

## EXPANDING THE SITUATIONIST CHALLENGE TO RESPONSIBILIST VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

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*The last few decades have witnessed the birth and growth of both virtue epistemology and the situationist challenge to virtue ethics. It seems only natural that eventually we would see the situationist challenge to virtue epistemology. This article articulates one aspect of that new challenge by spelling out an argument against the responsibilist brand of virtue epistemology. The trouble can be framed as an inconsistent triad: (non-skepticism) many people know quite a bit; (responsibilism) knowledge is true belief acquired and retained through the exercise of intellectual virtue; (epistemic situationism) most people do not possess the intellectual virtues countenanced by responsibilism. Non-skepticism is a Moorean platitude we should aim to preserve at most if not all costs. I muster evidence from cognitive and social psychology to argue for epistemic situationism. If my argument is correct, responsibilism must be revised or rejected, and reliabilists should avoid incorporating responsibilist components into their theories.*

### I. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Starting with Ernest Sosa's seminal article, 'The Raft and the Pyramid,' the last three decades have witnessed the birth and growth of *virtue epistemology*.<sup>2</sup> Following Lorraine Code's landmark article, 'Toward a "responsibilist" epistemology,' virtue epistemology today is typically taken to cleave into three families of views:<sup>3</sup>

- *Reliabilism*, which sees the intellectual virtues as non-motivational capacities, dispositions, or processes that tend to lead their

<sup>1</sup> With grateful thanks to Jonathan Adler, James Beebe, Abrol Fairweather, Michael Levin, Daniel Shargel, and the referees at *Philosophical Quarterly*.

<sup>2</sup> E. Sosa, 'The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 5 (1980), pp. 3–26.

<sup>3</sup> L. Code, 'Toward a "Responsibilist" Epistemology', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 45 (1984), pp. 29–50.

- possessors to increase the balance of truths over falsehoods in their belief sets (e.g., sound deduction, good eyesight, capacious memory, etc.)
- *Responsibilism*, which views the intellectual virtues on analogy with the neo-Aristotelian moral virtues as motivational, reasons-responsive dispositions to act and react in characteristic ways (e.g., open-mindedness, curiosity, intellectual courage, etc.)
  - *Mixed virtue epistemology*, which countenances the virtues of both reliabilism and responsibilism.

Cross-cutting this classification is another tripartite distinction due to Christopher Hookway for whom epistemological projects can be divided into three species:<sup>4</sup>

- *Classical epistemology*, which aims to answer traditional questions, such as, ‘Does *S* know that *p*?’, ‘Is *S* justified in believing that *p*?’, etc.
- *Inquiry epistemology*, which aims to answer nontraditional questions, such as, ‘Does *S* possess understanding or wisdom?’, ‘Is *S* a praiseworthy epistemic agent?’, etc.
- *Combined epistemology*, which aims to answer both traditional and non-traditional questions.

Crossing these distinctions generates nine types of virtue epistemology. It would not be procrustean to place many prominent virtue epistemologists into one or another of these categories. Alvin Goldman is a classical reliabilist. Linda Zagzebski is a combined responsibilist. Christopher Lepock is a combined mixed theorist.

Meanwhile, the last thirteen years have seen the rise of the so-called *situationist challenge to virtue ethics*. With John Doris and Gilbert Harman leading the charge and Christian Miller, Peter Vranas, and me providing rearguard support, this challenge has raised the question of the empirical adequacy of virtue ethics.<sup>5</sup> Virtue theorists such as Robert Audi, Richard Brandt, N.J.H. Dent, Stephen Hudson, Alasdair MacIn-

<sup>4</sup> C. Hookway, ‘Affective States and Epistemic Immediacy’, in M. Brady and D. Pritchard (eds), *Moral and Epistemic Virtues*, (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003a), pp. 75–92; ‘How to be a Virtue Epistemologist’, in M. DePaul and L. Zagzebski (eds), *Intellectual Virtue*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003b), pp. 183–202; ‘Epistemology and Inquiry: The Primacy of Practice’, in S. Heatherington (ed.), *Epistemology Futures*, (Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 95–110.

<sup>5</sup> M. Alfano, ‘Explaining Away Intuitions about Traits: Why Virtue Ethics Seems Plausible (Even if it isn’t)’, *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 2 (2011), pp. 121–36; J. Doris, ‘Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics’, *Nous*, 32 (1998), pp. 504–40; *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, (Cambridge UP, 2002); ‘Replies: Evidence and Sensibility’, *Philosophy and*

tyre, James Wallace, and Gary Watson have been wont to argue that virtue-talk references an empirically adequate moral psychology, one that presupposes that many people have such traits as honesty, temperance, and courage.<sup>6</sup> Unlike consequentialists and deontologists, whose theories focus on the purely evaluative, virtue ethicists use a vocabulary that is simultaneously evaluative and explanatory. To say that someone acted compassionately is both to praise her (or her action) as manifesting a virtue and (partially) to explain that action as flowing from her character. This means that virtue ethicists have empirical skin in the game: if virtue ethics is explanatory, then the virtues had better be psychologically real. What philosophical situationists argue, however, is that most people do not possess traits that resemble the virtues as traditionally conceived. Both in their behavior and in their thought, feeling, and deliberation, people are astonishingly susceptible to seemingly trivial and normatively irrelevant features of their situations, such as mood elevators, mood depressors, ambient sounds, ambient smells, social distance cues, and even the weather. If few people are virtuous, then explaining human conduct in terms of the virtues would seem to be a hopeless endeavor.

