2008

Four Varieties of Character-Based Virtue Epistemology

Jason Baehr
Loyola Marymount University, jbaehr@lmu.edu

Four Varieties of Character-Based Virtue Epistemology

Jason Baehr

Loyola Marymount University

The field of virtue epistemology has enjoyed remarkable growth over the last decade. Several international conferences drawing top scholars in epistemology and ethics have been held on the topic, a number of books and scores of articles have been published, and several new lines of inquiry have opened up. But these developments have yet to be accounted for in the literature in a systematic way.[1] This is problematic, among other reasons, because developments in the field have resulted in extreme theoretical diversity such that it is no longer clear just what is picked out by the term "virtue epistemology" – e.g. what the defining tenets or commitments of this new approach are supposed to be.

This confusion is evident in two characterizations of virtue epistemology by leading figures in the field. John Greco and Linda Zagzebski both define virtue epistemology in terms of a thesis about the "direction of analysis" of certain basic epistemic concepts. Greco (2004) comments: "Just as virtue theories in ethics try to understand the normative properties of actions in terms of the normative properties of moral agents, virtue epistemology tries to understand the normative properties of beliefs [viz. knowledge and justification] in terms of the normative properties of cognitive agents."[2] Similarly, Zagzebski (1998) says that virtue epistemology is "a class of theories that analyse fundamental epistemic concepts such as justification or knowledge in terms of properties of persons rather than properties of beliefs."[3] But even at the time these characterizations were written they failed to account for the full range of views within virtue epistemology. Several virtue epistemologists (e.g. Code 1987; Kvanvig 1992; Hookway 2003) – authors whom Greco and Zagzebski themselves describe as such – eschew any attempt to offer a virtue-based analysis of knowledge, justification, or any related concept. These authors take an interest in matters of intellectual character and virtue that is largely independent of more standard

epistemological questions and issues. And in recent years the field has continued to expand in this direction.[4]

In what follows I offer an up-to-date account of virtue epistemology that sheds significant light on its basic structure, substance, and promise. I do so by developing an illuminating fourfold classification of approaches to virtue epistemology together with an assessment of each approach.

There are, however, two limitations of the discussion that must be noted up front. First, my concern is limited to *character*-based or "responsibilist" approaches to virtue epistemology. These are approaches that conceive of intellectual virtues as excellences of intellectual character like fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, attentiveness, carefulness and thoroughness in inquiry, and the like – rather than as cognitive *faculties* or related abilities like vision, hearing, memory, introspection, and reason. While I will have occasion to say something brief about the latter, faculty-based or "reliabilist" approaches to virtue epistemology, they are not my immediate or central concern. This limitation is significant inasmuch as some of the leading contributors to virtue epistemology proper (e.g. Greco and Ernest Sosa) are proponents of a faculty-based approach.[5] Nonetheless, the theoretical differences between the two approaches are significant enough, and my space here is sufficiently limited, that I will focus almost exclusively on character-based versions of virtue epistemology. This is not a major liability, however, given that character-based approaches are considerably more diverse than faculty-based approaches and therefore stand in greater need of a broad, systematic treatment; they also represent a considerably more novel – and in the judgment of some a more *interesting* – innovation within epistemology.[6]

The second limitation is a function of the paper's broad scope. For each of the four main approaches to character-based virtue epistemology, I identify the central challenge facing the approach, and go some way toward considering the likelihood of its being overcome. While this permits at least a preliminary assessment each of the four views, I do not pretend that the assessment is exhaustive or definitive. Thus while I will take a stand regarding the plausibility of the different approaches – arguing that two are problematic and two are promising – I do not consider the debate on these matters entirely

closed. Nonetheless, my hope is that by clarifying the structure of the field and offering a substantive preliminary assessment of its various parts, the discussion will prove to be an illuminating and much-needed contribution to the literature in virtue epistemology.

1. The Varieties Delineated

The initial basis for distinguishing between varieties of character-based virtue epistemology concerns how the authors in question conceive of the relationship between (1) the concept of intellectual virtue and (2) the problems or questions of traditional epistemology. By "traditional epistemology" I mean (roughly) epistemology in the Cartesian tradition, the central focus of which is the *nature, limits, and sources* of knowledge. Some of the topics and debates that have been or are central to this tradition include global and local skepticism, the nature of perception, rationalism vs. empiricism, the problem of induction, the analysis of knowledge, foundationalism vs. coherentism, internalism vs. externalism, and the Gettier problem.[7] The idea, then, is that we can begin to distinguish between varieties of virtue epistemology based on what these approaches imply about the relation between (1) and (2).

Some proponents of virtue epistemology regard an appeal to the concept of intellectual virtue as having the potential to "save the day" within traditional epistemology – e.g. to "solve" (or in certain cases to *dis*solve) certain longstanding problems or debates in the field. These authors view the concept of intellectual virtue as meriting a *central* and *fundamental* role within traditional epistemology. Zagzebski (1996), for instance, defends an analysis of knowledge according to which knowledge is (roughly) true belief produced by "acts of intellectual virtue."[8] She argues that conceiving of knowledge in this way not only yields a satisfactory account of the nature of knowledge, but also a way of undermining skepticism, resolving the tension between internalism and externalism, overcoming the Gettier problem, and more.[9] This represents an extremely high view of the conceptual connection between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology.

Other authors, however, are less sanguine about (or just less interested in) any conceptual connections between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology. These authors see reflection on the intellectual virtues as motivating fundamentally new directions and inquiries in epistemology – directions

and inquiries that are largely *independent* of traditional concerns about the nature, limits, and sources of knowledge.[10] Hookway (2000; 2003), for instance, commends an approach to epistemology that focuses on the domain of *inquiry* rather than on individual *beliefs* or states of knowledge; and because intellectual character virtues like carefulness and thoroughness, sensitivity to detail, intellectual perseverance, and intellectual honesty often play a critical role in successful inquiry, he contends that such an approach will be virtue-based. Likewise, Robert Roberts and Jay Wood (2007) have recently defended an approach to virtue epistemology that focuses on *individual* intellectual virtues and makes little attempt to engage or "solve" the problems and questions of traditional epistemology. Their aim is rather to provide something like a "conceptual map" of virtuous intellectual character.[11] They offer chapter-length analyses of several virtues, including love of knowledge, intellectual firmness, courage and caution, humility, autonomy, generosity, and practical wisdom.

This suggests an initial, broad distinction between two varieties of character-based virtue epistemology: viz. "conservative" approaches, which appeal to the concept of intellectual virtue as a way of engaging or addressing the epistemological tradition or mainstream; and "autonomous" approaches, which focus on matters of intellectual virtue in ways that are largely independent of the traditional quarry.

Each of these two types of virtue epistemology can be subdivided, resulting in a total of four types. I begin by distinguishing two varieties of "conservative" virtue epistemology. According to Zagzebski's approach noted above, the conceptual connection between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology is central and fundamental. But conservative virtue epistemology need not take such a strong line as this: it need not regard an appeal to the concept of intellectual virtue as "saving the day" within or as properly transforming traditional epistemology. Instead, it might posit considerably weaker or peripheral conceptual connections between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology. In recent years, for instance, I have argued that while the concept of intellectual virtue does not merit a central or fundamental role in an analysis of knowledge or any other traditional problem in epistemology (2006a), it does have a background or secondary role to play in connection with at least two major accounts of knowledge. I argue (2006b), first, that *reliabilist* accounts of knowledge must incorporate intellectual

character virtues into their repertoire of "knowledge-makers," or traits that contribute to knowledge, and that doing so generates some difficult theoretical challenges. Second, I argue (forthcoming) that *evidentialist* accounts of epistemic justification must incorporate a virtue-based background condition or constraint according to which, where a person's agency impacts her "evidential situation," she must operate in a minimally virtuous way. I will have more to say about these arguments below. The point at present is merely that a view like Zagzebski's is not the only alternative within "conservative" virtue epistemology, for while drawing certain conceptual connections between intellectual virtue and elements of traditional epistemology, neither of the arguments just noted is aimed at showing that the concept of intellectual virtue merits the leading or central role in connection with any issues in traditional epistemology.

In keeping with this distinction, I shall use the term "Strong Conservative VE" to refer to the view that the concept of intellectual virtue merits a central and fundamental role in connection with one or more traditional epistemological problems and "Weak Conservative VE" to refer to the view that while there are some notable conceptual connections between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology, these connections are considerably weaker, less central, or more peripheral than those posited by Strong Conservative VE. Again, Strong Conservative VE sees an appeal to the concept of intellectual virtue as having a major, transformative effect within traditional epistemology, while Weak Conservative VE posits considerably more modest connections between the two.

The second general type of character-based virtue epistemology identified above regards reflection on the intellectual virtues as occupying an epistemological niche outside of traditional epistemology; again, it views such reflection as motivating new and largely unaddressed questions about intellectual virtues and their role in the intellectual life, but questions that nonetheless are broadly epistemological in nature. These "autonomous" approaches also admit of two types. Here the difference depends, not on the positive substance or direction of the approaches themselves, but on how they perceive their status vis-à-vis a more traditional epistemology. "*Radical* Autonomous VE" says that an autonomous or independent concern with matters of intellectual virtue ought to *replace* or *supplant*

traditional concerns. "*Moderate* Autonomous VE" views an independent virtue-based approach as properly *complementing* more traditional approaches.[12]

Radical Autonomous VE typically arises out of a conviction that traditional epistemology is somehow fundamentally misguided or futile. Its defenders regard a turn to an independent concern with intellectual virtue as a new and more promising theoretical alternative. One example of Radical Autonomous VE is Jonathan Kvanvig's 1992 book *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind*.[13] Kvanvig argues that the notion of intellectual virtue should be the focus of epistemology, but that the belief-based, synchronic framework of traditional epistemology cannot accommodate such a focus (more on this argument below). Consequently he calls for a rejection of the traditional framework and the issues and questions central to it. Kvanvig's preferred, more diachronic and socially oriented framework begins with a conception of "human beings in terms of potentialities in need of socialization in order to participate in communal efforts to incorporate bodies of knowledge into corporate plans, practices, rituals, and the like for those practical and theoretical purposes that ordinarily characterize human beings."[14] Central to this framework are several questions and issues an adequate treatment of which, he claims, will give a major role to the concept of intellectual virtue. These include questions about how "one progresses down the path toward cognitive ideality," the significance of "social patterns of mimicry and imitation" and "training and practice" in human intellectual formation, the acquisition of the sort of "know-how" involved with searching for and evaluating explanations,[15] the relative merits of different kinds of epistemic communities and the bodies of knowledge these communities produce,[16] and the evaluation of "structured chunks" of information (vs. discrete propositions).[17] Because of the fundamental epistemological role that Kvanvig's proposed approach gives to the concept of intellectual virtue, and because he intends it as a *replacement* for traditional projects and concerns, this approach represents a clear instance of Radical Autonomous VE.[18]

Defenders of *Moderate* Autonomous VE agree that reflection on intellectual virtue and its role in the intellectual life can form the basis of an epistemological research program that is largely independent of traditional epistemology. But they do not regard this program as a replacement for traditional

epistemology; instead they envision it existing alongside or as *complementing* a more traditional approach. Put another way, defenders of Moderate Autonomous VE insist merely that epistemology proper is not *reducible* to or *exhausted* by traditional epistemology and that the borders of traditional epistemology ought to be *expanded* to make room for a more immediate or independent concern with the intellectual virtues. One representative sample of Moderate Autonomous VE is Lorraine Code's *Epistemic Responsibility* (1987). According to Code, epistemic responsibility can be understood as an excellence of intellectual *character* – indeed as the *chief* intellectual character virtue. But Code does not appeal to the notion of epistemic responsibility in an effort to formulate an analysis of knowledge or any other familiar epistemic concept. In fact she thinks (for reasons similar to Kvanvig's) that the basic categories and focus of traditional epistemology obscure what is philosophically most interesting about the intellectual virtues.[19] She aims instead to "develop a perspective in theory of knowledge that is neither analogous in structure nor in functional capacity to [the traditional perspective], but that sees a different set of questions as central to epistemological inquiry."[20] This perspective "turns questions about, and conditions for, epistemic responsibility into focal points of explication and analysis."[21]

We began in this section by delineating two general types of character-based virtue epistemology – conservative and autonomous. We have seen that each of these two general types admits of two subtypes. Strong Conservative VE is the view that there are major substantive connections between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology – that the concept of intellectual virtue stands to "save the day" within or transform traditional epistemology. Weak Conservative VE is the view that the conceptual connection between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology, while genuine, is weaker, more secondary, or less central. Radical Autonomous VE is the view that an autonomous or independent concern with intellectual virtue should *replace* traditional epistemological concerns. Moderate Autonomous VE is the view that an autonomous or independent approach is a proper *complement* of traditional epistemology (see figure A below).

