EPISTEMOLOGY AND WELLBEING

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Abstract. There is a general presumption that epistemology does not have anything to do with wellbeing. In this paper I challenge these assumption, by examining the aftermath of the Gettier examples, the debate between internalism and externalism and the rise of virtue epistemology. In focusing on the epistemic agent as the locus of normativity, virtue epistemology allows one to ask questions about epistemic goods and their relationship to other kinds of good, including the good of the agent. Specifically it is argued that emotion has a positive role to play in epistemology, an example from Aquinas is used to illustrate this and to illustrate the different kinds of good involved in cognition.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is remarkable how quickly views that are taken as solid and central to one philosophical generation are ignored or rejected by the next, often with an unsympathetic or facile caricature of the 'traditional' or 'standard' view. We philosophers seem to define ourselves by opposing. Perhaps an element of general human psychological development is evident here, a need for individuation through rejecting the values of the previous generation. Anyhow, it seems to be the job of philosophers to object, challenge and argue against and one of our first targets is our teachers.

As a student, I was exposed to a traditional Thomistic education, with divisions between metaphysics, special metaphysics, logic and philosophical psychology, ethics and politics. What was intellectually exciting was the way in which hermeneutical, deconstructive and postmodern writers challenged this edifice with all the rhetorical flourishes of 'overcoming', 'transcending', 'rejecting grand narratives' and with the multiple deaths of the 'subject', 'God', 'metaphysics', 'philosophy' itself, or whatever. There was a real sense of the division between cutting edge versus traditional; cool versus staid. Who

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wouldn't want to be cutting edge? However, for me, the cutting edge moved to contemporary analytic philosophy, where many of the same giant-killing tendencies existed, but with what seemed to be sharper and more precise tools. One philosophized with a scalpel rather than a hammer. However, over time, the same deconstructive tendencies repeated themselves there. I experienced a growing awareness of dissatisfaction, a challenging of assumptions, a worry about the force of fashion and pressures of conformity. Often these pressures manifested indirectly in a facial expression or a change of conversational topic rather than direct argument. In response I found myself mining the older traditions, especially the work of Aquinas (possibly the most uncool philosopher in the canon), and relating his work to current issues particularly in epistemology. To my surprise many of the views I had laboriously worked my own way to were anticipated by him and expressed in ways which now seemed limpid and fresh rather than tedious and defunct.[1] In this paper I want to look at ways in which older, pre-modern views can emerge and begin to seem attractive through critical engagement with contemporary issues. To agree with Herbert McCabe, this is not a matter of trying to rehabilitate something called 'Thomism'.[2] Rather it is an attempt to do contemporary analytical philosophy in a historically attuned way.

II. WHAT HAS EPISTEMOLOGY TO DO WITH WELLBEING?

Does epistemology have anything to do with wellbeing? At first glance, no, it does not. Epistemology has to do with the grounds and conditions of knowledge of the world. It engages with objective reasons, abstracts from subjective

1 For example, the debate about the nature of a priori knowledge involving Quine, Lawrence BonJour and Paul Boghossian has interesting and relevant connections to Aquinas's thought — not least by virtue of BonJour's acknowledgement of that link. See Paul O'Grady, *Aquinas's Philosophy of Religion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 139–50.

2 'Then the intensely conservative Roman Church of the nineteenth century, terrified by the Enlightenment, went back and dug up St Thomas because they thought he might provide the intellectual framework they needed to hold the crumbling fabric of Christianity together. They invented "Thomism", a specially conservative version of his thought insufficiently liberated from Cartesian questions and it turned out to be a weapon that twisted in their hands. For it led to a new critical historical study of Aquinas. The new study of the text of Thomas proved if anything more corrosive of the Catholic establishment than ever the Enlightenment had been. It was corrosive from inside'. Herbert McCabe, *On Aquinas* (London: Continuum, 2008), 4.

viewpoints and seeks to establish universal, objective truths and is an abstract academic enterprise. Wellbeing has to do with the state of an organism, with what is *good-for* that being. Therefore it is a condition that affects everyone and is not an academic activity at all. And human wellbeing in particular seems to have quite a bit to do with subjectivity, with how people view their situation. A person in ideal material circumstances who views these (for whatever reason) in strongly negative terms is not said to have a high level of wellbeing. For example, someone grieving the loss of a spouse may pine away from distress, despite an ideal social or economic environment.