It seems only natural that eventually we would see the convergence of the twain: *the situationist challenge to virtue epistemology*. Doris (Replies, p. 110) gestures in this direction, but he has yet to publish a sustained treatment. In this article, I argue that all versions of responsibilist and mixed virtue epistemology must come to terms with a situationist challenge of their own. I begin by spelling out in more detail the responsibi-

*Phenomenological Research*, 71 (2005), pp. 656–77; G. Harman, ‘Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, 119 (1999), pp. 316–31; ‘The Nonexistence of Character Traits’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 100 (2000), pp. 223–6; ‘Virtue Ethics without Character Traits’, in A. Byrne, R. Stalnaker, and R. Wedgwood (eds.), *Fact and Value*, (MIT Press, 2001), pp. 117–27; ‘No Character or Personality’, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 13 (2003), pp. 87–94; ‘Three Trends in Moral and Political Philosophy’, *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 37 (2006); C. Miller, ‘Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics’, *The Journal of Ethics*, 7 (2003), pp. 365–92; ‘Empathy, Social Psychology, and Global Helping Traits’, *Philosophical Studies*, 142 (2009), pp. 247–75; P. Vranas, ‘The Indeterminacy Paradox: Character Evaluations and Human Psychology’, *Nous*, 39 (2005), pp. 1–42.

<sup>6</sup> R. Audi, ‘Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief’, in *Virtue Epistemology: Essays on Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility*, (Oxford UP, 2001), at pp. 82–4; R. Brandt, *Morality, Utilitarianism, and Rights*, (Cambridge UP, 1992), at p. 13; N. Dent, ‘Virtues and Actions’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 25 (1975), at p. 328; S. Hudson, ‘Character Traits and Desires’, *Ethics*, 90 (1980), pp. 539–42; A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); J. Wallace, ‘Excellences and Merit’, *The Philosophical Review*, 83 (1974), pp. 182–99, at p. 193; G. Watson, ‘On the Primacy of Character’, in O. Flanagan and A.O. Rorty (eds.), *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, (MIT Press, 1990) pp. 449–83, at p. 451.

list approach to epistemology. Next, I outline the contours of the situationist challenge to virtue ethics. I then show, using evidence drawn from social and cognitive psychology, that the challenge can be expanded to responsibilist virtue epistemology. This raises the specter of skepticism. In classical responsibilism, one knows that  $p$  only if one has come to believe that  $p$  through the exercise of intellectual virtue, so if the intellectual virtues are as rare as situationism suggests, then most people know very little.

## II. VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

As explained above, virtue epistemologists can be divided into three camps: reliabilists, responsibilists, and mixed theorists. This section sketches the second and third approaches, which are the targets of my argument in this article.

### II. 1. *Responsibilist virtue epistemology*

Responsibilist virtue epistemology was first so called by Code, for whom the ‘intellectually virtuous person’ is identified not merely by his purely cognitive capacities, abilities, and dispositions but also by his conative attitudes toward truth and falsehood. He ‘finds value in knowing and understanding how things really are. He resists the temptation to live with partial explanations where fuller ones are attainable, the temptation to live in a fantasy or in a world of dream or illusion, considering it better to know, despite the tempting comfort and complacency that a life of fantasy or illusion (or well-tinged with fantasy and illusion) can offer’ (p. 44). Because they are motivational, reasons-responsive, and action-guiding, the responsibilist pantheon of virtues is more obviously analogous to the traditional Aristotelian moral virtues.

James Montmarquet and Linda Zagzebski have been the most articulate and prolific defenders of responsibilism, so I will treat their views as representative in this article.<sup>7</sup> Montmarquet is an inquiry responsibilist, whereas Zagzebski is a combined responsibilist. For Montmarquet, the intellectual virtues are traits that a person who desires the truth would want to have. The sole cardinal intellectual virtue is conscientiousness, the desire to attain true belief and avoid error, but a host of lesser intel-

<sup>7</sup> J. Montmarquet, ‘Epistemic Virtue’, *Mind*, 96 (1987), pp. 482–97; *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility*, (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993); L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, (Cambridge UP, 1996).

lectual virtues subserve conscientiousness. They fall into three categories. First are the *virtues of impartiality*, such as openness to new ideas, willingness to exchange ideas, lack of jealousy and personal bias, and a lively sense of one's own fallibility. Next come the *virtues of sobriety*, such as the reluctance to draw outrageous conclusions based on scant evidence. Finally, there are the *virtues of intellectual courage*, such as the willingness to conceive and examine alternatives to popularly held beliefs, perseverance in one's beliefs in the face of opposition, and determination to see an intellectual project through to completion (1993, p. 23). Note that all three types of intellectual virtue involve a motivational component: unlike the reliabilist virtues, they all encompass in some way a desire to attain true beliefs and avoid error. With this theory in hand, Montmarquet defines subjective justification in terms of intellectual virtue: 'A person *S* is justified in believing *p* insofar as *S* is epistemically virtuous in believing *p*' (1993, p. 99).