Finally, it is worth reiterating that these categories are inspired by the range of views that *have actually been developed and defended* in the virtue epistemology literature.[22] The point of the

classification, again, is to shed light on what is at first glance an extremely diverse and even disorienting

philosophical literature. I take it, then, that inasmuch as the classification covers the full range of relevant

views (and to my knowledge there are no contributions to the virtue epistemology literature that fail to fit

into one of the four relevant categories), it stands to advance our understanding of the basic structure and

content of character-based virtue epistemology in a substantive and needed way.

Figure A
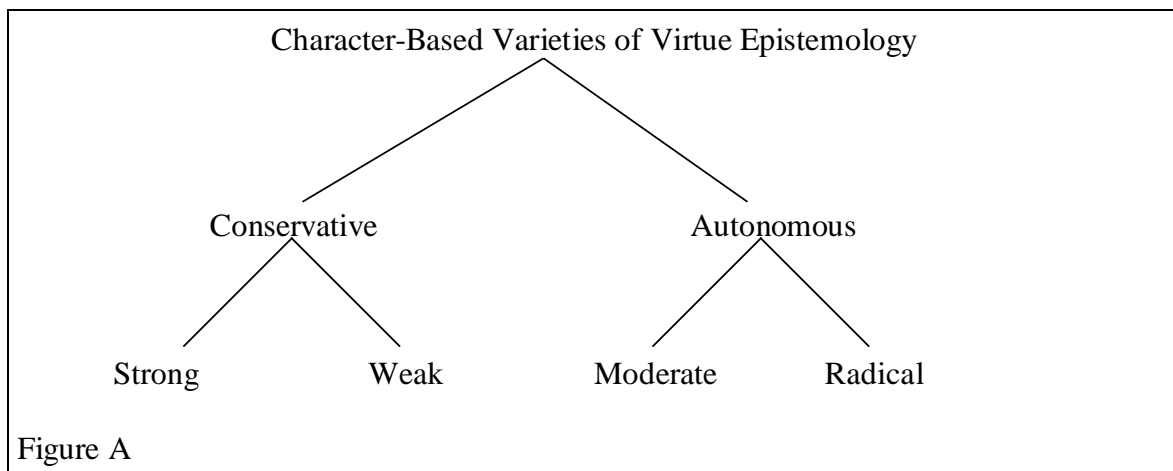
2. Evaluating the Varieties

The aim of this paper is not merely to clarify the terrain of character-based virtue epistemology. It

is also to evaluate the four major views within the field – a task to which I now turn. I begin by

developing some criticisms of the two obviously stronger and more controversial varieties: viz. Strong

Conservative VE and Radical Autonomous VE. I then turn to identify the central challenge facing the

other two varieties – Weak Conservative VE and Moderate Autonomous VE – and offer some reasons for

optimism about the prospects of these less extreme approaches. As noted above, while these assessments

are necessarily limited in scope and depth, they should prove revealing enough to shed valuable light on

the probable viability of each approach and thus on the probable future of character-based virtue

epistemology as a whole.

Strong Conservative VE says that the concept of intellectual virtue can form the basis of a solution to one or more problems in traditional epistemology. For this to happen, however, it appears that the concept of intellectual virtue must occupy a central role in a viable *analysis* of knowledge, and more specifically, that something like an exercise of intellectual virtue must be an *essential* or *defining* feature of knowledge.[23] This is because traditional debates about the nature, structure, and limits of knowledge revolve around the necessary or essential features of knowledge, such that if an exercise of intellectual virtue is not among these features, the concept of an intellectual virtue is unlikely to figure prominently in a solution to any of these problems.[24] Consider, for instance, the problem of skepticism about the external world. Non-skeptical replies to this problem attempt to show that some of our beliefs about the external world do actually qualify as knowledge, that is, that they satisfy the necessary (and sufficient) conditions for knowledge. The concern here is *not* with any properties or features that the beliefs in question instantiate only sometimes or occasionally. Thus if an exercise of intellectual virtue is not a necessary feature of knowledge, a concern with the relevant traits apparently will be of minimal relevance to dealing with the skeptical challenge. A similar point can be made in connection with the debate between foundationalists, coherentists, and others about the underlying structure of epistemic justification. Here again the concern is with the *essential* features of justification, and in particular, with whether these features should be conceived along foundationalist, coherentist, or other lines; it is not with any *incidental* features of justification. So again, it is difficult to see how the concept of an intellectual virtue might figure prominently in a response to any traditional epistemological problems without also forming the basis of a plausible analysis of knowledge.[25] This in turn suggests that that central challenge facing Strong Conservative VE is that of showing that something like an exercise of intellectual virtue is an essential feature of knowledge.

Accordingly, the most straightforward way of evaluating Strong Conservative VE is to consider whether it is possible to acquire knowledge *absent* an exercise of intellectual virtue. For if it is, then an exercise of intellectual virtue is not a necessary or defining feature of knowledge. One obvious reason for

thinking that knowledge *is* possible apart from an exercise of intellectual virtue is that otherwise, the class of knowers apparently would be limited to the class of intellectually virtuous agents: a person lacking in intellectual virtue could not be said to know *anything* (even, for instance, that she has hands or that two plus three equals five). Defenders of Strong Conservative VE have taken measures to get around this objection. Zagzebski, for instance, stops short of requiring that to have knowledge a person must actually *be* intellectually virtuous. She requires merely that the person possess the *motives* and perform the *actions* characteristic of an intellectually virtuous person (and that the person reach the truth as a result of these motives and actions).[26] This is possible even if the relevant motives and actions are not expressive of the agent's *character* (i.e. they do not arise from a corresponding habit or settled disposition on the part of the agent).

There remains, however, a range of troubling cases even for an attenuated position like this. For we appear to be capable of knowing many things absent any virtuous intellectual motives or actions. Right now, for instance, I apparently know that there is (or at least seems to be) a computer monitor before me, that I do not have a headache, that music is playing in the background, that the room smells of freshly ground coffee, that today is Tuesday, that I have been working for at least an hour this morning, and much more. And none of this putative knowledge appears to have involved even a momentary or fleeting manifestation of any virtuous motives or actions. At first glance, then, there appears to be a wide range of counterexamples to a virtue-based account of knowledge.[27]

Zagzebski has done more than any other defender of Strong Conservative VE to try to deal with cases of this sort, which she refers to as cases of "low-grade" knowledge.[28] Her discussion of this issue suggests three distinct replies. In the remainder of this section, I will examine and assess each one.

One reply that Zagzebski flirts with, but in the end appears not to endorse, involves simply biting the bullet and maintaining that the sorts of beliefs in question do not amount to genuine knowledge.[29] Embracing this response requires swallowing a very bitter pill, however, for beliefs of the relevant sort have seemed to epistemologists for centuries to be among the *clearest* and *least controversial* instances of knowledge. Indeed, a commitment to regarding such beliefs as knowledge is a standard methodological

starting point for many philosophers of knowledge.[30] Consequently, where a particular analysis of knowledge fails to accommodate such cases, this is likely – and plausibly – to be looked upon either as a reductio ad absurdum of the analysis in question or as grounds for thinking that it is an analysis of a fundamentally different epistemic concept than the one that has traditionally interested epistemologists.[31] Because of the radical and prima facie implausible nature of this reply, I will not pursue it further here. I shall take for granted that a plausible account of "low-grade" knowledge must regard the beliefs in question as knowledge.

A second and less radical response suggested by Zagzebski's discussion involves a significant modification to the thesis that knowledge is true belief formed via intellectually virtuous motives and actions. At one point, she suggests that a belief counts as knowledge just in case it is true and is *formed in the way that an intellectually virtuous person might form it under similar circumstances*.[32] She remarks, in connection with whether young children can acquire knowledge: "As long as they are old enough to imitate the behavior of intellectually virtuous persons in their belief-forming processes, young children (and possibly animals) can have knowledge based on perception and memory."[33] This modified conception of knowledge can accommodate the sort of low-grade knowledge identified above. For it is reasonable to think that when an intellectually virtuous person forms the sorts of beliefs in question, she too does so in a strictly automatic or mechanistic way; she does not manifest any virtuous motives or perform any virtuous actions. Thus by maintaining that knowledge is true belief formed in a way that an intellectually virtuous person might form it under similar circumstances, Strong Conservative VE might appear to have a way of handling the problem of low-grade knowledge.