To use a different example, knowledge of the objective conditions which lead to a debilitating disease of the nervous system have nothing to do with the subjective states of the sufferer of such a condition. The former is clear, objective and impersonal, the latter is murky, subjective and intensely personal. Furthermore it is clear that the state of wellbeing of the sufferer is impacted by their emotional state and the capacity to determine their life (make informed decisions), while the medical knowledge of the disease is not impacted by emotion and seems to have little to do with the actions of the will in any relevant way. In this paper I want to argue that initial appearances are deceptive and that there is an important sense in which epistemology and wellbeing are connected. Specifically I want to argue that emotions are, in some sense, important in making sense of epistemological normativity.

To make this case I want to start in section three with a selective survey of late 20th century epistemology, focussing on Gettier's paper and its aftermath. I shall argue that the debate between epistemic internalism and externalism is the most important effect of Gettier's paper and that a main issue in epistemology at the start of the 21st century is the attempt to explain how epistemic normativity arises. In section four I shall articulate three key assumptions underlying these attempts to make sense of epistemic normativity. These are i) that emotion plays no role in epistemology, ii) the main task of epistemology is to make sense of justification or warrant and it does this by trying to articulate an abstract general form of justification/warrant, using counterexamples, thought experiments and intuitions and iii) this task is theoretical rather than practical—it's not to make better cognizers, but to understand cognition. In section five I turn to virtue epistemology as a response to the internalist/externalist controversy. The revolutionary change suggested by virtue epistemologists is to make the focus of analysis the agent A who holds belief p, rather than

belief p itself. Whatever good epistemic qualities p might have are derivative on qualities A has. This offers a new way of answering old questions in epistemology, but also raises new ones. Specifically questions arise about epistemic goods and how they relate to larger questions of goodness. With the focus now on the agent, the epistemic good of the agent has to be connected to the overall goodness of the agent — hence wellbeing makes an entrance for the virtue epistemologist. In section six I discuss the role of emotion and will for virtue epistemologists. Emotion plays a causal, motivational role in the operation of virtue and so becomes epistemologically relevant. There are several obvious ways in which emotions help epistemological inquiry, but also a study of epistemic vices shows how emotional regulation is important for knowledge acquisition. In section seven I shall discuss Aquinas's treatment of the virtue of *studiositas* and the vice of *curiositas*. Finally in section eight I shall argue that virtue epistemology offers a new paradigm which rejects all three assumptions identified in section four above. i) Emotions do have a role in epistemology, ii) the main task of epistemology is the study of epistemic virtue, best done by a non-reductive, cartographic approach which uses a range of resources, including literature as well as conceptual analysis and iii) the task is both theoretical and practical — it is partly a job of seeking to make better cognizers.

III. RECENT EPISTEMOLOGY

Edmund Gettier's famous short article of 1963 precipitated an avalanche of papers in response.[3] He challenged the adequacy of the longstanding account of the nature of knowledge as justified true belief. His worry was that such an account wasn't sufficient. Counterexamples were devised to show that beliefs could be true and justified, but that intuitively we wouldn't call them instances of knowledge.

One significant aspect of his paper was that he clearly accepted the fallibility of justification. A belief could be justified, but nevertheless turn out to be false. To require that justification be infallible, or always produce truth seems too strong a requirement. It makes knowledge too hard to achieve and leads inexorably to skepticism. So in Gettier's counterexamples, the person

3 Edmund L. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?", *Analysis* 23, no. 6 (1963). For a survey of the aftermath see Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant. The Current Debate* (OUP, 1993), 6–11.

holding the target belief has good fallible grounds for the belief (testimony, observation, logical inference). The belief also turns out to be true, but there is some sort of disconnect between the justification and the truth. Explaining what this disconnect is and attempting to plug it became a cottage industry. If a fourth condition could be added to the first three necessary conditions, perhaps the package would then by jointly sufficient for knowledge and candidates for a fourth condition typically included a non-defeasibility factor. A defeater is a factor which renders the justification void and one suggested defeater is that the justification rests on false beliefs. The non-defeasibility condition then requires that this cannot be the case and so gets past Gettier's own examples. But following Gettier's impetus new counterexamples were devised to try to show that this didn't work, with ensuing new proposals for 4th conditions.

As the epistemological community tired of repeated attempts to solve this puzzle, the deeper effect of Gettier's paper was to highlight the tension in the traditional definition of knowledge between the truth aspect and the justification aspect. That a belief be true is something objective and potentially independent of the agent's reasoning since beliefs can be true by luck. That a belief be justified is dependent on the agent's reasoning, but crucially is not infallibly connected to truth (if one is fallibilist). Someone may reason impeccably, be in no way blameworthy, but nevertheless end up with a false belief (say in an evil demon scenario). So how are these necessary features of knowledge related to each other? Uneasily, was the main answer, and attempts to relate them tended to eventually drop one side or the other.