Zagzebski engages with both classical and inquiry epistemology, attempting to provide both a theory of justification and knowledge and a theory of intellectual credit and culpability. For Zagzebski, a virtue is '*a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end*' (p. 137, emphasis hers). Intellectual virtues are a species of this general category. Zagzebski does not subdivide the intellectual virtues into categories like Montmarquet, but her catalogue is strikingly similar. The intellectual virtues include intellectual carefulness, perseverance, humility, vigor, flexibility, courage, thoroughness, integrity, as well as open-mindedness, fair-mindedness, insightfulness, originality, and the virtues opposed to wishful thinking, obtuseness, and conformity (p. 155). The intellectual vices include intellectual pride, negligence, idleness, cowardice, conformity, carelessness, rigidity, prejudice, wishful thinking, close-mindedness, insensitivity to detail, obtuseness, and lack of thoroughness (p. 152).

Like Montmarquet, then, Zagzebski sees intellectual virtues as motivational traits of character. In fact, their definitions of epistemic justification largely coincide. For Zagzebski, '*A justified belief is what a person who is motivated by intellectual virtue, and who has the understanding of his cognitive situation a virtuous person would have, might believe in like circumstances*' (p. 241). Unlike Montmarquet, however, Zagzebski goes on to define knowledge as '*a state of true belief arising out of acts of intellectual virtue*' (p. 271).

In addition to analysing justification and knowledge, responsibilists are well-equipped to deal with the nontraditional questions of inquiry

epistemology. Code (p. 46) points out that people can be legitimately praised for their possession and exercise of responsibilist intellectual virtue but not reliabilist intellectual virtue. Similarly, they can be legitimately blamed for their possession and exercise of responsibilist intellectual vice but not reliabilist intellectual vice. The creative person is admirable; the person with perfect pitch is not (even though perfect pitch is desirable as such). Dogmatism is deplorable; colorblindness is not (even though colorblindness is undesirable as such).

Jason Baehr emphasises a number of further questions that responsibilism seems especially suited to answer, including, ‘How are the intellectual virtues related to one another?’ ‘Are there any higher-order intellectual virtues?’ ‘How are the intellectual virtues related to the moral virtues?’ ‘Are intellectual virtues instrumentally or intrinsically valuable?’ and ‘Do intellectual virtues make their bearers’ lives or the lives of their bearers’ peers better?’<sup>8</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to attempt to answer these questions here; I mention them to point out the kind of research responsibilism seems especially suited to.

To sum up, responsibilist virtue epistemology addresses questions of both classical and inquiry epistemology. It starts with a subset of the stable, counterfactual-supporting traits of intellectual character – namely, the virtuous ones, which are complexes consisting of a desire for truth rather than error and a capacity to satisfy that desire. It then defines epistemic justification in terms of intellectual character. An agent has justification if and only if she is exercising her intellectual virtues and not exercising any intellectual vices, and any given belief of hers is justified if it is such as the virtuous person would acquire or retain in her circumstances. Finally, responsibilism defines knowledge as true belief acquired and retained through the exercise of intellectual virtues (and the absence of intellectual vices).

## II. 2. *Mixed virtue epistemology*

More recently, epistemologists in both the reliabilist and the responsibilist camps have moved toward a consensus on mixed virtue epistemology.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> J. Baehr, ‘Character in Epistemology’, *Philosophical Studies*, 128 (2006a), pp. 479–514.

<sup>9</sup> J. Baehr, ‘Character, Reliability, and Virtue Epistemology’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 56 (2006b), pp. 193–212; H. Battaly, ‘Virtue Epistemology’, *Philosophy Compass*, 3 (2008), pp. 639–63; V. Dalmiya, ‘Why Should a Knower Care?’ *Hypatia*, 17 (2002), pp. 34–52; J. Greco, ‘Agent Reliabilism’, *Nous*, 13 (1992), pp. 273–296; *Putting Skeptics in Their Place: The Nature of*

In the 1990s, Greco began to incorporate responsibilist insights into what he calls *agent reliabilism*, which recognises the necessity of appropriate motivation. For instance, according to agent reliabilism, ‘subjective justification can be understood in terms of the dispositions a person manifests when she is thinking conscientiously – when she is *trying* to believe what is true as opposed to what is convenient, comforting, or fashionable’ (1992, p. 289, emphasis mine).<sup>10</sup>

From the other direction, Zagzebski has not resisted saying that her responsibilist view presupposes reliabilist virtues. For one’s desire to believe the truth and avoid falsehood to be satisfied, one must possess many cognitive capacities, abilities, and dispositions. She goes so far as to claim that even the moral virtues involve perceptual and cognitive states (p. 149).