But in fact there is a significant problem with this modified conception: namely, that it is not genuinely *virtue*-based. Relative to the sorts of cases at issue, the concept of intellectual virtue, or that of virtuous motives and actions, is not doing any *explanatory* work. According to the account, the beliefs in question are knowledge because they are formed in a manner that an intellectually virtuous person would form them. However, we have seen that when a virtuous person forms these beliefs, she does not do so *qua* intellectually virtuous person; she does not exercise any virtues of intellectual *character*. Rather, she

forms the beliefs in question via the *brute* or *mechanistic* part of her cognitive nature. This is evident in Zagzebski's remark that even *animals* might be capable of imitating the behavior of virtuous persons in these cases. The upshot is that nothing having to do with any intellectual character virtues explains why these beliefs count as knowledge. This in turn suggests that the conception in question fails to offer a genuinely virtue-based account of low-grade knowledge.[34]

A third response to the problem of low-grade knowledge suggested by Zagzebski's discussion is that such knowledge *does* in fact involve intellectually virtuous motives and actions. This is apparently Zagzebski's preferred way of handling the problem. She suggests that while such motives and actions appear absent from low-grade knowledge, they are in fact present and operative at a certain "low" or subconscious level. She says that in cases of simple perceptual knowledge, for instance, an intellectually virtuous person is characteristically guided by a "presumption of truth," which she describes as an intellectual *attitude*, and that it is plausible to think that this motive is also possessed by ordinary cognizers under similar conditions.[35] To add to this suggestion, let us suppose that virtuous and non-virtuous agents alike in such cases possess something like a low-level *desire* for truth. For instance, it might be said that when I form the belief that there is a ceramic mug on the desk before me, this process is guided by an *interest* in knowing what is on the table before me together with a basic *willingness* to trust that my senses are not deceiving me. The suggestion, then, is that in cases of low-grade knowledge, the beliefs in question do in fact arise from virtuous motives and actions and thus that a virtue-based account of knowledge might accommodate such cases.[36]

I will not dispute that in a range of the cases in question, certain low-level intellectual motives or actions may be operative, that is, that the relevant beliefs are not always the product of strictly brute or mechanical cognitive processes. Nonetheless, I find it implausible, first, to characterize the motives or actions in question as *virtuous* – to think of them as *characteristic* of intellectual *virtue*. As Zagzebski herself suggests, these motives and actions are entirely pedestrian: they are routinely manifested by mediocre cognitive agents and by young children (and possibly, she says, by animals). Moreover, she characterizes a *failure* to manifest such actions and motives as a rather extreme kind of intellectual

paranoia.[37] Character virtues, on the other hand, are typically thought to pick out a comparatively high and distinguished level of personal excellence – something that is not possessed by the average cognitive agent or by young children (and certainly not by animals!). Thus to the extent that our concern is whether something resembling an exercise of intellectual virtue is necessary for knowledge, the suggested line of response to the problem of low-grade knowledge appears unpromising.

An even more serious problem is that inasmuch as certain low-level motives or actions (whether virtuous or not) are operative in these cases, it seems clear that they do not stand in the required *causal* relation to the *truth* of the relevant beliefs. As Zagzebski and others have noted, a plausible virtue-based account of knowledge must require, not only that a known belief be true and that it have its origin in intellectually virtuous motives or actions, but also that the *truth of the belief itself* be attributable to the relevant motives and actions.[38] Consider my belief that music is presently playing in the background. Suppose we grant that at some level, the formation of this belief involves the sort of low-level intellectual motives or actions described above. While this much may be true, surely these motives or actions are not the primary *cause* of the *truth* of my belief that music is playing. Rather, the primary or salient reason my belief is true is that I have good *hearing* – that my auditory faculty is in good working order. A similar point could be made in connection with many other instances of perceptual knowledge: the *truth* of my belief that there is a computer monitor before me or that the aroma of coffee is in the air, for instance, is explainable, not in terms of any intellectual motives, actions, or effort on my part, but rather in terms of the standard, brute or relatively untutored operation of certain of my sensory modalities.

It appears, then, that this response to the problem of low-grade knowledge is unsuccessful. And indeed, there is one additional consideration worth noting that reinforces this conclusion. I have been assuming that in the cases in question, certain minimal or low-level intellectual motives or actions are operative at some level. But relative to at least some items of low-grade knowledge, this concession is too much. For there appear to be cases of low-grade knowledge that are unaccompanied by *any* genuine motives or actions. These are cases in which the agent in question is *passive* with respect to the belief in question. Suppose, for instance, that as I sit working at my desk late one night, the electricity suddenly

shuts off, causing the room immediately to go dark. As a result, I *immediately* and *automatically* form a corresponding belief. I am *overcome* by knowledge of the change in lighting; this knowledge simply dawns on me.[39] By all appearances, this is a case in which I do not manifest any relevant intellectual motives or actions. I do not, even at a "low" or subconscious level, *seek* the truth about the state of affairs in question. Nor is plausible to think I am "trusting my senses" in the relevant, motivational sense. And yet surely I come to *know* that the lighting in the room has changed. Moreover, cases like this are not few and far between: they include knowledge that, for instance, a loud sound has just occurred or that one presently has a severe headache or is feeling nauseous. Again, knowledge of this sort seems not to involve or implicate the knower's agency in any significant way.[40]

We have examined three replies to the problem of low-grade knowledge that might be offered in defense of Strong Conservative VE and have found each reply wanting. Nor is it clear what a more promising line of defense might amount to. Thus, the discussion, while perhaps falling short of a comprehensive or exhaustive critique of Strong Conservative VE, provides some initially compelling reasons for thinking that the prospects of this approach are grim.

2.2 Radical Autonomous VE

I turn now to consider a second rather strong and controversial variety of character-based virtue epistemology. As a version of *autonomous* virtue epistemology, Radical Autonomous VE endorses a theoretical concern with or focus on intellectual virtue that is independent of the traditional preoccupation with questions about the nature, limits, and sources of knowledge. What distinguishes this view from *Moderate* Autonomous VE is its claim that an independent virtue-based research program should *replace* traditional epistemology – that traditional epistemological projects and pursuits should be *rejected* in favor of a virtue-based approach.

Radical Autonomous VE faces two main challenges, one positive and the other negative. The *positive* challenge is that of making good on the claim that there are indeed substantive, broadly epistemological questions and issues to be pursued in connection with the intellectual virtues that are independent of traditional questions and that might form the basis of an alternative approach to

epistemology. This challenge is also the central challenge for Moderate Autonomous VE; thus I shall

postpone a discussion of it to the discussion of Moderate Autonomous VE below. The *negative* challenge

for Radical Autonomous VE is that of showing that an independent theoretical focus on intellectual virtue

is not just an interesting and promising complement to traditional epistemology, but rather that the

epistemological enterprise should be entirely *reoriented* in this direction (that epistemologists should

jettison the questions and issues of traditional epistemology).

Clearly the defender of Radical Autonomous VE is in a difficult dialectical position. Why think

that an independent, virtue-based epistemological research program (assuming, for the moment, that there

can be such a thing) merits the lion's share of attention within epistemology? Why think that traditional

epistemology should be *abandoned* in favor of a strictly virtue-based approach? Given the seriousness of

this challenge, it is not too surprising that to date, there is only one systematic and fully worked out

defense of this view: namely, Kvanvig's *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind* (1992).[41]

Kvanvig's argument for the negative component of Radical Autonomous VE is not easy to pin

down. At points, it looks as if he simply *begins* with the (intuitive?) premise that the intellectual virtues

should be the focus of epistemology and proceeds to argue that the traditional epistemological framework

cannot accommodate this focus and so should be rejected.[42] Elsewhere, and more plausibly, his argument

appears to be grounded in a certain meta-epistemological requirement, according to which "[w]hat we

really want from an epistemologist is an account of the cognitive life of the mind that addresses our

cognitive experience and helps us understand how to maximize our potential for finding truth and

avoiding error."[43] By Kvanvig's lights, traditional epistemology fails badly on this score. He argues that it

generates a conception of the cognitive life by "cementing together the time-slice accounts of justification

and knowledge for each moment of an individual's life," and that the result is conception that is "removed

from the ordinary concerns of … human cognizers." He likens traditional epistemology to "a maze of

complexities surrounding the analysis of knowledge and justification from which no route into the

promised land seems possible."[44] According to Kvanvig, a virtue-oriented epistemology could avoid these

defects. Thus he spends several chapters examining whether the framework of traditional epistemology

might accommodate a focus on intellectual virtue.[45] But based in part on the sorts of objections raised against Strong Conservative VE above, Kvanvig eventually concludes that there is no room within the synchronic, belief-based framework of traditional epistemology for the required kind of focus on intellectual virtue. From this he draws the further conclusion that epistemologists should abandon traditional epistemology in favor of an autonomous, virtue-based approach.[46]

While interesting and provocative, there are at least two substantive problems with Kvanvig's argument. First, the conclusion of the argument follows only if the *sole* purpose of epistemology is to "address our cognitive experience" and give us a better idea of "how to maximize our potential for finding truth and avoiding error." Otherwise the fact (if it is a fact) that traditional epistemology fails to deliver in this respect will fall short of licensing the abandonment of traditional epistemology. It is difficult to see, however, why this account of the *telos* of epistemology should be accepted. While it may be a mistake to deny that the kind of practical relevance in question is *a* goal of epistemology, there is little reason to think it is the *only* one. Indeed, surely one (if not *the*) central aim of epistemology is simply to provide a deeper and more illuminating *understanding* of the nature, limits, and sources of knowledge than is available via commonsense. Where the theoretical work required for providing such an understanding fails to have the sort of practical value that concerns Kvanvig, this need not count as a significant strike against it. Any theory's ability to shed substantial light on its subject matter may conflict with its practical usefulness or applicability; and there is little reason to think that the latter theoretical value should always trump the former.

A second problem with Kvanvig's argument is the premise that traditional epistemology completely fails to serve the relevant practical end, that it fails to "address our cognitive experience" and to give us a better idea of "how to maximize our potential for finding truth and avoiding error." This claim also seems much too strong. Why think that an accurate and well-constructed (even if still technical or theoretical) account of knowledge or justification would not be of some use to a person aiming to improve his cognitive situation? Indeed, there is surely *something* of practical use or significance in some of the better and more sophisticated accounts of knowledge and justification on offer. By illuminating the

nature and significance of epistemic reliability, various evidential support relations, or the epistemic

basing relation, for instance, these accounts presumably provide at least some measure of intellectual

guidance. To borrow an analogy from Aristotle, an agent with a refined view of the epistemic goal, like

an archer with a focused view of his target, is considerably more likely to achieve this goal than one with

an unfocused or unrefined view.[47] The suggestion is that one helpful way of realizing the epistemic good

is the possession of a reasonably robust and illuminating conception of this good, which at a minimum

will include an account of concepts like knowledge, rationality, understanding, and the like. And surely

traditional epistemology can – and indeed has – played a significant role in this regard. My claim is not

that standard accounts of knowledge and related epistemic concepts are the *sin qua non* of the knowing

enterprise itself, but rather that it is a mistake to think that traditional epistemology has nothing to offer in

connection with the sort of practical desideratum that interests Kvanvig.

It appears, then, that Kvanvig's argument for the negative and defining tenet of Radical

Autonomous VE is unsuccessful. This does not, of course, guarantee the failure of Radical

Autonomous VE as whole. For in principle, any number of reasons might be given for

abandoning traditional epistemology. Nevertheless, the discussion of Kvanvig's argument

illustrates an important point: namely, that Radical Autonomous VE shoulders a daunting

argumentative burden. Again, its defenders must demonstrate, not just that traditional questions

and projects are merely *part* of what matters from an epistemological standpoint, but rather that

they do not matter at all. Therefore, until such a project has been carried out, and carried out in a

way that at least leaves open the possibility of an alternative, virtue-based approach to

epistemology, the prospects of Radical Autonomous VE are bound to appear questionable.[48]

Before moving on, one other point that tells against the prospects of Radical Autonomous VE is

worth considering. In short, the point is that it takes very little in the way of philosophical interest or

commitment to motivate a host of the problems and questions central to traditional epistemology, with the

result that arguments for the wholesale repudiation of traditional epistemology seem even less likely to succeed.

