in Code's treatment of the intellectual virtues to which we will turn again in what follows. Still, Code looks only at consequentialist and deontological ethics for analogies with epistemology rather than at virtue theory (1987, pp. 40–2). And even that much she does not pursue very far, saying, "Despite the analogy I argue for . . . between epistemological and ethical reasoning, they are not amenable to adequate discussion under the rubric of any of the traditional approaches to ethics, nor under any reasonable amalgam thereof" (p. 68). Code's account supports the rejection of the atomistic approach to epistemology, seen in the later book by Kvanvig, but she neither makes such a rejection explicitly nor sees the problem in using act-based moral theory as the analogue for epistemic theory when such a rejection is made. This leads her to identify with Sosa's theory more than she should, given the insights she develops in her book. *Her* examples are virtues in the sense of classical ethics; she does not seem to notice that his are not.

12

approach to epistemology that can be connected at critical points with other, more familiar approaches. I will have to leave to others the task of working out the details of such a connection.

I conclude that no epistemological theory is based on a carefully developed virtue theory. We have seen that several theories recognize, or at least come close to recognizing, the desirability of such a theory, but they do not consciously connect normative epistemological concepts with virtue ethics in any great detail. To make this connection, the concept of intellectual virtue should be analyzed sufficiently to show its status as a virtue and its relationship to moral virtue.

1.2 *Some advantages of virtue-based theories*

Until recently contemporary moral theories were almost exclusively act-based, with more and more subtle forms of consequentialism vying with more and more subtle deontological theories for the allegiance of philosophers. Lately there has been a resurgence of interest in virtue theories, as well as some strong and well-known attacks on contemporary act-based theories, although the latter are not always associated with the former.[5]

The mark of a virtue theory of morality is that the primary object of evaluation is persons or inner traits of persons rather than acts. To describe a good person is to describe that person's virtues, and it is maintained that a virtue is reducible neither to the performance of acts independently identified as right nor to a disposition to perform such acts.[6] There is both more and less to a moral virtue than a disposition to act in the right way. There is more because a virtue also includes being disposed to have characteristic emotions, desires, motives, and attitudes. There is less because a virtuous person does not invariably act in a way

---

[5] A good example of this is Susan Wolf's paper "Moral Saints" (1982). Wolf's provocative attack on both utilitarian and Kantian theories is not accompanied by a call to bring back classical Aristotelianism. In fact, she explicitly denies that our conception of the moral will permit this move.

[6] Gregory Trianosky (1987) makes a distinction, discussed below. What he calls primary and secondary actional virtues are conceptually or causally tied to right action respectively, but what he calls spiritual virtues are not so tied.

that can be fully captured by any set of independent normative criteria.[7] The common approach of act-based moral theories to begin the analysis with right and wrong acts and to subsequently define virtues and vices in terms of a conceptual or causal connection to such acts is insufficient to capture the nature of virtues and vices as they are understood by such theories.

Within this framework there are several varieties of virtue theories. Some theories do not define a virtue in terms of a right act, but neither do they define a right act in terms of virtues. They focus on the agent and her traits as a way of determining what is right but do not maintain that what is right is right because it is what a virtuous person would do; they say only that what a virtuous person would do is the best *criterion* for what is right. These theories are what Michael Slote calls agent-focused (1993 and forthcoming), and they are what I call weak virtue theories. By a pure virtue theory, in contrast, I mean a theory that treats act evaluation as derivative from the character of an agent. Roughly, an act is right *because* it is what a virtuous person might do. In such theories aretaic concepts are conceptually more fundamental than deontic concepts.

Since, as far as I know, no one has yet proposed an epistemological theory that is closely modeled on any form of virtue theory, it is worth investigating as many forms of the virtue approach as possible. Much of what follows will not require a position on the preferability of one form over another, and my hope is that most of what I do in this book will be agreeable to the adherents of most versions of virtue ethics and of interest to adherents of other types of ethical theory. When we get to the relation between virtues and acts/beliefs in Part II, I will propose a way to define the evaluative properties of both acts and beliefs in terms of moral and intellectual virtue, the approach of a pure virtue theory, and

---

[7] Some virtue ethicists go farther and claim that not only is it impossible to reduce a virtue to a disposition to act in a way that can be fully captured by some set of normative criteria, but a virtue is not reducible to a disposition to act in a way that can be captured by any set of *descriptive* criteria either. So a virtue is not an act disposition of any sort. Von Wright (1963) and Wallace (1978) take this position.

one of my aims is to show that even the strongest form of virtue ethics can be plausibly extended to handle epistemic evaluation.

Let us now consider several respects in which a virtue approach to ethics has been considered superior to an act-based approach. Each of these points has already been made in the literature and my present purpose is not to endorse them but to call attention to the fact that in each case a parallel point can be made about a virtue approach to epistemology. These points are not equally plausible, but they do show us how concerns in ethical theory have counterparts in normative epistemology.