It would seem, then, that reliabilists and responsibilists have been climbing different sides of the same mountain, and that as their theories develop, they are converging. This is a welcome development. It means, however, that reliabilists who adopt mixed views make themselves susceptible to the situationist challenge to responsibilism. The attractions of mixed views notwithstanding, it might turn out that pure reliabilism should be preferred to a mixed view because it is more empirically adequate. In the balance of this article, I show how the situationist challenge to virtue *ethics* can be expanded to challenge responsibilist and mixed virtue *epistemology* as well.

### III. THE SITUATIONIST CHALLENGE TO VIRTUE ETHICS

Like responsibilists, virtue ethicists typically construe virtues as motivational traits of character. To be generous is to have a complex disposition to *notice* when others are in need, to *construe* ambiguous social cues charitably, to *want* to help others whom one takes to be in need, to *deliberate* soundly about what would in fact help a given person in particular circumstances, and to *succeed* in helping when one tries. Such traits are ‘thick’ in the sense that they are descriptively rich (knowing that someone is generous tells you a lot about her), explanatorily powerful (the generous person not only *does help* but *would help* in circumstances

*Skeptical Arguments and Their Role in Philosophical Inquiry*, (Cambridge UP, 2000); C. Lepock, ‘Unifying the Intellectual Virtues’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, (forthcoming); E. Sosa, *Knowing Full Well*, (Princeton UP, 2011), at pp. 15–6; Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, at p. 149.

<sup>10</sup> See also Greco (2003) at p. 111 and Sosa, *ibid.*, at pp. 15–6.

where the same reasons were in force), and evaluatively laden (generosity is admirable). As MacIntyre puts it, 'to identify certain actions as manifesting or failing to manifest a virtue or virtues is never only to evaluate; it is also to take the first step towards explaining why those actions rather than some others were performed' (p. 199).

What's more, many virtue ethicists are rather egalitarian; they take virtues (and vices) to be instantiated in lots of ordinary people. MacIntyre goes so far as to say that 'without allusion to the place that justice and injustice, courage and cowardice play in human life very little will be genuinely explicable' (p. 199). Responding to the situationist challenge has tempered the egalitarian impulses of some virtue ethicists, a dialectical turn I discuss below, but many still hold that most people at least could become virtuous.

The situationist challenge to virtue ethics is an attack primarily on this conjunction of consistency, explanatory power, and egalitarianism. According to the situationist critique, most people do not respond – or do not respond robustly – to moral reasons. Seemingly trivial and normatively irrelevant features of our environments predict and explain our behavior better than such traits. Though consistency requires that people respond the same way whenever they have the same reasons (e.g., generously when they have decisive reason to help), psychologists have found that they respond differently depending on the presence of bystanders,<sup>11</sup> social distance,<sup>12</sup> ambient smells, and ambient sounds,<sup>13</sup> among other things.

<sup>11</sup> B. Latané and J. Darley, 'Group Inhibition of Bystander Intervention in Emergencies', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 10 (1968), pp. 215–21; *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn't He Help?* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970); B. Latané and S. Nida, 'Ten Years of Research on Group Size and Helping', *Psychological Bulletin*, 89 (1981), pp. 308–24; B. Latané and J. Rodin, 'A Lady in Distress: Inhibiting Effects of Friends and Strangers on Bystander Intervention', *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 5 (1969), pp. 189–202; S. Schwartz and A. Gottlieb, 'Bystander Anonymity and Reactions to Emergencies', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39 (1991), pp. 418–30.

<sup>12</sup> I. Bohnet and B. Frey, 'Social Distance and Other-regarding Behavior in Dictator Games', *The American Economic Review*, 89 (1999a), pp. 335–9; 'The Sound of Silence in Prisoner's Dilemma and Dictator Games', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 38 (1999b), pp. 43–57; E. Hoffman, K. McCabe, V. Smith, 'Social Distance and Other-regarding Behavior in Dictator Games', in C. Plott and V. Smith (eds.), *Handbook of Experimental Economics*, volume 1 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1996), pp. 429–35.

<sup>13</sup> R. Baron, 'The Sweet Smell of ... Helping: Effects of Pleasant Ambient Fragrance on Prosocial Behavior in Shopping Malls', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23 (1997), pp. 498–503; R. Baron, and J. Thomley, 'A Whiff of Reality: Positive Affect as a Potential Mediator of the Effects of Pleasant Fragrances on Task Performance and Helping', *Environment and Behavior*, 26 (1994), pp. 766–84; W. Boles and S. Haywood, 'The Effects of Urban Noise and Sidewalk Density upon Pedestrian Cooperation and Tempo', *Journal of Social Psychology*, 104 (1978), pp. 29–35; S. Cohen and A. Lezak, 'Noise and Inattentiveness to Social Cues', *Environment and Behavior*, 9 (1977), pp. 559–72; E. Donnerstein and D. Wilson, 'Effects of Noise and Perceived Control on Ongoing and Subsequent Aggressive Behavior', *Journal*