We are as human beings curious about the world around us. We want to acquire knowledge, to form an accurate or true perspective, of a great many subject matters or dimensions of reality. But this is not all we desire from an intellectual or epistemic standpoint, for it is conceivable that we might possess a very large stock of true beliefs (perhaps even knowledge) and yet be *unaware* of this fact: relative to our own reflective perspectives, it might be it an *accident* that we have achieved such success.[49] Surely in this case our epistemic situation would be lamentable. What we desire, in addition to *having* a lot of true beliefs or knowledge, is the *assurance* that we have achieved this goal: we want to "see" or know that in fact our beliefs about the world *are* true or that they do in fact amount to knowledge. Call this desideratum "epistemic assurance."

One unfortunate but salient feature of the human epistemic condition is that such assurance is not directly and unproblematically available to us: we cannot, simply on the basis of introspection or any other cognitive power, *tell* whether our beliefs are true or amount to knowledge.[50] For this reason, we esteem and seek to acquire good *evidence* or *reasons* in support of our beliefs – reasons for thinking that in fact our beliefs are *true*.[51]

Given this rather straightforward and plausible view of the centrality of the possession of good epistemic reasons to the possession of a good intellectual life (and a good life as a whole), it is natural to want to get a better, more reflective or philosophical understanding of such reasons than is provided by commonsense. But this, it turns out, is not at all easy to come by. The attempt to gain a deeper and more penetrating understanding of good epistemic reasons gives rise to host of difficult philosophical questions. For instance, what exactly *is* it for a belief to be supported by good epistemic reasons? What is the underlying *structure* of this desideratum? The most natural reply appeals to the concept of an epistemic *foundation*: the idea being (roughly) that a belief is supported by good epistemic reasons just in case it is ultimately grounded in something like sensory experience. But it has proven extremely difficult to give an account of such a relation: and in particular of how something non-cognitive like experience

might provide reasons in support of cognitive states like beliefs.[52] Such difficulties have lead many philosophers to abandon "foundationalist" accounts of good epistemic reasons in favor of other models (e.g. "coherentist" or "infinitist" models). But none of these alternative models has been widely accepted.

Other critical questions surround the essential *sources* of good epistemic reasons. While it is, as just indicated, extremely difficult to specify *how* exactly sensory experience can be a source of good epistemic reasons, it is also extremely difficult to deny that it is a source. It can reasonably be wondered, however, whether sensory experience is the *only* source of good epistemic reasons. The most obvious alternative in this regard is *reason* or *rational reflection*. Can rational reflection by itself provide us with reasons for thinking that some of our beliefs are true? If so, what must it (and the world itself) be like? And how can it do so? And if reason is not an autonomous source of good epistemic reasons, how can we know the wide range of things our support for which *seems* to come from reason? How can what we seem to know a priori really be supported or grounded in sensory experience?

Finally, there are certain difficult and easily motivated questions concerning the *limits* of good epistemic reasons. Central here is the question of whether the possession of good epistemic reasons is even *possible*. The challenge is to give reasons in support of an affirmative reply that are not viciously circular or question-begging. For instance, if we ask about the quality of our reasons for our beliefs about the external world – about why what we *take* to be good reasons for these beliefs really *are* good reasons – we are likely to be led to questions about the reliability or trustworthiness of sense perception. It is likely to seem that we can have good reasons for our beliefs about the external world only if we can have good reasons for trusting sense perception. The problem is that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to give an account of the reliability of sense perception that does not rely on the deliverances of the very faculties whose credibility is in question. Skepticism, then, quickly ensues.

The point of rehearsing this dialectic is *not* to suggest that these questions or issues are intractable or that none of them has been addressed in a satisfactory way in the literature. It is rather to illustrate the point that it takes relatively little by way of philosophical commitment or interest to *motivate* the relevant questions – to make them seem worth taking seriously. And since these questions represent a considerable

segment of the theoretical basis of traditional epistemology, the discussion underscores the difficulty of trying to motivate a wholesale *repudiation* of traditional epistemology. And in doing this, it casts further suspicion on the prospects of Radical Autonomous VE.[53]

2.3 Weak Conservative VE

We have examined two of the four main varieties of character-based virtue epistemology and found that their prospects do not appear to be very good. I turn now to examine the other two varieties. As the names suggest, Weak Conservative VE and Moderate Autonomous VE lack the stronger or more radical bite of the other two approaches just considered. It is not too surprising, then, that their prospects turn out to be considerably better. My focus in this section is Weak Conservative VE, which is the view that there are some conceptual connections between intellectual virtue and the subject matter of traditional epistemology, even if not connections that warrant giving the notion of intellectual virtue a central or fundamental role within traditional epistemology. I will attempt to illustrate what I take to be the promise of Weak Conservative VE by briefly reiterating some recent arguments which, if compelling, amount to a vindication of this approach's central thesis.

As noted earlier, in recent years I have argued (2006b; forthcoming) that the concept of intellectual virtue deserves at least some kind of role in connection with two prominent accounts of the nature of knowledge or epistemic justification. Reliabilism, for instance, says that knowledge is (roughly) true belief produced by reliable or truth-conducive cognitive traits. The sorts of traits they regard as reliable, however, are largely *mechanistic* or *impersonal*. These include vision, hearing, memory, introspection, and the like.[54] Reliabilists are right to think that traits of this sort account for the reliability of human cognizers with respect to certain "fields" of propositions (e.g. propositions about the appearance of one's immediate surroundings) and within certain environments ("normal" environments with good lighting). But they are mistaken to think that they can account for our reliability with respect to *all* relevant propositional fields and environments – including those that pertain to some of the most valued and sought after forms or instances of knowledge. Reaching the truth about philosophical, scientific, mathematic, historical, or moral reality, for example, or reaching the truth in circumstances or

environments in which doing so requires overcoming significant obstacles, does not primarily depend on one's having perfect vision, an excellent memory, or the like; rather it depends, we might say, on one's having a *will* of a certain sort: e.g. on one's being *motivated* to reach the truth or on one's possessing certain intellectual *character* virtues like carefulness and thoroughness in inquiry, attentiveness, determination, open-mindedness, and fair-mindedness. These traits are the vehicle or basis of our reliability with respect to the sorts of propositions and environments just noted. The claim, then, is that to the extent that reliabilists fail to incorporate these traits into their repertoire of reliable traits or "knowledge-makers," they will be unable to account for the status of much of the knowledge that we care about most as human beings. For again, to explain why the beliefs in question amount to knowledge, they must identify the basis of our reliability with respect to such knowledge; and this, I have suggested, requires an appeal to intellectual *character* virtues. Accordingly, the concept of intellectual virtue has at least some role to play within a plausible reliabilist account of knowledge. It should not be the (exclusive) conceptual basis or focal point of such an account; but it does represent one critical way of realizing or achieving that focal point (viz. reliability). And there is more to be said in support of this connection. While I cannot get into the details here, reliabilism's inclusion of character virtues into its repertoire of "knowledge-makers" brings with it several new and challenging theoretical *questions* and *problems* that arise from certain structural differences between character virtues and faculty virtues.[55] The result is that substantive philosophical *work* to be done by reliabilists in connection with matters of intellectual virtue.

Evidentialism offers an account of epistemic justification that is typically characterized as a competitor of a reliabilism.[56] According to evidentialism, a person is justified in believing a given claim just in case (roughly) her evidence supports this claim.[57] This view is vulnerable to criticism based on cases in which a person's belief is supported by her evidence, but only because the person has failed to inquire with respect to the relevant subject matter, has inquired in a shoddy and superficial way, or is presently ignoring or suppressing potential defeaters to her belief. Imagine, for instance, a person whose evidence supports her belief that long term exposure to secondhand smoke has no negative consequences for her health, but only (due, say, to acute anxiety about health-related matters) because she has shown

extreme tunnel vision, denial, and self-deception in her thinking and "research" about this issue. While this person's belief may satisfy the evidentialist's condition for justification, her belief intuitively is unjustified.[58]

Because the explanation for this apparently lies with the person's manifestation of various intellectual *vices* (inattentiveness, careless and hastiness in inquiry, an unwillingness to consider counterevidence, etc.), one solution for the evidentialist would be to incorporate a condition according to which justification supervenes on a belief that fits a person's evidence only if this person has exercised certain intellectual *virtues* in the formation or maintenance of this belief. But for reasons noted earlier in connection with Zagzebski's defense of Strong Conservative VE, making virtuous agency a *necessary* condition or precondition for justification would be a mistake. For again, there are cases of "passive knowledge," in which a cognitive agent is passive in the formation of her belief. A more plausible solution is for the evidentialist to adopt a virtue-based *constraint* or *proviso* – one that applies or is binding only with respect to the relevant sorts of cases. Consequently evidentialists might hold that a person is justified in believing a given claim just in case this claim is supported by her evidence – *provided* that, if the person's agency makes a salient contribution to her evidence concerning the belief in question, she functions in a manner consistent with intellectual virtue. This represents a second way in which the concept of intellectual virtue might bear upon a traditional account of knowledge without occupying center stage in or forming the conceptual basis of the account.

This brief reiteration of the relevant arguments is intended to illustrate what the positive substance of Weak Conservative VE might amount to. These arguments show how the concept of intellectual virtue might come into play within traditional epistemology in certain background, secondary, or somewhat peripheral ways. I take it that the arguments have sufficient prima facie plausibility such that they warrant some optimism about the prospects of Weak Conservative VE – or at least justify taking seriously the *possibility* of this approach. And of course there is little reason to think that the connections just identified are the *only* potential points of contact between the concept of intellectual virtue and the positions and debates central to traditional epistemology.[59] We may conclude, then, that while Strong

Conservative VE is unpromising, the prospects of Weak Conservative VE are considerably better. Again, while the concept of intellectual virtue does not merit a leading role in connection with an analysis of knowledge (or other traditional issues), it may very well merit one or more supporting roles.

2.4 Moderate Autonomous VE

I noted earlier that the *positive* challenge for Radical Autonomous VE is identical to the *central* challenge for Moderate Autonomous VE. Again, defenders of both views advocate a virtue-based approach to epistemology that is largely independent of traditional epistemology. But the question naturally arises: if the focus of such an approach is *not* the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge, then what exactly is it? The defender of Radical or Moderate Autonomous VE cannot plausibly reply by saying merely that the focus is something like "the intellectual virtues and their role in the cognitive life." For this response, while perhaps correct at a general level, says next to nothing about the positive theoretical *substance* of the approach: nothing about the specific issues, questions, problems, puzzles, etc., responses to which might constitute its theoretical basis. Indeed it leaves open the possibility that there are *not* any (or many) such issues or questions: that when reflection on the intellectual virtues is divorced from traditional considerations, these traits are of little or no philosophical or epistemological significance. Thus defenders of either version of autonomous virtue epistemology must be explicit about the positive theoretical focus of the virtue-based approach they endorse. I shall refer to this as the "theoretical challenge" for autonomous virtue epistemology.