Probably the first major attempt in recent philosophy to call attention to the advantages of focusing ethics on virtues rather than on acts was Elizabeth Anscombe's important paper "Modern Moral Philosophy," which appeared in 1958. There Anscombe argues that the principal notions of modern moral discourse – namely, *right, wrong, obligation,* and *moral duty* – lack content. On the other hand, concepts such as *just, chaste, courageous,* and *truthful* are conceptually rich. A similar point was made by Bernard Mayo in the same year (1958, p. 209). In addition, Anscombe argues, *obligation, right, wrong,* and *duty* are legal concepts that make no sense without a lawgiver and judge. Traditionally, such a legal authority was God, and it is no accident that these concepts entered Western philosophical discourse with the Judeo-Christian religion. Given the modern absence of an ethic grounded in theism, however, legalistic ethics is incoherent. It would be far better to return to an Aristotelian virtue ethics, which contains neither a blanket concept of wrong nor a concept of duty, Anscombe argues.

Moral philosophers have not generally accepted Anscombe's position that the concepts favored by legalistic, act-based ethics are incoherent or unnatural in the absence of a divine lawgiver, but it is not uncommon to accept her claim that virtue concepts have the advantage of greater richness; in fact, Bernard Williams's distinction between "thin" and "thick" moral concepts is now well known.[8] Williams's examples of thick ethical concepts in-

---

[8] Bernard Williams makes this distinction throughout *Ethics and the Limits of*

clude *courage, treachery, brutality,* and *gratitude.* Such concepts are amalgams of the normative and the descriptive. That is, they both imply a positive or negative moral judgment about that to which they apply and have sufficient descriptive content to permit ordinary users of these concepts to pick out typical instances in everyday life. Clearly, not only are virtue concepts "thick" in Williams's sense, but virtue concepts are among the paradigm examples.

A second and more compelling set of considerations favoring a virtue approach to ethics is that more and more philosophers are becoming convinced that morality is not strictly rule governed. The idea is that there can be no complete set of rules sufficient for giving a determinate answer to the question of what an agent should do in every situation of moral choice. With the exception of act utilitarianism, act-based theorists have been faced with the problem that more and more complex sets of rules seem to be necessary to capture the particularity of moral decision making. Philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum have argued for a more particularist approach, using literature as the basis for a model that does not begin with the rule or principle but with the insight into the particular case.[9] While particularists are not necessarily virtue theorists,[10] dissatisfaction with attempts to force the making of a moral judgment into a strictly rule-governed model is one of the motivations for contemporary virtue ethics.[11]

A third reason favoring a virtue approach to ethics is that it can explain better than act-based theories the specifically moral value of such personal goods as love and friendship.[12] There are cases in which acting out of a motive of love or friendship seems to be morally preferable to acting out of duty, and when a motive of

---

Philosophy (1985), and Allan Gibbard also uses this distinction in *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (1990).

[9] Martha Nussbaum takes this position in numerous places. See especially *Love's Knowledge* (1990).

[10] W. D. Ross is an example of a particularist, nonabsolutist, act-based theorist.

[11] Although the objection that morality is not strictly rule governed has been leveled against strict deontological theories, it has been argued that not even Kant thought that moral reasoning is algorithmic. See O'Neill 1989, esp. chap. 1.

[12] Examples would be Stocker 1976 and Blum 1980.

love and a motive of duty conflict, it is not obvious that the latter ought to override the former. Although it is not impossible for an act-based ethical theory to account for such intuitions,[13] it is much easier on a virtue approach since the perspective of the individual agent can easily be worked into the concept of a virtue, whereas the major act-based theories approach morality primarily from an impersonal standpoint and can accommodate the distinctive values of individual persons only with difficulty.

A fourth reason favoring the focus of moral theory on virtues rather than on acts and principles is that there are virtues that are not reducible to specifiable acts or act dispositions. Gregory Trianosky (1987) has argued that there are higher-order moral virtues that cannot be analyzed in terms of relations to acts. For example, it is a virtue to have well-ordered feelings. A person with such a virtue has positive higher-order feelings toward her own emotions. Similarly, it is a virtue to be morally integrated, to have a positive higher-order evaluation of one's own moral commitments. These are virtues that cannot be analyzed in terms of some relation to right action. Furthermore, although Trianosky does not say so explicitly, such higher-order virtues are connected to the virtue of integrity since integrity in one of its senses is the virtue of having a morally unified self, and it is difficult to see how such a virtue can be explicated in terms of dispositions to perform acts of a specified kind.[14]

The resurgence of interest in virtue ethics in recent philosophy is certainly not due solely to these four sets of considerations. Nonetheless, these reasons are important, have generated considerable discussion, and all have analogues in the evaluation of cognitive activity. In fact, as we shall see, some of them are even stronger in epistemic evaluation than in moral evaluation.

I have said that contemporary epistemology is belief-based, just as modern ethics is act-based. Epistemic states are evaluated in terms of properties of beliefs or belief dispositions, just as moral evaluations are typically given in terms of properties of acts

---

[13] Again, W. D. Ross comes to mind.