While it is possible for virtue ethics to retreat into purely normative territory by giving up egalitarianism, as Christian Miller (2003, p. 379) and Christine Swanton suggest, such a move is distasteful for a number of reasons.<sup>14</sup> One of the supposed strengths of virtue ethics is an empirically adequate moral psychology; such a retreat would abandon any claim to that strength. Additionally, the move toward moral elitism threatens to violate the ‘ought’ – ‘can’ implication. If people ought to be virtuous, presumably they can. But if virtue is rare and exceedingly difficult to attain, it might be that they really cannot. One might respond that the point is not so much to *be* virtuous as to *aspire to* virtue, but even this weaker prescription is problematic. Presumably one cannot intend to do something one takes to be impossible. Aspiration plausibly involves intention, which would mean that one cannot aspire to something one takes to be impossible. If it truly is impossible to attain virtue, then one could only aspire to it if one did not know how difficult it is to attain. This would entail that the only people capable of fulfilling the prescription to aspire to virtue are holy fools who are ignorant of the impossibility of attaining their goals.

A less extreme retreat endorses something like Doris’s (2002, p. 62) theory of local virtues, which are individuated much more finely than the traditional virtues. Doris seems inclined, for instance, to distinguish a large variety of local traits that fit within the global virtue of courage. He seems willing to individuate traits as finely as required for them to actually support counterfactuals and confident predictions. Instead of *courage* or even *physical courage*, he would have us speak of *battlefield physical courage*, of *storms physical courage*, of *heights physical courage*, and of *wild animals physical courage*. Indeed, he even seems willing to differentiate between *battlefield physical courage in the face of rifle fire* and *battlefield physical courage in the face of artillery fire*. Though it might appear that he is being flip by cutting the fabric of traits so finely, he claims that this principle of individuation ‘is the beginning of an empirically adequate theory’ (p. 62).

*of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34 (1976), pp. 774–81; R. Geen and E. O’Neal, ‘Activation of Cue-elicited Aggression by General Arousal’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 11 (1969), pp. 289–92; V. Konecni, ‘The Mediation of Aggressive Behavior: Arousal Level Versus Anger and Cognitive Labeling’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32 (1975), pp. 706–16; C. Korte and R. Grant, ‘Traffic Noise, Environmental Awareness, and Pedestrian Behavior’, *Environment and Behavior*, 12 (1980), pp. 408–20; C. Korte, A. Ypma, and C. Toppen, ‘Helpfulness in Dutch Society as a Function of Urbanization and Environmental Input Level’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32 (1975), pp. 996–1003; K. Matthews and L. Cannon, ‘Environmental Noise Level as a Determinant of Helping Behavior’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32 (1975), pp. 571–7; R. Page, ‘Noise and Helping Behavior’, *Environment and Behavior*, 9 (1974), pp. 311–34.

<sup>14</sup> C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralist View*, (Oxford UP, 2003), at p. 30.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the intricacies of the dialectic between situationists and virtue ethicists. In this section I aim only to limn the outlines of the situationist view. In a nutshell, the view is that traditional virtues are individuated coarsely by their characteristic reasons (e.g., others' need and one's ability to help), but that most people's actual thought, feeling, deliberation, and behavior is better characterised by finely individuated dispositions that make reference to seemingly trivial and normatively irrelevant situational features. In the next section, I marshal empirical evidence previously uncited in the present context to show that a similar argument applies to responsibilist and mixed flavors of virtue epistemology.

#### IV. EXPANDING THE CHALLENGE TO RESPONSIBILIST VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

I want to extend the situationist criticism to responsibilist virtue epistemology, so I need to argue that its intellectual virtues are empirically inadequate: they neither explain nor predict a sufficient portion of epistemic conduct because people are inordinately susceptible to seemingly trivial and epistemically irrelevant situational influences. This section attempts to make good on that claim.

##### IV.1. *The challenge to classical responsibilism*

At first blush, empirical evidence about what sorts of cognitive dispositions people actually possess would seem to be welcome news to responsibilists because it would help to solve the so-called *generality problem*. Recall that, on this view, knowledge is true belief acquired and retained through the exercise of intellectual virtues. However, any event of acquiring a belief could be classed under an indefinite number of headings, some of which are highly reliable, others of which are less so, still others of which are outright unreliable. Suppose that Susie comes to believe that the cat is on the mat, and that the cat really is on the mat. If we describe her belief-formation process as *seeing a cat on a mat*, then of course it is reliable. If, however, we describe it as *seeming to see a cat on a mat*, then it is less so. All seeings of cats are seemings as of cats, but not all seemings as of cats are seeings of cats. Furthermore, not all seemings as of cats are veridical, but all seeings of cats are. And if we describe her belief-formation process as *coming to believe that the cat is on the mat or that  $2 + 2 = 5$* , then it is clearly unreliable.