This challenge may not seem to pose a very serious threat to the viability of an autonomous virtue epistemology. But when one looks, for instance, at some of the seminal attempts to defend a version of Moderate Autonomous VE, this appearance dissipates.[60] For while clearly embracing its defining tenets, several principal defenders of Moderate Autonomous VE either fail to be very specific about the positive theoretical focus of their proposed approaches or go about specifying issues or questions which (for one reason or another) fail to have much epistemological traction.[61] For instance, much of Code's *Epistemic Responsibility* (1987) is devoted to discussions that have no immediate bearing on matters of intellectual virtue or whose bearing is tenuous enough that it is unclear how the relevant issues and questions could

form the basis of a virtue-based alternative to traditional epistemology. This applies to her lengthy (and often interesting) discussions of metaphysical realism (Ch. 6), literature as a source of knowledge about cognitive well-being (Chs. 2 and 8), doxastic voluntarism (Ch. 4), and similarities between epistemic and moral evaluation (Ch. 3). Moreover, when Code does squarely address issues like the basic nature and structure of intellectual virtues, her discussion is often surprisingly thin. Consider the following passage, which is not atypical: "How, then, are we to delineate more precisely the nature of intellectually virtuous character? … Intellectually virtuous persons value knowing and understanding how things really are. They resist the temptation to live with partial explanations where fuller ones are attainable; they resist the temptation to live in fantasy or in a world of dream or illusion, considering it better to know, despite the tempting comfort and complacency a life of fantasy or illusion (or one well tinged with fantasy or illusion) can offer."[62] Characterizations like this, while perhaps entirely accurate as far as they go, can lead even the open-minded reader to wonder whether there is really much for epistemologists to talk about in connection with intellectual virtue. They suggest that an understanding of intellectual virtue may be more or less a matter of commonsense.[63]

A related point can be made in connection with some of Hookway's work discussed above. While Hookway is considerably more reflective about the theoretical requirements of a genuine, virtue-based alternative to traditional epistemology,[64] some of his discussions of such an alternative exhibit some similar limitations. We saw above that central to Hookway's argument for a version of Moderate Autonomous VE is the idea that the notion of intellectual virtue should figure prominently in the practice of "epistemic evaluation." The reason, again, is that when making such evaluations, our concern is not merely *beliefs*, but also cognitive *deliberations* and *inquiries*; and in these domains, success or failure often turns on whether the person in question possesses various excellences of intellectual character. Thus, Hookway concludes, if we are to offer reasonably "thick" and accurate assessments of our cognitive deliberations and inquiries, we shall have to appeal to the concept of intellectual virtue.

I do not wish to dispute the validity of Hookway's argument. Rather, my concern is that it is unclear what bearing it is supposed to have on the enterprise of *epistemology* – virtue epistemology or

otherwise. Cognitive evaluation is primarily a *practical* affair: it is engaged in by ordinary cognitive agents in ordinary cognitive situations. It is not principally an activity undertaken by epistemologists *qua* epistemologists. To be sure, epistemologists sometimes offer "epistemic evaluations" in the sense that they construct theories of knowledge and justification which can then be applied to individual beliefs. But Hookway does not endorse a virtue-based analysis of justification or any other familiar epistemic concept. Instead his point is apparently that an accurate and illuminating assessment of various cognitive phenomena will necessarily appeal to the language and concepts of intellectual virtue. But how is this insight supposed to form the basis of anything like an alternative, virtue-based epistemological research program? What would the governing issues, questions, problems, etc., be on such an approach? Put another way, what *work* is there for epistemologists to do in light of Hookway's argument?[65]

My claim is *not* that that these discussions of Code or Hookway are entirely bereft of any hints or suggestions concerning the possible theoretical or philosophical substance of a virtue-based alternative to traditional epistemology. (Indeed, as I explain below, I think both at times point in some promising directions.) The claim is rather that neither is sufficiently explicit or convincing on this score and that consequently the viability of their proposed alternatives comes off looking questionable. Both authors fail to deal adequately with the "theoretical challenge" for an autonomous virtue epistemology.[66]

Before proceeding, it is worth considering what explanation might be offered of this kind of mistake, which is at once serious and yet quite common in the virtue epistemology literature.[67] My proposal is that the relevant discussions of Code, Hookway, and others fall prey to a certain subtle and tempting *fallacy* related to defending an autonomous, virtue-based epistemology. These authors do effectively demonstrate what might be referred to as the "epistemic" significance of the intellectual virtues. That is, they demonstrate the *instrumental* or *practical* significance of these traits vis-à-vis various epistemic ends like knowledge and understanding. Code, for instance, shows that matters of intellectual virtue are important for assessing the testimony of other believers. And Hookway makes a good case for thinking that intellectually virtuous agency is essential to successful inquiry. The problem is that demonstrating the *epistemic* significance of the intellectual virtues is not sufficient for demonstrating

their *epistemological* significance. Epistemology is a *philosophical* or *theoretical* discipline. It trades in various challenging questions, problems, puzzles, etc., that arise with philosophical or theoretical reflection on the cognitive life. What we have seen, however, is that something can be an important *means* to cognitive success without admitting of significant and sustained *theoretical* or *epistemological* inquiry. Its cognitive significance might simply be a matter of commonsense; it might have certain practical, but no real theoretical, implications; or it might be the proper subject matter of a discipline other than epistemology (e.g. of cognitive science or ethics).

We may refer to the inference from a thing's epistemic significance to its epistemological significance as the "theoretical fallacy."[68] My suggestion is that the problem identified above with certain instances of Moderate Autonomous VE is traceable to this fallacy. As a case in point, consider the following remark from Hookway: "To draw these ideas together, why should we talk about the virtues? In making judgements, we rely on traits of character, habits and dispositions. If we are genuinely virtuous, we will ask the right questions, and this explains our successes in inquiry."[69] Hookway's suggestion is apparently that the critical role of intellectual virtues in inquiry is a sufficient indication of their epistemological significance (presumably professional epistemologists are the "we" to whom he initially refers). Similarly, Code remarks that her preferred approach to epistemology "denies the autonomy of the known, maintaining that the nature of the knower and of his/her environment and epistemic community are *epistemologically* relevant, for they act as *enabling* and/or *constraining* factors in the growth of knowledge, both for individuals and for communities."[70] One's nature as a knower, on Code's view, is largely constituted by one's intellectual character. Thus she too seems to accept the idea that the practical or causal connection between virtuous intellectual character and knowledge is sufficient for demonstrating its epistemological significance. But again, the conclusion does not follow – any more than the fact that well-functioning retinas or healthy brain chemistry are critical to cognitive well-being entails that these things ought occupy the attention of the epistemologist *qua* epistemologist.[71]

This discussion suggests that the theoretical challenge for autonomous virtue epistemology is genuine and should not be underestimated.[72] However, this challenge is not insurmountable. There are, in

fact, good reasons to think that it can be overcome. Some of these reasons are evident in other contributions to the virtue epistemology literature. Others pertain to issues and questions that to date have received scant if any treatment. In the remainder of this section, I briefly enumerate several theoretical issues or projects which, when taken together, warrant at least some optimism about the possibility of a relatively autonomous, virtue-based epistemological research program.[73] Again, the challenge is to identify philosophical issues and questions surrounding the intellectual virtues that might form the basis of a virtue-based epistemological research program that is independent of a more traditional program – issues and questions that might occupy defenders of Moderate Autonomous VE.

Several challenging and broadly epistemological questions arise with reflection on the precise *nature* of an intellectual virtue. Principally, what *makes* the relevant character traits intellectual virtues? This question has been answered in several ways, all of which have at least some plausibility, but which ultimately are incompatible. Julia Driver (2000; 2003), for instance, argues that a trait is an intellectual virtue just in case it is epistemically reliable or truth-conducive. It seems reasonable to think that many of the traits we regard as intellectual virtues (e.g. intellectual carefulness, thoroughness, attentiveness, fairness, etc.) are reliable in this sense; and since it is plausible to regard a reliable or truth-conducive trait as an "intellectual virtue" in some sense, Driver's proposal has at least some initial promise. But this is not the only account of intellectual virtue available. Montmarquet (1993; 2000), for instance, maintains that the traits in question are intellectual virtues on account of certain of their internal or psychological features considered *in their own right* – for example, a *desire* for truth or knowledge.[74] This account has the advantage of being able to explain the apparent *personal* worth or value associated with these traits, that is, the fact that these traits seem to make their possessor a good or better *person*. This feature of intellectual virtues is difficult to account for on a model of intellectual virtue according to which (like Driver's) the traits in question are strictly *instrumentally* valuable.[75] A third account weds the two just noted. Zagzebski (1996) argues that a trait is an intellectual virtue just in case it is reliable *and* involves an intrinsically valuable motive.[76] Despite its conciliatory tone, this mixed or hybrid account has the (problematic) appearance of trying to bring together two very different sorts of value (one instrumental,

the other intrinsic; one impersonal, the other personal) under a single, univocal concept of intellectual virtue. The worry here is not with the possibility that a single trait might have both instrumental and intrinsic value, but rather with the idea that such a trait would be an intellectual virtue in just a single sense – rather than satisfying the conditions for two, separable concepts of intellectual virtue. Mixed accounts also run the risk of inheriting any defects internal to either of the accounts it is attempting to integrate. It appears, then, that the answer to the question of what ultimately *makes* the relevant character traits intellectual virtues is far from obvious and merits further attention among virtue epistemologists.

A related set of issues focuses directly on the (alleged) *reliability* of the intellectual virtues. We just noted that many of the traits commonly regarded as intellectual virtues seem pretty clearly to be reliable. But this is not so clear with respect to other putative virtues: for instance, intellectual integrity, autonomy, and originality. It is much less clear whether these traits tend in a systematic way to help their possessor reach the truth and avoid error. Moreover, virtually none of the traits commonly regarded as intellectual virtues is reliable when possessed in isolation. An intellectually careful but dogmatic and closed-minded person, for instance, is unlikely to acquire a preponderance of true beliefs. This suggests that the intellectual virtues are "unified" in a reasonably strong sense, which in turn raises questions about how they are to be *individuated*. For example, if reliability is a defining feature of an intellectual virtue, but none of the relevant traits taken by itself is reliable, in what sense can these traits really be considered intellectual virtues? This problem is magnified by the fact that even when taken as a whole, the traits in question are reliable only if combined with properly functioning cognitive *faculties* (e.g. good eyesight, a good memory, etc.). A final problem arises from certain counterfactual considerations. Montmarquet (1993) and others (Swank 2000; Dancy 2000; Baehr 2007) envision a person who bears all the internal marks of intellectual virtue and who from her own (reasonable) perspective is extremely cognitively successful. Owing to the work of a Cartesian demon, however, she is in fact extremely unreliable. According to these authors, such a person should still be regarded as intellectually virtuous. If they are correct, this presents a further obstacle to the initially attractive view that reliability is a defining feature of an intellectual virtue. Thus the sense (if any) in which intellectual virtues are reliable and the

implications this has for individuating of intellectual virtues and for related matters is also something that merits further thought and reflection from autonomously minded virtue epistemologists.