[14] I surmise that the difficulty of an act-based theory in accounting for integrity in this sense is one of the reasons integrity is rarely discussed.

If those philosophers who advise a more particularist approach to moral evaluation are right, it is reasonable to think that the same point applies to epistemic evaluation. An interesting consequence is that the recent turn to literature for help in understanding the right way to act might also help us in understanding the right way to think and to form beliefs. Good fiction can give us a vivid picture of the inner life of its characters, and this includes the intricacies of their methods of inquiry and processes of belief formation. If we can obtain a better sense of the morality of acts from fictional portrayal, it is also likely that we can obtain a better sense of the goodness and badness of ways of thinking and believing from fictional portrayals as well.

The third advantage of aretaic ethics also has a parallel in epistemic evaluation. Contemporary epistemology focuses on epistemic values that are impersonal: the value of possessing truth and the value of rationality and justified belief. Truth, like utility, is a good that does not depend upon the point of view of any given individual, and rationality and justifiability are typically understood in a way that also is impersonal. But there is one personal epistemic value so important that it is the one from which philosophy gets its name, and that is wisdom. Wisdom is a value that is at least difficult, probably impossible, to understand impersonally on the model of rationality. It is likely that wisdom, like friendship, takes a different form in each individual case, and it resists any analysis that does not make essential reference to the standpoint of the individual. This feature of wisdom is reflected in the fact that human knowledge is usually thought to increase over the ages, but few people would observe the same progress in human wisdom. This is presumably because there is no stock of wisdom possessed by the species comparable to the stock of knowledge. Each person has to begin at the beginning in developing wisdom, and the experience needed for wisdom requires a certain amount of time, whereas growth in knowledge can be accelerated by proper teaching of the most advanced knowledge of an age. A related reason for the difference is that much knowledge is propositional and can be learned a bit at a time, whereas wisdom unifies the whole of human experience and understanding. The unifying feature of wisdom explains another distinctive

mark of wisdom, namely, that it cannot be misused, whereas knowledge surely *can* be misused. Wisdom not only unifies the knowledge of the wise person but unifies her desires and values as well. There is nothing incoherent or even surprising about a knowledgeable person who is immoral, but it is at least surprising, perhaps incoherent, to say that a wise person is immoral.

These considerations may explain how the focus on belief in epistemological theories has led to a neglect of the importance and value of wisdom. The fact that there is no stock of wisdom distinct from its integration into the psyche of the wise person shows that wisdom cannot be analyzed as a function of individual propositions believed or individual states of believing, nor can a belief-based approach explain the connection between wisdom and moral goodness. The way in which wisdom is acquired makes it similar to the way in which friendships develop, suggesting that the individual perspective of the wise person is part of what makes it valuable. And even if the claim that perspective is essential to wisdom is not convincing, it cannot be denied that a virtue approach is preferable in an account of wisdom if wisdom itself is a virtue, as the tradition has thought it to be. And even if wisdom is not a virtue but an epistemic value of a different sort, surely wisdom is connected more closely to virtues than to justified or rational believing as the latter is handled in contemporary epistemology.

We may even hope that a virtue epistemology would be in a position to deal with the epistemic analogue of conflicts between impersonal and personal values. If it is an advantage of virtue ethics that it can explain better than act-based theories the proper moral relationship between the motive of duty and the motive of friendship, it ought also to be an advantage of a virtue epistemology to explain better than belief-based theories the proper relationship between the motive of rationality or justifiability, on the one hand, and the motive for wisdom and other personal epistemic values such as understanding and insight, on the other. Just as the motivation for impersonal moral values can conflict with personal values (e.g., duty can conflict with friendship), impersonal epistemic values can conflict with personal epistemic values. Perhaps a person facing a conflict between rejecting a

23

claim on the basis of a counterexample and accepting it because of the understanding it provides may be in a quandary of this sort. On the face of it, this conflict can be construed as a conflict between the desire for the impersonal value of rationality and the desire for the personal value of understanding or an increase of wisdom. This is not to deny that the presence of a putative counterexample requires us to give further thought to a proposal, but it does indicate an advantage of a virtue theory since such a theory can give a place to both values, whereas it is difficult to see how a belief-based theory can even properly formulate the conflict between rational believing and understanding or wisdom.

Consider finally the epistemic analogue of the fourth objection to act-based theories. The type of higher-order moral virtue identified by Trianosky has a cognitive parallel. It is an intellectual virtue to be cognitively integrated, just as it is a moral virtue to be morally integrated. A person who is cognitively integrated has positive higher-order attitudes toward her own intellectual character and the quality of the beliefs and level of understanding that such a character produces. Good belief-based theorists such as William Alston have sometimes attempted to identify this desirable quality, but Alston's way of doing so is to say that not only is it epistemically valuable to *be* justified in one's beliefs, but it is epistemically valuable to be justified in believing one's beliefs are justified (1993, p. 529). Unfortunately, this way of approaching the virtue of cognitive integration is inadequate because the quality in question is not a property of a single belief, not even a belief about all of one's beliefs. To have a good intellectual character, it is not sufficient to simply pile up justified beliefs and judge that they are justified. A person who is cognitively integrated has epistemic values that determine such things as the proportion of one's time spent gathering evidence or considering arguments for and against an unpromising theory, as well as the epistemic worth of one belief over another and the way in which each belief fits into her overall belief structure and is conducive to understanding. Cognitive integration is partially constitutive of intellectual integrity, the virtue of having an intellect with an identity. I conclude that at least some intellectual virtues cannot be analyzed in terms of a relation to good (justified, warranted) beliefs. The vir-

24

tue of intellectual integrity requires a virtue approach to at least some aspects of epistemic evaluation.