Epistemic internalism placed the emphasis on justification and is typically associated with what is called the KK thesis.[4] To know something one has to know that one knows. That is, one has to have some reflective level of awareness such that reasons can be offered if the belief is challenged. Worries about this include the exclusion of children or inarticulate adults from having knowledge. A child may well know their name, but be flummoxed if challenged as to how they know it. In opposition to this view, epistemic externalism focused on using reliable methods to acquire true beliefs. If the use of a method (such as perception) results in a high ratio of true beliefs, then use of

4 First stated in this form by Jaakko Hintikka in his *Knowledge and Belief: An Introduction to the Logic of the Two Notions* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1962).

that method counts as knowledge. However, it may be that one is unaware of the reliability of the method, or indeed have good reasons to think the method is unreliable. It leaves the kind of reflection we associate with knowledge out of the equation and makes knowledge acquisition something mechanical — akin to attributing knowledge to a light sensor which accurately records movement in its vicinity.

Both positions have been finessed in the recent literature and versions of each exist[5] but let's examine the broad contrast evident between them. Internalism is more familiar from the tradition — many of the classic early modern epistemologists are internalists and the typical features appealed to by internalists as epistemologically valuable are features of beliefs available to introspective awareness — clarity, distinctness, vivacity and so on. After the linguistic turn and the general move away from a Cartesian conception of mind, such features seemed less fundamental, as social and linguistic aspects of language and knowledge took centre stage. This allowed Quine, for example, to focus on observational sentences and the behavioural conditions under which people who are linguistically competent might assent to them.[6] For Externalists, considerations of internally accessible mental states drop out of the picture as epistemologically redundant. Forms of truth-tracking replace conscious deliberation. The split between these approaches has led commentators to suggest that they are actually dealing with different phenomena — what one group mean by knowledge and justification is simply different to what the others means and they talk past each other. Terminological quarrels have led some to eschew terms like 'justification' and attempt to introduce new terminology, for example 'warrant'.[7] The presence of such fundamental disagreement and terminological proliferation and confusion led a number of epistemologists to strike out in a new direction. Part of what makes this direction new is the rejection of some assumptions common to both internalists and externalists despite their massive disagreements. So in the next section I would like to characterize some of these assumptions.

5 See for example Hilary Kornblith, ed., *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism* (Blackwell, 2001), for representative statements.

6 For a succinct statement see W. v. O. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2003), ch. 1.

7 Plantinga, *Warrant. The Current Debate*, 6–11.

IV. STANDARD EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

(i) Emotions do not play a role in Epistemology

When considering the range of factors deployed by epistemologists in explaining what is to be added to belief to augment its epistemological value, emotion rarely features. Internalists appeal to consciously available mental states which can be phenomenologically observed, but typically ignoring emotional states. Externalists appeal to cognitive operations which lead to a high ratio of truths. So one's emotions are not regarded as relevant. Indeed, a significant range of opinion thinks of the emotions as being epistemologically negative, they positively hinder cognition. For example, wishful thinking skews judgement, passions cloud one's assessment. The proper state for cognitive work is dispassionate cool — light not heat is required.

(ii) The Chief Task of Epistemology is Explaining how Beliefs Achieve Epistemological High Value

Common to both internalists and externalists is the focus on belief as the target of analysis. While coherentists emphasize their link to other beliefs and classical foundationalists have a more atomistic approach (both standardly held to be internalist positions), they nevertheless share with externalists of different stripes the assumption that one focuses on individual beliefs and seeks to explain how they come to be true in ways that are not dependent on luck. These ways are then explained as properties of such beliefs and an abstract general account is given of the nature of these properties. The standard way of proceeding is to appeal to pre-theoretical intuitions, counterexamples, thought experiments and a familiar procession of mad scientists, evil geniuses, fake barns, clairvoyants and chicken-sexers parades through the literature. So the primary locus of interest in this way of doing epistemology is the belief, considered abstractly in itself and divorced from the conditions of the holder of the belief.

(iii) The Task is Theoretical Rather than Practical

The job of epistemologists is to come up with explanatory theories about the nature of the added value belief has when it achieves the level of knowledge. The task is not to improve anyone's ability or chance of achieving knowledge, but to understand the conditions under which knowledge occurs. In the pro-

cess, one might acquire transferrable skills, but these are incidental to the main, abstract theoretical task.

All three of these assumptions tend to deepen the initial consensus that epistemology has nothing to do with wellbeing and that emotion and will play no role there. I turn now to virtue epistemology and examine how all three assumptions are rejected there.

V. VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

V.1. Main Features

While virtue ethics has existed since ancient times, virtue epistemology is dated to a paper by Ernie Sosa in 1980.[8] He proposed the use of the idea of a virtue in epistemology as a way through the foundationalist-coherentist debate. His notion of a virtue was that of a process which was reliable at attaining truth. In the aftermath of that work virtue epistemology has quickly developed as a significant position in contemporary epistemology. Differences exist among theorists as to the nature of virtue. But they also disagree about the task of epistemology. For some it is business as usual, defining knowledge, defeating skepticism, explaining the grounds of knowledge and so on. Others have a more revolutionary vision where the very tasks of epistemology need to be change by the introduction of virtue theory, old questions being dropped, new ones emerging.

A fundamental distinction among types of virtue theory is that between those who think of virtue on a reliabilist model and associate it with reliable truth-acquiring faculties such as perception, memory, inference etc., while others think that virtue is more akin to the traditional Aristotelian model, where it is a disposition or train of character which is a form of cognitive excellence. These two positions have been labeled Reliabilist Virtue Epistemology and Responsibilist Virtue Epistemology respectively.[9]

Reliabilist theories would appear to be closer to externalist sensibilities and place less emphasis on internalist factors in the acquisition of knowl-

8 Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1980).

9 See Heather Battaly, "Virtue Epistemology", in *Virtue Epistemology*: *Contemporary Readings*, ed. John Greco and John Turri (The MIT Press, 2012).

edge. Sosa's formulations have changed since his initial 1980 suggestion and he most recently defines knowledge on what he called the AAA model (Sosa 2007).[10] A belief is apt when it is accurate and that accuracy has been brought about by the adroitness of the person who holds the belief. So there is an explanatory causal relation between the truth of the belief and the skills of the person who forms the belief. He uses the image of an archer hitting a target. While on occasion one might hit the target by chance, what we want is to hit the target because of ability and skill. John Greco is also categorized as a Reliabilist and his view is that knowledge is acquired when the truth of the belief is successfully brought about by the action of the agent.[11]

Responsibilist theories on the other hand fit better with internalist sensibilities. Linda Zagzebski has presented a highly detailed virtue epistemology which explicitly links the structure of virtue with that of Aristotelian ethics.[12] A virtue is a deep-seated feature of a person's character which has a success and a motivation component. The success component is that it tends to achieve the sough-after goal — in this case truth. The motivation component is the psychological mechanism with pushes on towards achieving that goal.

Reliabilist accounts of virtue tend to work well with examples of basic perception. When presented with a patch of colour which I reliably identify correctly, it seems not to involve any particularly complicated cognitive processes, or training or excellence. However, when dealing with more complicated situations — perhaps discriminating between different kinds of wine at a blind tasting — then training, experience, sensitivity and skill come in. This has led theorists to reflect on different kinds of knowledge. Wittgenstein once remarked that a diet of one-sided examples tended to skew philosophical theories.[13] And traditional epistemological examples tended to be of simple perceptual beliefs. But it is clear that knowledge includes more than just knowing isolated perceptual truths. Understanding involves seeing relationships between beliefs and grasping explanatory or causal relations. It is not simply getting a new belief, but coming to grasp a pattern between beliefs and being able to generate fur-

10 Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge* (OUP, 2007), 22.

11 John Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity* (CUP, 2010), 3.

12 Linda T. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (CUP, 1996).

13 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Basil Blackwell, 1953), section 593.

ther new true beliefs on this basis. One suggestion is that reliabilist and responsibilist accounts are complementary and work well relative to different sets of problems. Reliabilist accounts fit better simple perceptual input issues, while responsibilist accounts suit more complex instances of knowing.[14]

A further dimension, noted above, is that some theorists want to use the virtue framework to make radical changes to epistemology. For example Roberts and Woods argue for a very different approach to the methods and questions of epistemological inquiry.[15] They eschew reductive, hierarchical theory formation and approach the issues in a broader, more descriptive (or cartographic) way, drawing on literature and psychology to support them. The current spread of virtue epistemologists includes those who seek to answer traditional questions using new methods, those who seek to do this but also to expand the range of questions and those who jettison the old questions. Jason Baehr has usefully given a taxonomy of these views ranging from conservative to radical virtue epistemology.[16]

V.2. Epistemic Goods

The tradition has it that there is an important difference between true belief and knowledge. A chief task of epistemology is to explain wherein lies this difference. The problem with mere true belief is that it can come about by luck. So explaining how we come by true beliefs in a way not dependent on luck is important. One of the features of Gettier problems is that they frequently rely on elements which deploy bad luck subsequently countered by good luck yielding true belief. So, when I glance at my watch which is stopped (bad luck), but coincidentally at the exact time at which the watch is stopped (good luck), I acquire a true belief, but do so in a manner which doesn't count as knowledge. Too much coincidence and luck was involved and it could easily have been otherwise.