Other relevant issues and questions arise with reflection on the internal *structure* of an intellectual virtue. According to Zagzebski (1996), the fundamental psychological requirement of any intellectual virtue is a *motivation* for truth and related cognitive goods.[77] While something like this requirement is plausible, intellectual virtues seem essentially to have a certain *cognitive* or *doxastic* component as well.[78] This is suggested by some of the work of virtue ethicists on the moral virtues. John McDowell (1979), for instance, characterizes moral virtue as fundamentally involving a kind of moral *perception*. And Julia Annas (2005) gives the notion of practical *reason* a central place in her account of moral virtue. These requirements are arguably complementary and plausible. And it is reasonable to think that intellectual virtues exhibit an analogous internal structure. This underscores several important questions concerning the structure of an intellectual virtue, none of which has been very widely discussed by virtue epistemologists or other philosophers. For instance, what is the full *range* of psychological states essential to intellectual virtue? What is the precise nature of these states? And how exactly are these states related to each other?[79]

Several related questions concern the *ends* or *goals* proper to intellectual virtue. First, what ultimately motivates an intellectually virtuous person? According to one fairly standard view (e.g. Montmarquet 1993), the proper aim or end of all intellectual virtues is *truth*. But Zagzebski (2001) and Wayne Riggs (2003) have recently argued to the contrary that the fundamental aims of intellectual virtue extend beyond truth and knowledge and include such "higher end" cognitive values as understanding and insight. It is also important to consider *whose* cognitive success or well-being is the intrinsic object of intellectual virtue. It is easy to get the impression from the literature that an intellectually virtuous person is always *egoistically* motivated, for the intellectual virtues are usually characterized in relation to the context of personal *inquiry*, where the goal is typically the inquirer's *own* acquisition of true beliefs. But surely the intellectual virtues are applicable to other contexts as well. They are relevant, for instance, to the domains of teaching, reporting, and public debate – among others. In these areas, the goal of an

intellectually virtuous person is likely to be *others'* acquisition of various cognitive goods. Very little work has been done to explore these alternative applications of intellectual virtue or what they indicate about the intrinsic aims or goals of intellectual virtue.[80]

Some of the recent work of Robert Roberts and Jay Wood suggests a considerably different type of focus and methodology that might be pursued within autonomous virtue epistemology. Instead of focusing on the general concept of intellectual virtue, Roberts and Wood give their attention primarily to the nature and structure of *individual* virtues. In their recent book *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (2007) they devote entire chapters to analyses of virtues like intellectual firmness, courage and caution, autonomy, generosity, and humility.[81] Their aim in these chapters is not to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for the relevant traits, but rather to offer a "conceptual map" of the characterological dimension of cognitive flourishing.[82] The result is several rich, well-illustrated, and illuminating philosophical profiles of individual intellectual virtues.

The work of Roberts and Wood illustrates a general, recognizably Aristotelian methodology that can be applied to virtually any intellectual virtue with interesting philosophical results. For any virtue *V*, the following sorts of questions might profitably be addressed: What are the basic actions, feelings, attitudes, motives, judgments, etc., characteristic of *V*? What is to perform these actions, have these feelings, etc., in the right way, at the right time, toward the right person, and so forth? How does *V* differ from closely related intellectual virtues? (For example, in the case of open-mindedness, how is this virtue distinct from, say, intellectual empathy or fairness?) Which vices, if any, correspond to *V*? And how exactly are they related to *V*? Which domains of the intellectual life (e.g. inquiry, teaching, or public debate) does *V* bear on most directly? Which epistemic goods does it deliver? And how does it do so? This method is philosophically fruitful, both for the light it sheds on the nature and structure of individual virtues, but also because it helps shore up and illustrate some of the more general or fundamental philosophical questions surrounding intellectual virtue (e.g. whether there is a univocal concept of intellectual virtue that "covers" all of the relevant traits[83]).

A final general area of potential inquiry begins with the plausible assumption that there are fixed and generic dimensions of the cognitive life that make certain fairly systematic and traceable demands on an agent's intellectual character. These include dimensions associated with, say, mastering a foreign or challenging subject matter, inquiring in the face of threats to one's well-being, evaluating testimony, collaborating with others in intellectual ventures (e.g. coauthoring an article or doing group research), engaging an intellectual opponent or adversary, teaching a difficult subject matter, or motivating an audience to care about a particular idea or body of knowledge. It is plausible to think that success or failure in these and related domains depends in substantial and systematic ways on the extent to which one exercises one or more intellectual virtues (to follow through with a threatening but important inquiry, one needs intellectual courage and perseverance; to carry out a joint intellectual venture, one needs to be intellectually open, attentive, and adaptable; etc.). This suggests an additional method for studying the intellectual virtues from an epistemological standpoint. For a given intellectual domain D, we might ask: What is the general structure of D? What sorts of character-relevant demands does success in D typically involve? Which virtues are relevant to meeting these demands? How are they relevant? How do they contribute to success in D?[84]

A good example of this sort of inquiry is some recent work by Miranda Fricker. In a recent essay (2003), and in an even more recent book (2007), Fricker examines the role of intellectual character in the evaluation of testimony. She is concerned in particular with certain sorts of *injustices* that tend to occur in this domain (e.g. where a person's word or opinion is not taken seriously because of her gender, race, or accent). Fricker makes clear that the injustices in question admit of a definite, discernable structure and she argues convincingly that the proper corrective is a certain "testimonial sensibility," which is partly constituted by an intellectual virtue she labels "reflexive critical openness" (2003, pp. 8-11 and 17-19). Fricker's work in this area reveals some of the subtle, complex, but ultimately systematic and traceable ways in which the intellectual virtues are related to cognitive success; it is a model of the sort of inquiry that a defender of an autonomous virtue epistemology might profitably undertake.

This canvassing of various issues and questions pertaining to intellectual virtue suggests five broad themes or categories that might constitute the theoretical focus of a plausible version of Moderate Autonomous VE: (1) The fundamental *nature* of an intellectual virtue (What exactly *makes* the traits in question intellectual virtues? Is there just a single "right answer" to this question?); (2) The fundamental *structure* of an intellectual virtue (Which psychological states are essential to intellectual virtue? How are they related to each other? What is the range of potential aims or goals associated with intellectual virtue?); (3) Relations *among* intellectual virtues (On what sorts of configurations of virtues does reliability supervene? To what extent are the intellectual virtues "unified"? How can they be individuated? Are there any "master" or "executive" intellectual virtues?); (4) The relation of intellectual virtues to *other* dimensions or elements of the intellectual life or intellectual character (Which virtues pertain to which dimensions of the cognitive life? How do they do so? What *general* or *systematic* connections between various virtues or groups of virtues, on the one hand, and various cognitive domains, on the other, can be identified? How are intellectual virtues related to intellectual *vices*? Do intellectual virtues represent a "mean" between a corresponding vice of deficiency and vice of excess?); (5) The internal structure and application of *individual* intellectual virtues (How are we to understand what appear to be structurally unique virtues like intellectual integrity or wisdom? Or, for any virtue, what are the essential psychological ingredients of that virtue? And what is it to manifest or instantiate these ingredients in the right way, at the right time, toward the right person, etc.?).

The aim of identifying these various avenues of inquiry has been to say something in support of the idea that there are indeed issues and questions for virtue epistemologists to talk about in connection with the intellectual virtues even after they give up trying to "solve" one or more problems within traditional epistemology. Cursory as it has been, I take it that the discussion does warrant at least some optimism – and hopefully some enthusiasm – about the prospects of Moderate Autonomous VE. Because of its direct or immediate focus on the matters of intellectual character, such an approach might properly be dubbed *character epistemology*.[85]

3. Conclusion

We have delineated four main varieties of character-based virtue epistemology and have found that two of the four face formidable challenges: Strong Conservative VE on account of its commitment to the idea that something like an exercise of intellectual virtue is an essential feature of knowledge; and Radical Autonomous VE on account of its contention that traditional epistemology should be *repudiated* in favor of an autonomous, virtue-based approach. A more promising alternative to the former, we have found, is Weak Conservative VE, which, instead of trying to give the concept of intellectual virtue a "central and fundamental" role in connection with one or more traditional epistemological problems, sees this concept as occupying a mere background or peripheral role in this context. And a more promising alternative to Radical Autonomous VE is Moderate Autonomous VE, which regards an independent concern with intellectual virtues and their role in the intellectual life as providing a suitable *complement* to traditional epistemology. While the approaches of Weak Conservative VE and Moderate Autonomous VE are still largely undeveloped, they seem likely to represent the way of the future within character-based virtue epistemology.[86]

References

Annas, Julia. 2005. "Virtue Ethics," in *The Oxford Companion to Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp (Oxford: OUP), pp. 515-36.

Anscombe. 1958. "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, pp. 1-19.

Arpaly, Nomy. 2002. *Unprincipled Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford UP).

Audi, Robert. 2001. "Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief," in Fairweather and Zagzebski 2001, pp. 82-97.

Axtell, Guy, ed. 2000. *Knowledge, Belief, and Character* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield).

-----. 1997. "Recent Work on Virtue Epistemology," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1), pp. 1-26.

-----. 2008. "Expanding Epistemology: A Responsibilist Approach," Philosophical Papers 37 (1), pp. 51-87.

-----. Forthcoming. "Virtue Theoretic Responses to Skepticism," in *The Oxford Handbook on Skepticism*, ed. John Greco (Oxford: Oxford UP).

Baehr, Jason. 2004. "Virtue Epistemology," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. James Feiser, URL = <http://www.iep.utm.edu/v/VirtueEp.htm>.

-----. 2006a. "Character in Epistemology," *Philosophical Studies* 128 (3), pp. 479-514.

-----. 2006b. "Character, Reliability, and Virtue Epistemology," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 56 (223), pp. 193-212.

-----. 2007. "On the Reliability of Moral and Intellectual Virtues," *Metaphilosophy* 38, pp. 457-71.

-----. Forthcoming. "Evidentialism, Vice, and Virtue," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

Battaly, Heather. "Thin Concepts to the Rescue: Thinning the Concepts of Epistemic Justification and Intellectual Virtue," in Fairweather and Zagzebski 2001, pp. 98-116.

Blackburn, Simon. 2001. "Reason, Virtue, and Knowledge," in Fairweather and Zagzebski 2001, pp. 15-29.

BonJour, Laurence. 2002. *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).

-----. 1990. Review of Lorraine Code's *Epistemic Responsibility*, *The Philosophical Review* 99, pp. 123-27.

-----. 1987. *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP).

Brady, Michael and Duncan Pritchard, eds. 2003. *Moral and Epistemic Virtues* (Oxford: Blackwell).

Chisholm, Roderick. 1966. *Theory of Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.).

Code, Lorraine. 1984. "Toward a 'Responsibilist' Epistemology," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65, pp. 29-50.

-----. 1987. *Epistemic Responsibility* (Andover, NH: University Press of New England).

Conee, Earl and Richard Feldman. 2004. *Evidentialism: Essay in Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford UP).

Dancy, Jonathan. 2000. "Supervenience, Virtues, and Consequences," in Axtell 2000, pp. 73-86.

DePaul, Michael and Linda Zagzebski, eds. 2003. *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford UP).

Driver, Julia. 2000. "Moral and Epistemic Virtue," in Axtell 2000, pp. 123-34.

-----. 2001. *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP).

-----. 2003. "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue," in Brady and Pritchard 2003, pp. 101-116.

Fairweather, Abrol and Linda Zagzebski, eds. 2001. *Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford UP).

Fairweather, Abrol. 2001. "Epistemic Motivation," in Fairweather and Zagzebski 2001, pp. 63-81.

Fricker, Miranda. 2003. "Epistemic Justice and a Role for Virtue in the Politics of Knowing," *Metaphilosophy* 34 (1), pp. 154-73.