In addition to the objections to act-based theories in general, arguments against consequentialism have been given in the recent literature, some of which have analogues in problems with reliabilism and other externalist theories of knowledge or justification.[17] Consequentialism is an externalist moral theory. Whether or not the consequentialist identifies good with utility, good is seen as something that is *produced*. The moral value of an act is determined by something external to the act and external to the thoughts, feelings, and motives that produce the act. The way a person thinks or feels may have moral value, but it is only derivative – the value of a means to an end. Even when the consequentialist identifies good with a state of a person such as pleasure or knowledge, good is conceptually external to the nature of persons as such. Further, good is quantitatively measurable. It is, then, always at least conceptually possible, and often causally possible, that more good is produced when people act with no awareness of what they are doing or when they act from motives that are commonsensically vicious – motives such as vindictiveness, cruelty, or hatred. A world in which this is always the case is possible and it would be morally preferable to the one we have. The objection here is that there are goods such as love, friendship, and loyalty that are good in themselves, not only insofar as they produce a high level of good as identified from the external, impersonal viewpoint. In addition, some of these values are not quantifiable, nor is it most natural to treat them as the external products of acts that are right because of their production.

Reliabilism is structurally parallel to consequentialist ethics. According to reliabilism the epistemic goal is to form true beliefs and not to form false beliefs, just as on consequentialist theories the moral goal is to produce good states of affairs and not to produce evil states of affairs. And it has already been remarked

---

[17] We shall see in Part II that reliability is a component of intellectual virtue, so the differences between my theory and reliabilism are not as great as might be implied by the discussion of this section.

that like most consequentialist ethics, externalist epistemic theories are quantitative. Since truth is assumed to be a property of propositions, the objects of belief, the goal of gaining truth is increased with each succeeding true proposition believed. So just as the utilitarian aims to maximize the balance of pleasure over pain, the reliabilist aims to maximize the balance of true over false beliefs. The aim is to have as many true beliefs as possible while paying the price of as few false beliefs as can be managed. The human faculties, abilities, and feelings that lead a person to form true beliefs have epistemic value only insofar as they are means to such an end. There is nothing intrinsically epistemically valuable about human reason, memory, and the senses. It is conceptually and sometimes causally possible for people to gain more true beliefs without any cognitive effort or awareness of what they are doing, or when their beliefs are formed out of motives that are commonsensically vicious, such as a narrow-minded disregard for the views of others. A world in which this always happens would be an epistemically better world than the one we have. Furthermore, it has already been pointed out that truth is an impersonal value. We see, then, that each of the features of consequentialist ethics identified above has a parallel in reliabilist epistemology.

I wish to propose an objection to the reliabilist approach just described that parallels an objection sometimes made by virtue ethicists to utilitarianism. I will begin by considering two ways of being omniscient posed by Charles Taliaferro (1985) in a completely different context. Taliaferro compares two omniscient beings he calls Dennis and Christopher. Both Dennis and Christopher believe all and only true propositions, but Dennis believes them because he has learned them from Christopher, who we will suppose has "seen" the truths for himself or has learned them by his own power. Notice that from the reliabilist viewpoint the two omniscient believers are equal in knowledge. Both use perfectly reliable truth-producing mechanisms, and both end up with exactly the same set of beliefs. Dennis is an ideal cognizer as much as is Christopher, at least with respect to the goal of truth acquisition. But Taliaferro points out that Dennis is cognitively inferior to Christopher because of the way in which he gets his knowledge.

kind of theory, a matter that will be examined at the end of Part II, but we can say at least this much at this stage of the inquiry: It is an advantage in a theory if it can give a clear and unified account of the full range of human evaluative levels, both ethically and epistemically. The notions of virtue, vice, and their intermediate states are intended to apply to the full range of evaluative levels, whereas the concepts of right/wrong and justified/unjustified are not. We will need to see whether a virtue theory can live up to its promise of handling the full range of levels of evaluation after such a theory has been developed.

2 DIFFICULTIES IN CONTEMPORARY EPISTEMOLOGY

In section 1 we looked at reasons for using a virtue theory in the evaluation of epistemic states that arise within ethics. In this section we will look at reasons for preferring a virtue approach that arise within epistemology. I will investigate the current problems in resolving the nature of justification, as well as the complaints that contemporary epistemology is too atomistic and that the value of understanding has been neglected. I will argue that these problems should lead us to investigate a virtue theory of normative epistemology.