This explains the appeal of reliabilism, which seeks to rule out such examples (so looking at that watch would be unreliable for most of the day, thus yielding a very low ratio of true beliefs). However, Linda Zagzebski has articulated a problem for reliabilism, which she also thinks generalizes out

14 See Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 273 on high-grade and low-grade knowledge.

15 Robert C. Roberts and William J. Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Clarendon, 2007).

16 Jason Baehr, "Four Varieties of Character-Based Virtue Epistemology", in *Virtue Epistemology*: *Contemporary Readings*, ed. John Greco and John Turri (The MIT Press, 2012).

to other approaches.[17] We think that having a true belief is something valuable. And so having a method which brings about having such a valuable thing is itself valuable. Thus the extra element (reliable process) explains the extra value in knowledge, as distinct from mere true belief. However, she draws an analogy with espresso coffee. We think that a cup of coffee is something valuable. We also are happy to have a reliable machine which brings this about. But the reliable machine doesn't alter the value of the cup of coffee. The rare cup of coffee from the unreliable machine is just as good as the reliably produced cup. So reliabilism doesn't seem to explain the extra value that knowledge has as distinct from mere true belief. Zagzebski has argued that the analogy of machine to product in terms of belief is misleading and one should instead think in terms of agent and act. The normative qualities of an act (on a virtue-theoretic view) derive from the qualities of the agent, there is an internal connection.

What virtue epistemologists argue is that there is a connection between the holding of the true belief and certain traits, qualities or features of the person who holds the belief. Sosa talks about the adroitness of the agent causing the accuracy of the beliefs.[18] Greco talks about achieving the goal (true belief) through exercise of one's abilities.[19] Zagzebski usefully puts this discussion in the context of what she calls Epistemic Value Monism.[20] An Epistemic Value Monist about knowledge is someone who thinks there is only one genuine epistemic value — and this is truth. All other considerations are understood to be instrumental to this end. A value pluralist on the other hand thinks that there are many and different values in play in knowledge. While truth is clearly important, there are other elements as well. These are the skills, abilities and traits of the person which are related to achieving the true belief. And they are not simply instrumentally related to achieving the truth, but these traits are intrinsically good in themselves. By being fair-minded, accurate, courageous, resolute, humble, I am likely to achieve true beliefs — but even if I do not, these are still excellences. They are constitutive of living a good life. For the virtue theorist, the normative element added to true belief is the exercise of deep-

17 Linda Zagzebski, "Epistemic Value Monism", in *Ernest Sosa and His Critics*, ed. John Greco (Blackwell, 2004), 190.

18 Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid", 22.

19 Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*, 3.

20 Linda Zagzebski, "Epistemic Value Monism".

seated traits of character which are intrinsically good in themselves. And the value-laden status that true beliefs which make up knowledge have, derives from the values of these traits in themselves.

V.3. Wellbeing

Zagzebski's account of virtue theory makes a strong link between moral and intellectual virtues. The model of a virtue used in epistemology derives from a broadly Aristotelian approach, whereas she sees earlier versions of virtue epistemology drawing in an inexplicit way on consequentialist models of normativity (that is seeing reliabilism as having a fundamentally consequentialist structure). Intellectual virtues are to be understood as a component of an agent's life, and as an integral part of living a good life. So the normativity involved is to be understood in a eudaimonistic way and individual virtues are to be understood as 'thick' concepts, having both descriptive and evaluative dimensions to them. Intellectual virtues are instrumentally good, since moral virtues require them, but also are intrinsically good as excellences in themselves. So the exercise of intellectual virtue is a constitutive part of living a good life. On this picture, what role does emotion have in epistemology?

VI. THE ROLE OF EMOTION

VI.1. Basic Considerations

The first thing to note is that emotion can have a straightforward relationship to cognition and knowledge acquisition. Theorists who reject the role of emotion in epistemology tend to do so with the assumption that emotion somehow skews cognition. A standard example is wishful thinking. This is construed as a cause of a belief, but not a reason for that belief. That I want something to be so is not a good reason for thinking that it is so. Examples where it is advantageous for me to believe that I can perform an action and this in turn helps me perform the action (for example jump over a ravine) are regarded as pragmatic rather than epistemic situations. There is a good achieved in the believing, but it is not an epistemic good.