-----. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice* (Oxford: Oxford UP).

Goldman, Alvin. 1992. *Philosophy Meets the Cognitive and Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Greco, John and Ernest Sosa, eds. 1999. *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell).

-----. 2000. *Putting Skeptics in Their Place* (New York: Cambridge UP).

-----. 2003. "Knowledge as Credit for True Belief," in DePaul and Zagzebski 2003, pp. 111-24.

-----. 2004. "Virtue Epistemology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta, URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2004/entries/epistemology-virtue/>.

Hookway, Christopher. 2000. "Regulating Inquiry: Virtue, Doubt, and Sentiment," in Axtell 2000, pp. 149-60.

-----. 2001. "Epistemic *Akrasia* and Epistemic Virtue," in Fairweather and Zagzebski 2001, pp. 178-99.

-----. 2003. "How To Be a Virtue Epistemologist," in DePaul and Zagzebski 2003, pp. 183-202.

-----. 2006. "Reasons for Belief, Reasoning, Virtues," *Philosophical Studies* 130, pp. 47-70.

Hursthouse, Rosalind. 1999. *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford UP).

Kawall, Jason. 2002. "Other-Regarding Intellectual Virtues," *Ratio* 15, pp. 257-75.

Kvanvig, Jonathan. 1992. *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).

-----. 2003. *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP).

Louden, Robert. 1997. "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics," in *Virtue Ethics*, ed. Daniel Statman

    (Washington, DC: Georgetown UP).

McDowell, John. 1979. "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, pp. 331-350.

Montmarquet. 1993. *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).

-----. 2000. "An 'Internalist' Conception of Intellectual Virtue," in Axtell 2000, pp. 135-48.

Riggs, Wayne. 2003. "Understanding 'Virtue' and the Virtue of Understanding," in DePaul and

    Zagzebski 2003, pp. 203-26.

Roberts, Robert and Jay Wood. 2003. "Humility and Epistemic Goods," in DePaul and Zagzebski 2003,

    pp. 257-79.

-----. 2007. *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford UP).

Solomon, David. 2003. "Virtue Ethics: Radical or Routine?" in DePaul and Zagzebski 2003, pp. 57-80.

Sosa, Ernest. 1991. *Knowledge in Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP).

-----. 2007. *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford UP).

Steup, Matthias, ed. 2001. *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty* (Oxford: Oxford UP).

Swank, Casey. 2000. "Epistemic Vice," in Axtell 2000, pp. 195-204.

Turri, John. Unpublished. "Believing for a Reason."

Zagzebski. 1996. *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP).

-----. 1998. "Virtue Epistemology," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London:

    Routledge), pp. 617-21.

-----. 1999. "What Is Knowledge?" in Greco and Sosa 1999, pp. 92-116.

-----. 2001. "Recovering Understanding," in Steup 2001, pp. 235-254.

---

[1] The last systematic account of the literature in virtue epistemology was Guy Axtell's 1997 paper "Recent Work in Virtue Epistemology."

[2] Par. 1.

[3] P. 617. Cf. Axtell 2000, p. xiii.

[4] See, e.g., Hookway 2006 and Baehr 2006a, 2006b, and forthcoming.

[5] See Greco 2000 and Sosa 1999 and 2007.

[6] See e.g. Blackburn 2001, in which he characterizes a faculty-based virtue epistemology as little more than a revamped reliabilism.

[7] For an overview and representative sample of traditional epistemology see BonJour 2002. Some other topics or debates that might reasonably be included under the "traditional" rubric include contextualism and infinitism. Though these issues have come to the fore in epistemology more recently than the issues just listed, they (as well as others) are still aimed at addressing or "solving" the traditional epistemological questions. At any rate, as will become clear shortly, it is not important for drawing the relevant fourfold distinction that the line between traditional and non-traditional epistemology be drawn too sharply.

[8] 1996, pp. 264-73.

[9] See, e.g., pp. 279-81, 291-95, 329-34. Guy Axtell (forthcoming) and Abrol Fairweather (2001) are also supportive of giving the concept of intellectual character virtue a significant role in an account of knowledge. Axtell, however, does not *define* the notion of intellectual virtue as a certain type of *character* trait; instead he endorses a "thinner" conception of intellectual virtue which incorporates both character virtues *and* faculty virtues.

[10] Of course the two sorts of approaches need not be entirely mutually exclusive in the sense that one might, like Zagzebski (1996) apparently does, think that there are major conceptual connections between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology *and* that matters of intellectual virtue are epistemologically interesting in their own right.

[11] Pp. 23-30.

[12] I use the terms "moderate" and "radical" here rather than "weak" and "strong" both because they provide a more accurate description of the relevant views and to mark the fact, noted above and elaborated on below, that the basis of the distinction between the two types of autonomous virtue epistemology is significantly different than that between the two types of conservative virtue epistemology.

[13] While ultimately stopping short of calling for a total repudiation of traditional epistemology, Code 1987, Roberts and Wood 2007, and Hookway 2003 also flirt with Radical VE.

[14] P. 169.

[15] Pp. 170-73.

[16] P. 176.

[17] Pp. 182-86.

[18] At times, Kvanvig's position regarding the status of traditional epistemology is somewhat less clear (see esp. p. 171). However, at several other points (see, e.g., pp. 150, 158, 168, 170, and 187), he seems clearly to be calling for the rejection of traditional epistemology. And, at any rate, the actual content of his argument (discussed below) is such that, if valid, it apparently eliminates any motivation for traditional epistemology.

[19] Pp. 63-64; 253.

[20] P. 13.

[21] P. 3.

[22] As this suggests, other ways of carving up the relevant terrain (including ways that might somehow "in principle" be more plausible) may be possible. My concern, again, is to try to impose some order on the field of virtue epistemology *in its present state*.

[23] Or of epistemic justification, but since justification is commonly thought to be a (and indeed the *relevant*) ingredient of knowledge, I shall limit my attention here to whether an exercise of intellectual virtue is essential to knowledge.

[24] This might be put by saying that traditional debates are about the *concept* of knowledge and thus about its essential or defining features. But as some of the recent work of Bob Roberts and Jay Wood (2007, Chs. 1-2) shows, it is possible to clarify or shed light on the concept of knowledge without limiting one's attention to (or even focusing primarily on) its essential features.

[25] And indeed, for some of the traditional questions (e.g., those concerning the fundamental *sources* of knowledge), it is not at all clear how the concept of an intellectual virtue could form the basis of an answer even if knowledge *could* plausibly be defined in terms of intellectual virtue.

[26] This is essentially what is involved with the performance of "acts of intellectual virtue." See Zagzebski 1996, p. 279, for a development of this point.

[27] Of course on a broader conception of intellectual virtue – e.g. one that includes intellectual or cognitive *faculties* – these cases might be easily accounted for. But our concern is with the intellectual *character* virtues, that is, with intellectual virtues conceived as excellences of personal character (rather than as cognitive faculties).

[28] See especially 1996 pp. 277-83. It is not easy to tell, however, just what Zagzebski thinks *makes* something an instance of low-grade knowledge (e.g. whether this is a function of the content of the relevant propositions, the

processes by which the beliefs in question are formed, or something else). But since it is easy enough to agree on paradigm cases, we not settle this issue here.

[29] Ibid., p. 262f.

[30] This is the case for so-called "particularists." See e.g. Chisholm 1966. Note that regarding items of low-grade of knowledge as among the *clearest instances* of knowledge is not necessarily the same as regarding them as "paradigm cases" of knowledge. Zagzebski takes issue with the latter claim (69; 278). But her discussion suggests that paradigm cases of knowledge represent the upper normative boundary of human cognition, which of course need not be the case for the clearest or least controversial instances of knowledge.

[31] Along the latter lines, it might be claimed that what Zagzebski is really trying to offer is something like an analysis of "higher grade" or "reflective" knowledge, which excludes simple perceptual knowledge and the like. But this response does not appear capable of rescuing Strong Conservative VE. The main reason is that there does not appear to be a univocal, pretheoretical concept of "higher grade" or "reflective" knowledge that is likely to admit of a virtue-based analysis. The notion of "reflective knowledge" does have some currency in the epistemological literature (and, I take it, some traction in commonsense). See, e.g., Sosa 1991. However, on standard ways of thinking about what, in general, such knowledge amounts to, it appears possible to acquire reflective knowledge absent any intellectually virtuous motives and actions (or at least absent these things' playing the required causal role vis-à-vis the *truth* of the known belief – more on this below). Suppose that reflective knowledge requires having a "reflective perspective" on the known belief and that this amounts to something like having good evidence or reasons in support of this belief. (While this is not precisely Sosa's account, I think it is an accurate description of the general sort of knowledge of which Sosa offers a more precise and slightly differently focused analysis.) It seems quite possible that one might, say, follow a simple chain of reasoning in support of a certain belief and thus have good evidence for this belief, and yet not be manifesting any excellences of intellectual *character*. It appears, then, that Zagzebski's conditions do not map onto any univocal and pretheoretical concept of "higher grade" or "reflective knowledge and thus they cannot vindicate Strong Conservative VE on this account.

[32] See especially the very bottom of p. 279 and the top of p. 280.

[33] Ibid. p. 280.

[34] Another way to bring out the point is in connection with Zagzebski's suggestion that a belief counts as knowledge only if it is formed in a manner that an intellectually virtuous person would *characteristically* form it (279). For it is not *characteristic* of intellectual virtue to form beliefs in the relevant passive way – even if intellectually virtuous people (just not "as such" or characteristically) do sometimes form them in this way.

[35] Pp. 280-81.

[36] Zagzebski also mentions a counterfactual condition according to which (roughly) a belief counts as an instance of low-grade knowledge only if, were the person in question presented with counterevidence to the relevant proposition, this person would confront and handle the counterevidence in an intellectually virtuous way (pp. 280-81). This condition is aimed at preventing an account of knowledge from being too permissive or lenient. But since my objection below is intended to show that Zagzebski's account is *not permissive enough*, we need not worry about this condition here.

[37] Ibid., p. 280.

[38] This condition is necessary, among other reasons, for dealing adequately with the Gettier problem. See ibid. pp. 283-98, Greco 2003, and Sosa 2007. On a related note, it is in fact unclear, in the cases in question, whether the relevant low-level motives or actions stand in the required causal relation even to the relevant *beliefs*. It is one thing for the motives and actions to *present*; it is another for them (vs. the person's cognitive machinery, say) to be the *source* or *cause* of the belief (much less of the *truth* of this belief).

[39] Cf. Baehr 2006a.

[40] It might be wondered whether beliefs like this are in fact the product of an entrenched perceptual *habit* that might at some level involve virtuous motives or actions. This may very well be the case for certain *spontaneous* perceptual beliefs. An expert birdwatcher, for instance, might *automatically* and *reflexively* form a belief about the identity of a passing bird that we would be prepared to count as knowledge; and this process or event might involve virtuous agency at some level – either in the process itself (spontaneous or automatic as it is) or in the initial formation of the corresponding perceptual habit. But this sort of case is very different from the "lights out" case just considered. While in cases like that of the birdwatcher just noted, there is no temptation to characterize the relevant perceptual process or event (the formation of the birdwatcher's belief) as *brute*, this *is* a plausible characterization of the sort of cognitive process or processes involved with the "lights out" and other related cases. This suggests that while both types of belief are formed spontaneously, whatever type of perceptual habit may be involved with kind of case at issue does *not* involve any virtuous motives or actions.