2.1 *Problems in the notion of justification*

One of the most intractable problems in contemporary epistemology is the dispute between internalists and externalists. This problem has now become the focus of the analysis of both the concept of knowledge and the concept of justification. The latter concept in particular seems to be in a conceptual muddle, and it is here that we will begin looking at the problems in contemporary epistemic theory.

Justification has been for some time a key concept in the Anglo-American epistemological literature. It fact, it has received more analytical attention than knowledge itself. This is partly due to the fact that it is commonly held that knowledge is justified true belief (JTB), and since the concept of true belief was thought to be

relatively clear until recently, attention turned to an account of justification. Of course, ever since Gettier's famous paper over thirty years ago, there have been misgivings about this project, but much of the motivation for the research involving Gettier cases has been the conviction that there is (or ought to be) an important connection between justification and knowledge. So many philosophers have thought that the JTB account of knowledge is more or less correct that it is virtually impossible to list its adherents. In fact, Roderick Chisholm (1989, p. 90) says its popularity extends far beyond the present, calling JTB "the traditional definition of knowledge," existing as far back as Plato's *Theaetetus.* An early-twentieth-century example of the same analysis can be found in C. I. Lewis, who says, "Knowledge is belief which is not only true but also is justified in its believing attitude" (1946, p. 9).

A second motivation for making justification central in epistemology is virtually the opposite of the first. Some epistemologists have thought it necessary to separate the concept of knowledge from an egocentric concept identified by Richard Foley (1993) with rationality and have focused their attention on the latter. Justification in at least one of its senses is an egocentric concept, associated more with rationality than with knowledge. So even when knowledge is removed from the center of discourse in epistemology, justification does not necessarily go with it. In short, the concept of justification is a highly important one in contemporary epistemology, and its importance is not limited to a narrow range of theories.

It is gradually becoming apparent, however, that there are so many notions of justification in the literature that it is difficult to identify a single target of dispute. Sometimes "justification" is used to name attributively whatever it is that, added to true belief, equals knowledge, but often it is connected with substantive notions such as basing beliefs on evidence or doing one's epistemic duty (Feldman and Conee 1985, p. 15; Firth 1978, p. 219), or being epistemically responsible (Kornblith 1983; BonJour 1985, p. 8), or doing any number of other things that are good or right from the believer's perspective or from the perspective of a rational person in the believer's circumstances.

30

Noting this plethora of views, both William Alston and Alvin Plantinga have recently argued that there is mischief in the idea of justification, and we will turn to their arguments next.[18] The problem as they see it is not simply that more than one concept has been analyzed under the name "justification," although that would be bad enough. More serious is the fact that conceptual confusion over justification has led to the present impasse between internalists and externalists. Internalists claim, roughly, that the believer must have cognitive access to the justifying condition of a belief, and externalists deny this. Although both sides have heaps of supporting arguments, it is remarkably difficult to resolve the differences between them. The heart of the problem is that the two approaches are working with different kinds of valuation. If Alston and Plantinga are right, it is impossible with the present confusion in the concept of justification to resolve these differences. We will turn first to Plantinga's argument since he believes the internalism/externalism dispute can be resolved by splitting the concept of justification. I will argue that this move will not work because the disagreement on the normative dimension of knowledge that has led to the internalism/externalism controversy is deeper than Plantinga recognizes.

Plantinga claims that (1) "the traditional view," originating with Locke and Descartes, identifies justification with both the component of knowledge in addition to true belief and the idea of doing one's epistemic duty, (2) the traditional view is an incoherent equivocation and is to blame for the impasse between internalism and externalism, and (3) the remedy is to separate the two concepts. Justification is connected with the idea of doing one's duty, which is the source of the attraction to internalism. Warrant is the element that converts true belief into knowledge and should be analyzed in an externalist fashion with a different type of normative dimension. Justification is neither necessary nor sufficient for warrant and it is a mistake to connect the two.

---

[18] See Plantinga 1990; Alston 1993. Large portions of Plantinga's 1990 paper now appear in the first chapter of his book *Warrant: The Current Debate*. In the book Plantinga stresses the deontological associations with the idea of justification and drops the claim made in the paper that the idea of justification is ambiguous.

31

The concept of knowledge is well rid of deontological associations.

Plantinga's point is both historical and conceptual and I will address both points. I will argue that although Plantinga appreciates the fact that the pretheoretical notion of knowledge includes a normative aspect, he is too quick to identify moral concepts with deontological ones, and he does not recognize the fact that internalism has a broader association with valuation than with deontology, both conceptually and historically. This leads Plantinga to underestimate the hold of internalism on accounts of knowledge.