Against this one can think of multiple examples where emotion aids cognition. That I am interested in and passionate about an intellectual project helps me apply myself diligently to the work required by it. That I am not

bored by a presentation at a conference allows me to engage with the ideas expressed better. That I like my subject helps me be a better teacher. These are straightforward uncontroversial examples of emotion helping cognition. But they point to a deeper theoretical point.

VI.2. Motivation

Zagzebski's account of virtue requires that it have two components, a motivational element and a success element. The motivational element is that which moves one to action and for Zagzebski this is an emotion. In an intellectual virtue this emotion is a desire for truth. It leads one to develop behaviour and practices which arrive at true beliefs. Emotions are susceptible to being too weak, too strong or to being distorted in various ways. Working well the desire for truth is a form of cognitive excellence. When habitually not working well, it forms the basis for an intellectual vice.

Aquinas denied this account of intellectual virtue, arguing that intellectual virtue didn't engage with the appetitive part of the soul, but rather with the intellectual part.[21] Therefore intellectual virtues weren't full virtues and one might use intellectual virtues to bad ends. Zagzebski challenges the underlying parts-of-soul psychology involved here and argues for the closer integration of the different aspects of the psyche. It seems clear that one cannot achieve intellectual excellence without at least some acts of will, where one trains and develops one's innate capacities. Roberts and Woods agree that the clearcut distinction between moral and intellectual virtue used by Aristotle and Aquinas is successfully undermined by Zagzebski, but wonder to what extent one can identify discrete motivation and success factors for each individuated virtue. Rather they note that motivation, will and emotion play a significant role in a person's overall intellectual character.[22] Now, however one resolves this debate, it is clear that they all agree that emotion, will, practice, discipline play a role in one's intellectual life.

VI.3. Vices

The emotional factors which play a role in cognition can go wrong. They may be deficient, or in excess or otherwise disordered. When pursuing a answer to some question I may not be diligent enough in pursuing all leads,

21 Aquinas *Summa Theologiæ* I-II q. 57, a.1
22 Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 72.

not courageous enough to face unattractive options (appalling vistas etc), not open-minded enough to contemplate alternative solutions. In each of these cases there is a deficiency in motivation, a deficiency which is a lack of the required drive or emotion to achieve the specific good in question. Alternatively I might be too quick to jump to a conclusion, blinded by prejudice to consider alternatives or consumed with desires which are extraneous to the specific good in question (truth) — I may want to be praised, win the prize, get the research grant. There are the vices of pride — arrogance, conceit, superciliousness, vanity, domination — which skew intellectual life. Who hasn't been on the receiving end of some of these at different points in one's career? The roots of these are clearly emotional and are clear ways in which the good of epistemic inquiry can be endangered. Indeed the insight that this is so is at the root of the assumption that emotion should not play a role in epistemology. The error is to fail to distinguish good, supportive and useful from bad, destructive and hindering roles for emotion.

VII. A CASE STUDY: AQUINAS ON STUDIOSITAS/CURIOSITAS

Philip Ball, in his stimulating and highly readable book, *Curiosity: How Science Became Interested in Everything*, traces the origins of modern science to the cultivation of that eponymous habit.[23] In the course of his discussion he remarks how certain medieval philosophers rejected the very idea and thought it sinful. He interpreted this as reflecting an ascetical, other-worldly attitude which dismissed this world with all its curious features in favour of a different, higher realm. Augustine and Aquinas hold this attitude and it was one of the elements of the medieval mindset which blocked the rise of modern science. In particular it fostered an adherence to an Aristotelian approach which sought generalities rather than focusing on individuals and which tended to inhibit the development of empirical experimental methods.

While it is true that Aquinas treats curiosity as a vice, it is not immediately clear that it has the same meaning for him as for later scientists. Neither is it clear that he had an attitude of dismissiveness for the material world. His philosophical master was Aristotle who displayed an enormous curiosity about the physical world. His immediate teacher was Albertus Magnus who

23 Philip Ball, *Curiosity: How Science Became Interested in Everything* (Bodley Head, 2012).

explored minerology, entemology, optics, botany, as well as ethics, metaphysics and philosophical theology (all of which Ball acknowledges). [24]

Aquinas discusses the virtue of studiousness and the associated vice of curiosity in the context of his general discussion of temperance.[25] The virtue of temperance has to do with living well and is about achieving balance in various areas of one's life. Specifically it has to do with training one's appetites in appropriate ways. Eating too little or too much has its problems. Likewise, drinking or exercising. And Aquinas speaks of the vice of insensibility, where one is indifferent to physical pleasures, a state which is not conducive to wellbeing.[26] So it would be hard to assimilate this approach to a world-denying asceticism. Within this general context Aquinas investigates our desire for knowledge. Is it possible that this could be too much? He looks at the objection that there can never be an upper limit to knowledge and so to think of needing moderation about knowledge is a kind of category error. What is opposed to knowledge is a kind of uninterest or lack of desire to find out, not an excess of this.