[41] As indicated earlier, several authors flirt with Radical Autonomous VE, but ultimately stop short of endorsing it, opting instead for a version of Weak Autonomous VE. This includes Roberts and Wood 2007 and Hookway 2003.

[42] See, for instance, pp. vii-x and pp. 186-87.

[43] Ibid. p. vii.

[44] Ibid. p. 167 and p. vii.

[45] See Chapters 2-5.

[46] For a sketch of this alternative approach, see pp. 170-88.

[47] *NE* Book 1 Chapter 2 (1094a).

[48] And it should be kept in mind that the negative challenge in question is only half the battle for Radical Autonomous VE. It also faces a certain positive challenge, which I get to below.

[49] Whether we might *know* a great many things without a first person awareness of this fact depends on whether *externalism* about knowledge is correct – an issue I will not attempt to address here. Also, it may be that in the situation just described we would also be lacking in many other epistemic desiderata: e.g. it might be important that we have true beliefs about certain "interesting" subject matters; or we may lack a share in certain epistemic goods that are not reducible to knowledge or true belief (e.g. understanding). My concern here, however, is limited to the relevant kind of awareness of the epistemic status of our beliefs.

[50] A possible exception might be self-evident or a priori truths.

[51] For a similar line, see BonJour 1987.

[52] See BonJour ibid.

[53] I am not suggesting that these considerations motivate the full range of traditional questions and issues. Moreover, I have avoided talk of "justification" (favoring instead the notion of good epistemic reasons) in order to avoid making any controversial assumptions about the nature of this concept, its relation to knowledge, etc. Thus what I have said is consistent with either internalist or externalist accounts of justification and with the view that justification is not even necessary for knowledge.

[54] See, e.g., "Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology" in Goldman 1992 or Sosa 1991.

[55] See Baehr 2006b pp. 206-12 for a development of this point.

[56] The two need not exclude each other, since one might identify forming/maintaining beliefs in accordance with the available evidence as the relevant form of reliability. For a representative sample of evidentialism, see Conee and Feldman 2004.

[57] I am characterizing evidentialism as a thesis about justification rather than knowledge. But with the addition of a truth (and perhaps an anti-Gettier) condition, it can easily be adapted as a thesis about knowledge.

[58] See Baehr forthcoming for a development of this and the points to follow.

[59] See, e.g., John Turri's "Believing for a Reason." Guy Axtell's recent account of knowledge (forthcoming) also strikes me as rightly regarded as a contribution to Weak Conservative VE. Axtell defends a virtue-based account of knowledge, but he does not *define* the notion of an intellectual virtue as a *character trait*. Nonetheless, intellectual character virtues, along with faculty virtues, *do* count as intellectual virtues and thus can contribute to knowledge on his view. His account is not a version of Strong Conservative VE, however, because he does not give the concept of an intellectual character virtue as such the central or fundamental role in the account.

[60] A similar worry can be raised in connection with Kvanvig's proposed version of Radical Autonomous VE. See note 66 below.

[61] As I explain below, this lack of traction can be due to any number of factors: the questions or issues may be more or less a matter of commonsense; they may be amenable strictly or primarily to empirical inquiry; or they may be the proper subject matter of some other philosophical discipline like ethics. Where any of these possibilities obtains, the relevant issues and questions will fail to support an alternative, virtue-based approach to *epistemology*, for the content of epistemology exceeds that of commonsense, is not (unlike cognitive science, say) exclusively or primarily empirical, and is distinct from (even if closely related to) that of ethics.

[62] Ibid. pp. 58-59. For similar passages, see pp. 61-66, 131-44, and 172-77.

[63] For a related worry concerning whether Code successfully outlines a genuine epistemological *alternative*, see BonJour 1990.

[64] See especially Hookway 2003.

[65] An analogous point can be made about Hookway's discussion (2001) of the connection between intellectual virtue and epistemic *akrasia* noted earlier. I think Hookway is entirely correct to suggest that the possession of various intellectual character virtues is the proper antidote to the relevant kind of weakness of the will. What he fails to make sufficiently clear, however, is what bearing this should have on the practice of *epistemology*. He does not

make clear enough why the proper response to his argument (by an epistemologist or anyone else) should not be simple *concession* or *agreement*, with little further discussion or inquiry or debate to be had on the matter.

[66] Two other discussions are also worth noting briefly here. To his credit, Kvanvig (1993) does more than Code or Hookway to attempt to outline a positive theoretical research program that might underwrite an alternative, virtue-based approach to epistemology (see esp. pp. 164-86). However, I think he fails to make good on the claim that a concern with intellectual character will enjoy pride of place in the program he sketches. For instance, consider the question, which Kvanvig describes as central to his preferred approach, of "what makes certain organized claims to truth epistemologically more significant than others," for example, of "what makes physics better off than, say astrology; or what makes scientific books, articles, addresses, or lectures somehow more respectable from an epistemological point of view than books, articles, addresses or lectures regarding astrology" (176). The concept of an intellectual virtue seems no more likely to figure prominently into a response to these questions than it does in an analysis of knowledge. James Montmarquet is also regarded as one of the early proponents of character-based virtue epistemology. However, the thrust of his book *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* (1992) is a virtue-based account of doxastic justification which he claims is essential for an adequate understanding of *moral* responsibility. Montmarquet himself acknowledges that the conception of justification that interests him is different from the conception that interests epistemologists. Accordingly, Montmarquet's analysis comes off looking like the proper subject matter of *ethics* rather than epistemology. (It is not clear, in fact, that Montmarquet would want to disagree with this assessment.) As a result, Montmarquet's treatment of intellectual virtue also fails to warrant much optimism about the prospects of an autonomous, virtue-based approach to epistemology.

[67] I think a similar error is made in some of the virtue ethics literature. See note 72 below.

[68] Of course it may often happen that a thing with epistemic significance also has epistemological significance. The point is simply that the former is not a *guarantee* of the latter. The general point here is also evident in epistemologists' tendency to focus on those aspects of knowledge that are particularly *puzzling* or *problematic*: aspects that conflict with our ordinary or intuitive ways of thinking (e.g. our assumption that we know a great deal about the external world or that inductive reasoning is cogent) or that seem recalcitrant to commonsense understanding (e.g. How reason could be an autonomous source of knowledge? How can sensory experience justify our beliefs?).

[69] 2001, p. 200.

[70] 1987, pp. 26-27.

[71] These claims about Code's and Hookway's reasoning are further substantiated by the fact that neither (to my knowledge) offers any *additional* arguments or considerations (beyond what I have called the "epistemic" significance of the intellectual virtues) in favor of the idea that reflection on the these traits should be a priority in epistemology. Thus they apparently regard the epistemic significance of the intellectual virtues as a *sufficient* indication of their epistemological significance.

[72] It is worth noting that an analogous challenge exists within the domain of virtue ethics; and that here too it sometimes goes unmet. In the virtue ethics literature, it is not uncommon to find an enthusiastic optimism about a virtue-based approach to ethics that does not bow to modern or traditional ethical questions and preoccupations. However, as with the virtue epistemology literature, this optimism sometimes goes unsubstantiated. In this connection, Robert Louden (1997) has noted that "most of the work done in [virtue ethics] has a negative rather than positive thrust – its primary aim is more to critcise than to *state positively and precisely what its own alternative is*" (181; my italics). He adds that this literature "often has a somewhat misty antiquarian air. It is frequently said, for instance, that the Greeks advocated a virtue ethics, though precisely what it is they were advocating is not always spelled out" (ibid.). While a lot has changed in virtue ethics since the publication of Louden's essay, much of it has been in what might be dubbed Strong Conservative Virtue *Ethics*. For instance, the most fully developed approach to virtue ethics to date is Rosalind Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics* (1999), but her project in this book is squarely within the tradition of modern moral philosophy, in the sense that her primary aim is to defend a virtue-based account of morally right action. One upshot of all of this is that optimism about Moderate Autonomous Virtue Epistemology cannot be grounded in an unsubstantiated optimism about corresponding, "autonomous" approaches to virtue ethics.

[73] Some of these issues and questions are discussed in Baehr 2006a.

[74] Dancy 2000 suggests a similar account. Ch. 6 of Kvanvig 1992 and Zagzebski 1996 also contain related discussions.

[75] The reason being that the relevant personal worth or value intuitively is *intrinsically* valuable.

[76] Pp. 168-83.

[77] Pp. 166-68.

[78] There are, however, resources in the virtue ethics literature that might be used to mount an argument against this claim. See, for instance, Arpaly 2002 and Driver 2001. This disagreement reinforces the point that there are genuine philosophical questions or challenges associated with trying to get a handle on the internal structure of an intellectual virtue.

[79] A further possibility worth considering is that the concept of intellectual virtue is not fully determinate or univocal to begin with, in which case there may not be any general or univocal "right answers" to these questions. Both Battaly 2001 and Roberts and Wood 2007 suggest something like this position.

[80] One exception is Roberts and Wood 2003 and 2007. These authors characterize the intellectual virtues as bearing on the acquisition, maintenance, transmission, and application of knowledge. And they discuss some of the non-egoistic applications of intellectual virtue in rich detail. See, for example, their discussion of intellectual generosity (2007, Ch. 11). Jason Kawall (2002) also argues convincingly that intellectual virtues are not strictly egoistic.

[81] These authors refrain from drawing a sharp distinction between intellectual and moral virtues; but their concern here is with the application of the traits in question to the *intellectual* life.

[82] Pp. 23-30.

[83] See Roberts and Wood 2007 for a defense of the claim that there is no such concept.

[84] Such a project would overcome the "theoretical challenge" discussed above given that the connections in question are indeed *broad* and *systematic* and that they are not simply a matter of *commonsense*. I take it that both of these assumptions are plausible. If developed in more detail, some of what Hookway or Code say in support of a virtue-based approach to epistemology (e.g. Hookway 2001 and 2003 and Code 1987) might be viewed as motivating inquiries of this sort. But again, as their discussions stand, they fail to say enough about the structure of the relevant domains or about the ways in which the intellectual virtues are systematically useful in these domains.

[85] Cf. Baehr 2006a. A final point is that while such an approach would be closely aligned with virtue ethics, it would be a mistake to regard this approach as a version of ethics *rather than* epistemology. For while the relevant issues and questions are not about the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge *per se*, they are concerned with personal character as it relates, both intentionally and causally, to distinctively epistemic ends like knowledge, truth, rationality, and understanding. This by itself appears sufficient for regarding these issues as proper to epistemology broadly conceived. AS these remarks suggest, however, I see no reason to deny that this may be an area in which epistemology and ethics *overlap*.

[86] I am grateful to various individuals and audiences for helpful comments and discussion on earlier drafts of this paper. These include Guy Axtell, John Greco, Bob Roberts, Jay Wood, and Linda Zagzebski, as well as audience members at the 2005 Southern California Philosophy Conference and a Loyola Marymount University departmental colloquium at which ancestors of this paper were presented.