Though the generality problem was first articulated as a hurdle for reliabilism,<sup>15</sup> Zagzebski (p. 300) recognises that classical responsibilism faces its own version of the problem. Should conative virtues be coarsely individuated, so that *open-mindedness* makes the cut, or should they be finely individuated, so that *open-mindedness towards friends while in a good mood* makes the cut? She argues that this question should be answered empirically (p. 309), a point with which I wholeheartedly agree.

One thing that makes matters especially tricky here is that responsibilism imposes an additional constraint on solving the generality problem. Responsibilist virtues are meant to be not only truth-conducive but also praiseworthy. This means that the principle of individuation for intellectual traits must be such as to make the virtues thus individuated good ways to be. To that end, Zagzebski also thinks that the intellectual virtues should be individuated, like the moral virtues, in part by their characteristic motivations, and thus quite coarsely. Intellectual courage is the virtue of (among other things) staying true to one's beliefs in the face of social pressure; curiosity is the virtue of wanting to learn; open-mindedness is the virtue of being willing to take seriously the opposing viewpoints of others.

Empirical evidence about what sorts of epistemically-relevant motivational traits people actually possess would presumably help to solve the generality problem for responsibilism. If the solution generalises, perhaps it could even be exported to reliabilism. Furthermore, the generality problem for virtue epistemology and the situationist challenge to virtue ethics seem to share many structural similarities. In the same way that the situationist challenge depends on whether moral virtues are coarsely individuated (e.g., honesty, courage, modesty) or finely individuated (e.g., honesty while watched by fellow parishioners, courage in the face of rifle fire, modesty before peers while in a good mood), the generality problem depends on whether intellectual virtues are coarsely individuated (e.g., curiosity, creativity, intellectual courage) or finely individuated (curiosity while in a good mood, creativity after being given candy, intellectual courage in the face of non-unanimous dissent). If this is right, then a solution to the generality problem for responsibilism might also be exported as a response to the situationist challenge to virtue ethics.

This point is not entirely novel. In a recent article, Guy Axtell noted an architectonic similarity between the generality problem for epistemol-

<sup>15</sup> J. Pollock, 'Reliability and Justified Belief', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 14 (1984), pp. 103–14.

ogy and the situationist challenge to virtue ethics.<sup>16</sup> His take on the similarity is very different from mine, however. For one thing, his goal is to reconcile reliabilist virtues and responsibilist virtues by saying that reliabilist virtues should be used in evaluating the justification of doxastic states while responsibilist virtues should be used in evaluating the praiseworthiness of epistemic agents (p. 78). For another, he discusses none of the relevant psychological literature. He therefore fails to consider whether the virtues of either camp actually exist, and, if they do, how common they are. Since the virtues of responsibilism are ‘thick,’ it ought to be possible to use them not only for evaluation of agents’ praiseworthiness but also for predicting and explaining how agents inquire and believe.

The situationist challenge to classical responsibilism can be framed as an inconsistent triad:

(*non-skepticism*) Most people know quite a bit.

(*classical responsibilism*) Knowledge is true belief acquired and retained through responsibilist intellectual virtue.

(*epistemic situationism*) Most people’s conative intellectual traits are not virtues because they are highly sensitive to seemingly trivial and epistemically irrelevant situational influences.

The thesis of *non-skepticism* is near-orthodoxy. In a recent PhilPapers survey of philosophers around the globe, 81.6% of philosophers and 84.3% of epistemologists rejected skepticism.<sup>17</sup> I will therefore treat *non-skepticism* as unrevisable for the purposes of this article. At the very least, it would take impressive argumentative acrobatics to convince most epistemologists that they should abandon *non-skepticism* instead of *classical responsibilism*.

The crucial question is therefore whether to accept *epistemic situationism* and reject *classical responsibilism* or, conversely, to reject *epistemic situationism* and accept *classical responsibilism*. To motivate the thesis of *epistemic situationism*, I will describe some of the research of Alice Isen and her colleagues on the influence of positive moods on cognitive motivation and processing. It will turn out that when people behave in accordance with the intellectual virtues of *curiosity*, *flexibility*, and *creativity*, their conduct is often better explained in terms of situational influences like mood eleva-

<sup>16</sup> G. Axtell, ‘Agency Ascriptions in Ethics and Epistemology: Or, Navigating Intersections, Narrow and Broad’, in H. Battaly (ed.), *Virtue and Vice: Moral and Epistemic*, (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), pp. 73–94. See also C. Lepock, ‘How to Make the Generality Problem Work for You’, *Acta Analytica*, 24 (2009), pp. 275–86.

<sup>17</sup> Data available at <http://philpapers.org/surveys/results.pl>

tors than in terms of consistent global traits. Most people are not curious, flexible, or creative as such; instead, they are *curious while in a good mood*, *flexible while in a good mood*, and *creative while in a good mood*. This suggests that they lack the consistent motivation required for intellectual virtue.