It is clear from Plantinga's recent work that he identifies moral concepts with deontological ones, a view that is so common as to seem obvious to many post-Kantians. He says straightforwardly, "Most of us will agree that a person is guilty, properly blamed, properly subject to censure and moral disapproval, if and only if she fails to do her duty" (1990, p. 52).[19] But many philosophers past and present would deny that morality is coextensive with the realm of duty, not the least of whom is Aristotle. Nonetheless, Plantinga goes on to use the claim just quoted to attack internalism via an attack on the idea that knowledge is true belief that is dutiful or within one's epistemic rights or conforming to one's intellectual obligations. But as we shall see next, internalism is associated with moral concepts generally, not just with deontological notions. If so, Plantinga cannot refute internalism by arguing that the normative aspect of knowledge is not like the deontological. Instead, he must show that it is not like the moral.

Suppose that we were to take seriously the idea of investigating the normative component in knowledge on the analogy with moral virtue as proposed in section 1. Aristotle says we can be praised and blamed for our moral virtues and vices and for the voluntary actions that issue from these qualities (*NE* III.1.1109b30–1). We do not need to go into the intricacies of Aristotle's notion of the voluntary to understand his confidence that this area of our lives is one for which we are responsible. But one cannot be blamed for something that is inaccessible to one's con-

---

[19] The same sentence appears in Plantinga 1993a, p. 15.

sciousness and is not at least under one's indirect control. This internal accessibility need not be present at every moment at which a person is blameworthy, however, since Aristotle claims that the truly wicked person not only is no longer in control of his own nature but may no longer be even aware of his wickedness (*NE* VII.8.1150b30–6). Both consciousness and control were present at earlier stages of his decline, however. Aristotle's theory, then, contains an internalist aspect, and this is true in spite of the fact that notions of duty, obligation, or rights do not arise at all in his account. If, then, the normative element in knowledge were like Aristotelian moral virtue, there would be an internalist constraint on the account of knowledge that is not associated with deontology. Since Plantinga gives no arguments at all for the claim that internalism is associated only with deontology, he must be mistaken in the implied answer to his question, "Once one gives up the deontology, however, what is the reason or motivation for retaining the internalism?" (1990, p. 67).

Plantinga's point, however, is historical as well as conceptual. He claims that the source of internalist theories of knowledge is the deontology of Descartes and Locke. So even if he is wrong that deontology is the only imaginable source of internalism, he could still be right that deontology is what has in fact attracted epistemologists to internalism. However, Plantinga's discussion misconstrues both Descartes and Locke.

First, consider his quotation from Locke:

> Faith is nothing but a firm assent of the mind: which if it be regulated, as is our duty, cannot be afforded to anything, but upon good reason; and so cannot be opposite to it. He that believes, without having any reason for believing, may be in love with his own fancies; but neither seeks truth as he ought, nor pays the obedience due his maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep him out of mistake and error. He that does not this to the best of his power, however he sometimes lights on truth, is in the right but by chance; and I know not whether the luckiness of the accident will excuse the irregularity of his proceeding. This, at least is certain, that he must be accountable for whatever mistakes he

33

tion of *logos* with justification. In any case, the notion of *logos* is normative and is quite obviously internalist, although it is certainly not deontological. It is true that internalism in contemporary epistemology has been strongly influenced by the important work of Chisholm, the preeminent epistemological deontologist. Still, it is very unlikely that Chisholm bears the principal responsibility for the hold that internalism has had in epistemology, even for recent writers.

Plantinga's solution is to use the term "warrant" for the normative element in knowledge, for which he gives an externalist account, and he reserves "justification" for an internalist normative aspect of beliefs that is independent of knowledge and presumably not as important.[23] I have one major misgiving about this approach apart from the considerations I have already given on the desirability of using a virtue approach to epistemology. Although the concept of justification is in a conceptual muddle, it at least has a history of usage in philosophical discourse, whereas the concept of warrant has virtually no history at all. It is not clear to me that much is gained by removing the muddled concept of justification from center stage in epistemology and letting another term fill one of the roles of "justification," one not previously in common usage.

It may be argued that Plantinga's target in this paper is *pure* internalism, and Aristotelian virtue theory is not purely internalist. But if this is Plantinga's intent, there would be no reason for him to conclude from an argument rejecting pure internalism that pure externalism ought to be accepted. So either he intends to attack weaker forms of internalism in his argument connecting internalism with deontology, in which case the argument fails at the step at which he makes the connection, or he intends to attack only pure internalism, in which case he has given no reason to reject theories that have stronger internalist elements than his own.[24]

---

[23] The evidence that justification is not as important as warrant for Plantinga is simply that he has written two volumes on warrant and is now writing a third, whereas he discusses justification mostly in the context of anticipated objections to his own theory.

[24] I thank John Greco for getting me to see the point of this paragraph.

In short, I believe Plantinga is right that the tradition assigns an internalist element to knowledge, but he is mistaken in thinking that the attraction to internalism is due solely to the association of deontological concepts with knowledge. He is right again that the concept of justification is in a muddle and that there appears to be an impasse between internalists and externalists, but he exaggerates the ease with which internalist intuitions can be removed from the concept of knowledge and assigned to a distinct territory of justification. Finally, the use of the new term "warrant" for the normative element of knowledge may not be illuminating if it simply replaces one of the previous senses of the word "justification."