Aquinas distinguishes between knowledge itself — understood as a kind of repository — and the desire for and pursuit of knowledge in any given individual person. While there is no upper limit to the acquisition of knowledge itself, it is the certainly the case that ways of pursuing knowledge can be better or worse. For a start, one can distinguish different kinds of knowledge and reckon one kind better than another. Without needing to accept any hierarchical account of reality (as Aquinas clearly did), there is the familiar example from contemporary epistemology of someone who devotes themselves to acquiring lots of low-grade knowledge (e.g. memorizing a phone directory) as distinct from qualitatively different knowledge (e.g. learning a language, or physics). We make a qualitative distinction between better and worse kinds of knowledge and think that merely learning off lots of discrete, uninteresting facts is intellectually low-grade. Aquinas also notes that knowledge has a

24 For a useful discussion of Aquinas's relationship to Albertus Magnus see Simon Tugwell, *Selected writings of Albert and Thomas* (Paulist Press, 1988), 208–13. Tugwell notes 'Albert was fascinated by all the details of what things are … For Thomas, it is not really the marvelous complexity and ingenuity of things that alerts the mind to the reality of God, it is rather the metaphysical implications of very simple observations about things, beginning with the primary fact of their being there at all', (213).

25 *Summa Theologiæ* II-II qq 166-167.

26 *Summa Theologiæ* II-II q. 142.a.1

moral dimension. It can be used for good or ill and that is a factor relevant to the cognizer's wellbeing. If one's primary focus is on abstract propositional knowledge, this makes no sense, whereas if one's focus in on the individual who possesses the knowledge (as with virtue epistemology), then this dimension is indeed relevant.

Another factor Aquinas draws attention to is how someone relates to the knowledge they have — in some cases it can inflates or puff up the possessor or indeed it can lead to a deeper kind of ignorance — where someone misses the bigger picture and gets so caught up in the importance of their particular bailiwick. This is not merely a moralistic or pious desire to prevent pride or vanity, but a realistic comment on the tendency of this kind of pride to develop into intellectual vice and thereby to damage the utility of the cognitive process.

Furthermore, anyone who has experience as a teacher can appreciate the need to harnass effort and energies in students, directing them constructively to make a cohesive point, to defend a thesis or write a decent essay. A feature of an untrained or novice scholar is to try too much, deal with too many issues or follow several leads at once in a confused and confusing way. The virtue of *studiositas* is about achieving excellence in this, acquiring an ability to focus, sustain an inquiry and not to get sidelined by *curiositas*, an uncontrolled scattergun approach.

This is not incompatible with empirical inquiry, *pace* Bell. Indeed it fits well with ideas about the theory-ladenness of observation. Observation is not neutral or contextless. Deciding to observe a particular range of phenomena, deciding what weight to put on what aspects, how to gauge anomalies, how and when to use different kinds of technology all involves a deep embeddedness in pre-existent theory. Good observation is driven by theory, by paradigms and hypotheses.

Aquinas's basic point about anyone's relationship to knowledge is that it is embedded in the context of the individual's wellbeing, which includes affections, action, education, natural abilities and social role. Each element of this list impacts on cognition — affection drives the pursuit of knowledge, actions reinforce dispositions and habits, education inculcates virtue or vice, natural abilities are perfected or blunted, social role places responsibilities and obligations in respect of cognition. It involves a rich account of knowledge where it is embedded in a social, moral and psychological matrix.

VIII. REJECTING STANDARD EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The foregoing discussion should straightforwardly show that it is false that emotions do not play a role in epistemology. And the role they play is not merely causal but constitutive of epistemic normativity, which derives from virtue. Underlying the epistemological project is the desire for truth — a desire famously noted by Aristotle at the start of the Metaphysics.[27] Note that desire is an appetitive state. This is what Zagzebski highlights in focusing on the motivation element in intellectual virtue — desire drives the search for truth. It is also the case that certain kinds of emotional response aid this project, certain others hinder it. An intellectually virtuous person is one whose emotions are in tune with and support the project of inquiry and support her in achieving true beliefs. An intellectually vicious person is one whose emotions hinder this project whether by being too weak in the pursuit of truth (being careless, lax, overlooking evidence etc) or too zealous in pursuit of some other goal (domination, self-aggrandizement, fame etc). So emotion is constitutive of and central to actual inquiry when one focuses on the agent who knows rather than merely on the beliefs abstracted from the agent. Hence assumption one [(i) Emotions do not play a role in Epistemology] is false.