Here's a test of your intellectual flexibility and creativity. Suppose you are given three items: a book of matches, a box of thumbtacks, and a candle. Your task is to fix the candle to a vertical cork board in such a way that, when you light it, no wax drips. What do you do? To solve this puzzle, some people try tacking the candle directly to the cork. Others try lighting the candle and using the molten wax as an adhesive. Neither method works. The only solution is to empty the box, tack it to the cork, and then place the candle on the platform thus created. This is known as the Duncker candle task.<sup>18</sup> When it is presented in this way, few people are able to solve it, but when the apparatus is presented as four items (a book of matches, a box, thumbtacks, and a candle) most do solve it. When the box contains the thumbtacks, people think of it as functionally related to the tacks: it is the sort of thing to hold thumbtacks. When the box and the thumbtacks are presented separately, people think of them as functionally distinct: a box for holding things (tacks, candles, what have you) and some tacks. This allows them to see that the box could be used to support the candle. Psychologists use the candle task as a measure of flexibility and creativity. If you have the box with the tacks in it, are you intellectually limber enough to think of the box in a new way?

Another test of cognitive flexibility and creativity is the remote associates test (RAT).<sup>19</sup> In this test, subjects are first presented three words. For instance, they might see 'sore', 'shoulder', and 'sweat', or 'room', 'blood', and 'salts'. Next, they are asked to generate a fourth word that conjoins naturally with each to generate a common phrase or compound word. The solution to the first triple is 'cold', which generates the phrases 'cold sore', 'cold shoulder', and 'cold sweat'. The solution to the second triplet is 'bath', which generates the phrases 'bathroom', 'blood bath', and 'bath salts'. Creative, flexible thinkers are able to generate the fourth word for many such triplets, and able to do so more quickly and efficiently than less creative, less flexible thinkers.

<sup>18</sup> K. Duncker, *On Problem Solving*. Psychological Monographs, 58, (American Psychological Association, 1945).

<sup>19</sup> M. Mednick, 'Research Creativity in Psychology Graduate Students', *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 27 (1963), pp. 265–6.

In a fascinating study, Isen, Daubman, and Nowicki found that seemingly trivial and epistemically irrelevant mood elevators led to significantly increased performance on both the candle task and the RAT.<sup>20</sup> In the control condition, participants were simply presented with the two puzzles. In two experimental conditions, their mood was situationally elevated by showing them a short comedy film or giving them candy. Both methods of elevating mood improved participants' performance. For the candle task, being in a good mood was almost as useful as being presented with the tacks outside of the box. Only 13% of participants solved the candle task in the control condition, with the tacks in the box. By contrast, 83% solved it when the tacks were presented outside the box, compared with 75% in the positive affect condition. Congruent results were obtained for the RAT. Participants in a situationally-induced good mood solved almost 66% more of the moderately difficult triplets than those in the control condition.

It appears that many of the subjects in this study who solved the candle task and the RAT were not creative and flexible as such, but that they acted in accordance with creativity and flexibility because of the seemingly trivial and epistemically irrelevant mood elevator. Consider the participants in these experiments who arrived at the correct solution but would not have done so had they not been in a good mood. Did they know the solutions they arrived at? Responsibilist knowledge is true belief acquired through the exercise of such virtues as flexibility and creativity, yet these participants acquired their true beliefs not through flexibility and creativity but through flexibility while in a good mood and creativity while in a good mood. The responsibilist seems to be committed to saying that they did not know the solutions. If Code is right that intellectual virtue includes a disposition 'not to be *unduly* swayed by affectivity' (p. 42, emphasis hers), then these participants were not exercising intellectual virtue and hence did not really know the solutions they arrived at. This seems to be the wrong result. To my mind, it sounds more natural to say that they did know the solutions even though they arrived at them not through the exercise of intellectual virtue but because the funny video or the candy lifted their spirits. Thus, *non-skepticism* and *epistemic situationism* are maintained at the cost of rejecting *classical responsibilism*.

Responsibilists might be inclined to say that these studies measure only *change* in intellectually virtuous conduct. They show that people act *more* creatively when in a good mood, but that is arguably irrelevant to

<sup>20</sup> A. Isen, K. Daubman, and G. Nowicki, 'Positive Affect Facilitates Creative Problem Solving', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52 (1987), pp. 1122–31.

whether they are creative. After all, a creative person might act *even more* creatively when in a good mood, but that does not make him uncreative to begin with. I recognise the force of this argument, but remain unconvinced. Yes, these studies measure change, but their control conditions also measure the baseline. And the results of these control conditions suggest that people are in fact pretty bad at the candle task and other tests of creativity *unless seemingly trivial and epistemically irrelevant factors like mood enhancers come into play*.