Let us now look briefly at the problem as seen by William Alston in "Epistemic Desiderata" (1993). Alston goes farther than Plantinga. He identifies six candidates for necessary conditions for justification, all of which can be found in the contemporary literature, and he concludes that there is no uniquely identifiable concept about which competing accounts differ. The problem as Alston sees it cannot simply be solved by settling on one candidate and eliminating the rest.

The six candidates are as follows: (1) A justified belief must be *based on* an adequate ground. (2) What justifies a belief must *probabilize* it. (3) A justifier must be cognitively accessible to the subject. (4) A justified belief must satisfy certain higher-level conditions, in particular, not only must a justified belief be held only in circumstances in which it is permitted, but the believer must hold the belief in the knowledge (or justified belief) that it is permitted. (5) A justified belief must fit into a coherent total system of beliefs. (6) The believer must satisfy intellectual obligations in forming and maintaining the belief.

Like Plantinga, Alston focuses on the apparent irresolvability of the dispute between internalists and externalists over these conditions, and he proposes that they are working with different concepts, different selections of epistemic desiderata, not just different views on the proper application of a common concept (see esp. 1993, pp. 532–4). If Alston is right, there simply is not enough of a pretheoretical notion of justification to give us any

confidence that all these accounts are aiming to elucidate the same concept. Alston goes on to suggest that perhaps the most honest course would be to abandon the concept of justification altogether, although he says he doubts that this is feasible (p. 533).

In this paper Alston makes a strong case for the claim that justification cannot bear all the conceptual weight that has been assigned to it, even if it is not a component of knowledge. But my interest here is not in whether the concept of justification can survive Alston's attack; the point is that the concept is in trouble. Unlike the concept of knowledge, the concept of justification is somewhat artificial and it is questionable how far we can get if we look for a pretheoretical notion of justification as a starting point for analysis. My response to this situation is to start elsewhere. We already have a number of motivations for using a virtue approach to epistemology, and the confusion in the notion of justification gives us one more. Since justifiedness is a property of a belief, we might bypass the problems in analyzing it if we can succeed in focusing on the deeper concept of an intellectual virtue and show-ing how justification is best treated as a derivative concept. I will show how the justifiedness of a belief can be defined in terms of intellectual virtue in the same way the rightness of an act can be defined in terms of moral virtue in Part II.

One of the implications of Alston's concerns about the confu-sion over the notion of justification is that it may be impossible to resolve the dispute between internalists and externalists on justi-fication because there is no common target of debate. And, of course, we could raise the same doubts about knowledge since there is also an internalism/externalism dispute about knowl-edge. Is there a single notion of knowledge about which compet-ing accounts differ? Alston thinks that there is,[25] and I am in-clined to agree with him. But we still need some way of resolving the internalism/externalism controversy. It is interesting that David Brink (1989) maintains that there are two senses of knowl-

---

[25] Alston says (1993, n. 15) that he thinks there is more commonality in the notion of knowledge than in the notion of justification.

edge, one internalist, one externalist. So not everybody thinks that the controversy *can* be resolved in a way that retains a unitary concept of knowledge. We should, then, look at the way this controversy dominates epistemology to see if there might not be an advantage in a different approach.

The dispute between externalists and internalists looms large mostly because of ambivalence over the place of luck in normative theory. Theorists who resist the idea that knowledge or justification is vulnerable to luck are pulled in the direction of internalism, and their account is egocentric. Externalists are more sanguine about luck. Ironically, one of the attractions of externalism is that it is supposed to be antiskeptical and thus bypasses the threat of the worst sort of epistemic luck. That is, it is not necessary to have an answer to the skeptical hypotheses in order to have knowledge on these theories. But, of course, there is lots of room for luck in externalist theories since the conditions that make it the case that the knower is in a state of knowledge are independent of her conscious access. So the idea seems to be that luck can work *for* us as well as against us, and under ordinary circumstances, we can assume that it works for us. Thus, externalism is attractive.

Internalists and externalists in epistemology selectively borrow lines of argument in ethics to bolster their respective positions, an observation we have already noted in a comment by Jonathan Dancy (Dancy and Sosa 1992, p. 119). Externalists attach themselves to the view that ignores the agent's motives and even intentions in discussing the rightness of acts, whereas internalists connect their arguments with the tradition in ethics that makes the agent central to moral evaluation. Dancy objects that epistemologists are prematurely siding with views that are very contentious in ethics, and he is right that epistemologists should not ignore the deep divisions in ethical traditions that stress one form of ethical evaluation over another. But it is interesting to consider the fact that the ethical analogue of the internalism/externalism dispute in epistemology does not seem to assume the level of importance that it has in epistemology. In fact, what is called internalism and externalism in ethics is a rather different

dispute.[26] This is not to say that ethicists have not thought of the exact analogue of the distinction in epistemology; they just have not been as much taken by it as have epistemologists.