The chief task of epistemology on this approach is therefore not in establishing the properties of beliefs which give them a high epistemological status, rather it is in understanding the good dispositions of persons who achieve true belief and how these dispositions lead to that goal. This is the revolutionary change proposed by virtue epistemologists. Rather than focusing on individual beliefs, construed abstractly and detached from the conditions of their possessor and environment, the explanatory focus is on the cognizer. True beliefs are ontologically and epistemology derivative on the inquirer. The beliefs don't exist apart from a person making an inquiry and their epistemological status is dependent on characteristics of the inquirer, not on some qualities they allegedly contain in themselves. Virtue ethics avoids rule-based decision making processes by emphasizing the notion of prudence, a governing capacity to judge rightly in the contingencies of specific situations. Virtue epistemology also emphasizes the non-rule-governed

27 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk.1.ch.1

and context-sensitive processes involved in actual cognition. Good judgment is required in mediating between different demands and good judgment is acquired through training, experience and habituation. Therefore assumption two, [ii) The Chief Task of Epistemology is Explaining how Beliefs Achieve Epistemological High Value] is misleading. Properties of beliefs are derivative on properties of individuals and the more fundamental task is explicating the properties of individuals.

Because intellectual virtue is acquired over a long period of time, requires training and apprenticeship, is sensitive to context and social setting and relates to the totality of the agent's situation, epistemology is made more concrete on this account than on standard views. Roberts and Wood put this nicely.

> Given the central place of knowledge and understanding in human life, one would expect epistemology to be one of the most fascinating and enriching fields of philosophy and itself an important part of an education for life. We might expect any bright university student who got all her way to her junior year without dipping her mind in an epistemology course would have to hang her head in shame of her cultural poverty. But the character and preoccupations of much of the epistemology of the twentieth century disappoint this expectation. We think that the new emphasis on the virtues and their relation to epistemic goods has the potential to put epistemology in its rightful place … the study of knowledge and related human goods connects with ethical and political issues, with the practice of science and other forms of inquiry, with religion and spirituality, with appreciation of the arts, and with the enterprise of education.[28]

Indeed this approach requires one to rethink the distinction between theoretical and practical. As Zagzebski puts it, a virtue theoretical approach can be seen as "emphasizing the practical aspect of speculative wisdom or…the theoretical aspect of practical wisdom".[29] If the explanatory focus is on the person, who thinks, acts and feels in a social setting, all these elements are interconnected with each other. To abstract one area and treat it as if it were hermetically sealed off from others is to falsify the data. One gets sharp, clean, theories, but not ones that have much purchase for people who don't abstract in the same manner. Hence assumption three, [iii) The Task is Theoretical Rather than Practical] is put in question.

28 Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 9.
29 Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 218.

IX. CONCLUSION

This last point might explain why so much philosophy is directed simply to other philosophers, rather than to the broad swathe of theorists interested in the foundational issues treated by philosophy. In this way philosophy has been sidelined and questions about ethics, human identity, meaning, spirituality are widely discussed by literary and cultural theorists, religious studies scholars, scientists, historians, psychologists independently of philosophy, frequently because the philosophical discussion seems too scholastic and in-house.[30]Virtue epistemology offers the possibility of continuing the traditional epistemological project but also of expanding, concretizing and connecting it to other discourses and disciplines investigating the human condition. To what extent this connects to the naturalistic turn in twentieth century philosophy, naturalized epistemology and cognitive science is an open and interesting question. But what is also interesting is the possibility afforded of making connections with the other humanities and for the significance of epistemology in relating the sciences and the humanities.

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30 This has been my experience from working in universities in Ireland and the UK, but also from visiting other institutions in Europe, the US and India. There is a desire for engagement with the discipline of philosophy by non-philosophers, but frequently a dissatisfaction in the actual interaction with philosophers. Hilary Putnam has some helpful reflections on this issue in *Realism with a Human Face*, drawing on a Kantian distinction between what is called a *Schulbegriff* (Scholastic concept) and *Weltbegriff* (World concept) of Philosophy. See especially the Introduction by James Conant p.xxiv in Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Harvard Univ. Press, 1992).

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