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2006

## Review of Michael DePaul & Linda Zagzebski, *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*

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Baehr, Jason, "Review of Michael DePaul & Linda Zagzebski, *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*" (2006). *Philosophy Faculty Works*. 28.

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*This is not a final draft. Please quote only the final draft, published in Philosophical Books 47 (2006), pp. 81-85.*

*Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*

Edited by MICHAEL DEPAUL and LINDA ZAGZEBSKI

Clarendon Press, 2004. viii + 298 pp. £37.00

This volume brings together several prominent philosophers from ethics and epistemology to discuss the interesting but historically underemphasized topic of intellectual virtue. Most of the discussion is set against the backdrop of virtue epistemology, a recent movement that gives the notion of intellectual virtue a central role in epistemological theorizing. The essays address a wide and rich range of issues, most of which revolve around three central themes: (i) connections between virtue ethics and virtue epistemology; (ii) the relation between virtue epistemology and traditional epistemological questions; and (iii) the so-called ‘value problem’ in epistemology (which is concerned with what makes knowledge more valuable than mere true belief). This review focuses on (i) and (ii).

Two noteworthy essays in the first group attempt to establish connections between the thought of ancient ethicists and contemporary epistemologists, two otherwise unlikely philosophical interlocutors. Julia Annas argues, with the Stoics and against Aristotle and some virtue epistemologists, that moral and intellectual virtues should be understood as skills and that the possession of either requires reliable success in achieving the “overall goal” of the virtue in question (p. 25). She also identifies a resulting tension between this account of virtue and any attempt to define knowledge in terms of intellectual virtue. In ‘Intellectual Virtue: Emotions, Luck, and the Ancients’, Nancy Sherman and Heath White explain how an account of intellectual virtue might appropriate insights from Aristotle and the Stoics regarding emotion and moral virtue. They go on to argue, however, that the links between ancient virtue ethics and virtue epistemology are necessarily limited because while moral virtue may, as the Stoics claim, be sufficient for happiness, the epistemological counterpart to this claim (viz., that intellectual virtue is sufficient for epistemic flourishing) seems obviously false.

Another noteworthy essay on the relation between virtue ethics and virtue epistemology is David Solomon’s ‘Virtue Ethics: Radical or Routine?’. Solomon distinguishes between a “routine” approach to virtue ethics, which aims primarily at deriving the concepts of a right act and a good state of affairs from that of moral virtue, and a “radical” approach, which eschews more traditional/modern projects and focuses instead on topics like that of a well-lived life, the moral importance of community, moral education, etc. (pp. 66–73). According to Solomon, a failure to appreciate some of the key differences between these two approaches has caused substantial and unnecessary confusion about the enterprise of virtue ethics. Solomon concludes by noting that virtue epistemologists also can take either a ‘routine’ or a ‘radical’ approach to their own work.

Solomon’s essay, while fairly schematic, provides a helpful framework for examining several of the other essays in the collection. To date, ‘routine’ approaches to virtue epistemology have consisted mainly of analyses of knowledge according to which knowledge is (roughly) true belief generated by an exercise of intellectual virtue (for example, Linda Zagzebski’s *Virtues of*

*the Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 1996)). But such approaches face a formidable objection: viz., that we seem capable of knowing many things *absent* an exercise of intellectual virtue (see Jason Baehr, ‘Character In Epistemology,’ *Philosophical Studies*, forthcoming). (Here the intellectual virtues are being conceived as traits of intellectual *character* like fair-mindedness, attentiveness, and intellectual courage, rather than as cognitive faculties like vision and memory. Certain virtue epistemologists, known as ‘virtue reliabilists’, define an intellectual virtue as any reliable quality of an agent and tend to regard cognitive faculties rather than character traits as paradigm cases of intellectual virtue. See, for instance, John Greco’s *Putting Sceptics In Their Place* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Ernest Sosa’s *Knowledge In Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1993).) Accordingly, it would appear that the viability of (at least a character-based) virtue epistemology depends on the viability of ‘radical’ approaches, that is, on approaches that eschew traditional epistemological questions and projects like the analysis of knowledge. But these approaches also face a notable challenge, viz., that of demonstrating that there is interesting and substantive philosophical work to be done concerning the intellectual virtues that is independent of traditional projects.

It is worth considering, then, what some of the other essays in the volume might contribute in this regard. In ‘How to Be a Virtue Epistemologist’, Christopher Hookway motivates a ‘radical’ approach to virtue epistemology the focus of which is the activity and deliberation involved with inquiry rather than the concepts of knowledge or justification. Similarly to Solomon, Hookway makes a strong case for the possibility of an approach to virtue epistemology that is not centred on traditional epistemological concerns. However, he too says relatively little about the specific issues, questions, projects, etc., that might lie at the heart of such an approach.

Wayne Riggs’s contribution goes some way toward filling this gap. Riggs argues that a proper understanding of what makes a trait an intellectual virtue requires expanding our conception of the “highest epistemic end” to include more than the goal of truth. Specifically, he argues that certain intellectual virtues have *understanding* (which he claims is distinct from knowledge or true belief) as their goal and hence that understanding must be regarded as an epistemic end in itself. Riggs’s discussion demonstrates, among other things, that there are interesting and challenging questions surrounding topics like the reliability and intrinsic goals of intellectual virtue, many of which can be pursued independently of traditional epistemological questions.

In ‘Humility and Epistemic Goods’, Robert Roberts and Jay Wood offer an illuminating and richly illustrated account of a single virtue: intellectual humility. Their discussion reveals that the individual virtues themselves admit of interesting and substantive philosophical analysis. For any given virtue *V*, we can ask, for instance: What is the exact psychological structure of *V*? How does *V* differ from closely related virtues? Which intellectual vices correspond to *V*? How is *V* related to the acquisition of other epistemic goods like understanding or wisdom?

When taken together, the essays of Solomon, Hookway, Riggs, and Roberts/Wood thus provide an interesting (if still somewhat limited) glimpse into the motivation for and potential theoretical substance of a ‘radical’ virtue epistemology, which again may be the only viable form of (a character-based) virtue epistemology.

*Intellectual Virtue* is one of few book-length treatments of its topic and it does as much as any to advance our understanding of the relevant traits and their role in epistemology. This alone makes it essential reading for anyone interested in the intellectual virtues or virtue epistemology.