To see this, consider a brief but interesting argument given by Hilary Kornblith to the effect that the same distinction is made in ethics:

> One kind of moral evaluation has us ask, "Was the agent's action one which the correct moral theory would have him perform?" A second kind of moral evaluation has us ask, "Was the agent's action one which was morally correct by his own lights?" In the moral realm, we overlook an important kind of evaluation if we fail to ask either of these questions. If we ask only the former question, then we have no idea whether the action manifested moral integrity. If we ask only the latter question, we have no idea whether the agent acted in a morally acceptable manner. By the same token, if we ask only whether an agent's beliefs are formed in a reliable manner, we have no idea whether the belief is appropriately integrated in the agent's cognitive scheme. If we ask only whether the agent's belief is arrived at in a way which seems right to him, we have no idea whether the belief is formed in a way which is actually conducive to the agent's epistemic goals. (1985, p. 269)

To my mind what is most striking about Kornblith's argument in this passage is the fact that ethicists generally do *not* separate the two kinds of evaluation in the way he describes. And to the extent that they do, they do not see themselves as representing
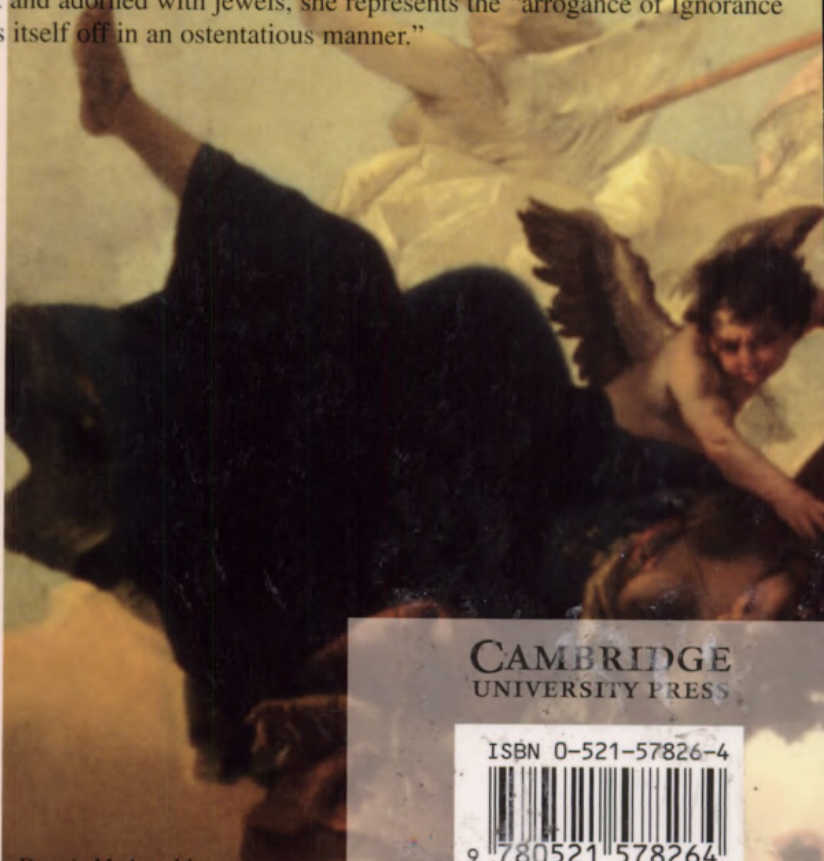
---

[26] The positions in ethics that are called internalist and externalist have to do with the connection between motives and justifications for action. Robertson and Stocker (1991) identify at least three positions concerning the relation between moral justification and motivation that have been characterized by the terms "externalism" and "internalism." Whereas externalism in ethics would be recognizably externalist on the epistemological use of the term "externalist," the internalist positions are more narrowly internalist than is internalism in epistemology. I do not see that these various disputes have been sorted out well enough in ethics to be of use to the internalism/externalism dispute as it is carried on in epistemology. It is even possible that this is one matter in which the epistemologists are ahead of ethicists in clarifying a normative dispute.

"This is a very impressive development of an epistemological theory that is modelled on a virtue oriented ethical theory. There have been several presentations of virtue-based epistemologies lately, but none of them matches the present work in systematic development, scope, and power. It will move this approach to epistemology onto center stage, and it will become the focus for discussions of virtue epistemology."

– William P. Alston, *Syracuse University*

The jacket illustration is The Triumph of Virtue and Nobility Over Ignorance, c. 1740–1750 by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696–1770). Reproduced by permission of the Norton Simon Foundation.

The painting, designed for a ceiling in the Palazzo Manin in Venice, depicts an allegory of Virtue and Nobility triumphing over Ignorance. Virtue, dressed in white with a sun symbol on her breast, personifies the following ideas: "as the sun lights the earth, so Virtue lights the heart and leads to good deeds." Beside her, Nobility holds a statuette of Minerva and a spear. To the left, Fame blows her trumpet. Below, the figure of Ignorance is being vanquished. Dressed in a rich garment and adorned with jewels, she represents the "arrogance of Ignorance which shows itself off in an ostentatious manner."

Cover design by Dennis M. Arnold