Alternatively, the responsibilist might argue that creativity, curiosity, and flexibility are not required for justification or knowledge. Creativity especially seems to be a kind of supererogatory intellectual virtue – praiseworthy to be sure, but not necessary for ordinary doxastic justification. Perhaps conscientiousness and intellectual courage are more directly relevant to knowledge and justification (topics in classical responsibilism), while creativity and curiosity are more directly relevant to the praiseworthiness of epistemic agents (a topic in inquiry responsibilism). This argument deserves our attention, but it shifts the burden of proof to the responsibilist. If creativity, flexibility, and curiosity do not belong to classical responsibilism, which traits do? It is unfair to the situationist to force him to play whack-a-mole, claiming whenever he gives a strong argument against some intellectual virtue that he forgot to account for some other intellectual virtue that is now identified *post hoc*. Perhaps intellectual courage is required for justification and knowledge? I will argue in the next section that most people lack intellectual courage and are at best intellectually courageous in the face of non-unanimous dissent. Perhaps some other intellectual virtues are required, then? This is a question that classical responsibilists must answer and defend in an empirically-informed way. It does not come for free. I discuss two potential answers (conscientiousness and need for cognition) in the concluding section of this article, but my conclusions there will not thrill classical responsibilists.

Isen and her colleagues have conducted dozens of further experiments in the same vein as the ones described above; in the remainder of this section, I discuss just a few. In another study of the influence of positive mood on creative problem-solving, Estrada, Isen, and Young presented medical internists a task in which they had to identify the correct diagnosis of a hypothetical patient based on a description of his condition.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> C. Estrada, A. Isen, and M. Young, 'Positive Affect Influences Creative Problem Solving and Reported Source of Practice Satisfaction in Physicians', *Motivation and Emotion*, 18 (1994), pp. 285–99; 'Positive Affect Facilitates Integration of Information and Decreases Anchoring in Reasoning among Physicians', *Organizational Behavioral and Human Decision Processes*, 72 (1998), pp. 117–35.

Some of the doctors were given a small gift of candy just prior to the experiment; some were asked to read aloud a humanistic statement about medical care; the remainder underwent no treatment. The experimenters observed the internists' reasoning processes for speed, accuracy, and flexibility. While most arrived at the correct diagnosis, those in the positive affect condition did so more quickly and with greater flexibility of thought than both the control group and the humanistic-reading group. One might have thought that the humanistic statement would augment the doctors' epistemic motivation more than the candy. They presumably had some degree of commitment to humanism; they had trained as doctors after all. However, what really kicked their desire to know into gear was not a reminder of the ultimate goal of medicine but a few gobstoppers.

In a similar study, Isen, Rosenzweig, and Young measured the influence of positive affect on creativity and curiosity.<sup>22</sup> They first gave third-year medical students an anagram task, then induced positive affect in some of them by reporting that they had successfully solved it. Participants were next asked to determine which of six hypothetical patients was most likely to have lung cancer. As in the previous study, positive affect did not induce higher accuracy, but it was correlated with speed, configural processing, and organisation of reasoning. In addition, participants in the positive affect condition were significantly more likely to engage in supererogatory reasoning about the hypothetical cases; they expressed more interest in the five cases deemed less likely to have lung cancer, even though this was not part of the task. It would seem, then, that positive mood induced heightened efficiency, better information processing, and increased interest in the subject matter. Again, while subjects in the positive affect condition may not have been creative or curious as such, they acted in accordance with these intellectual virtues because their moods had been improved by their seemingly trivial and epistemically irrelevant success on the prior anagram task. As before, it seems more natural to say that the doctors whose performance was enhanced by their good mood knew the solutions that they arrived at, even if they did not arrive at them by exercising the intellectual virtues of creativity and curiosity. If this is so, it means that *non-skepticism* and *epistemic situationism* are accepted at the cost of rejecting *classical responsibilism*.

The results described so far accord with the view of Schaller and Cialdini, who argue that positive mood induces an overall openness to new

<sup>22</sup> A. Isen, A. Rosenzweig, and M. Young, 'The Influence of Positive Affect on Clinical Problem Solving', *Medical Decision Making*, 11 (1991), pp. 221–7.

experiences and ideas.<sup>23</sup> People are more curious when their mood is positive than when it is negative or neutral. Happy people are also better able to recall information<sup>24</sup> and make connections among disparate objects.<sup>25</sup>

The effects of mood elevators are quite fleeting, however. In a study of the longevity of the effects of the sorts of mood elevators discussed in this section, Isen, Clark, and Schwartz found that only twenty minutes were required for the effect to wear off completely.<sup>26</sup> This is probably because mood elevators cause a temporary release of dopamine into the brain, which dissipates rather quickly.<sup>27</sup>

I could go on about the power of fleeting situational influences on epistemic conduct. I hope by now, however, to have motivated the thought that many people do not possess creativity, flexibility, and curiosity as such, but inquire and reason creatively, flexibly, and curiously when their moods have been elevated by such seemingly trivial and epistemically irrelevant situational influences as candy, success at anagrams, and comedy films. It would be tedious to document similar evidence against the other epistemic virtues. Instead, I suggest that the burden of proof is now not on the situationist but the responsibilist. If my arguments in this section are successful, three intellectual virtues have fallen prey to situationist critique (and I shall add a fourth, intellectual courage, in the next section). If some other intellectual virtue is immune to situationist critique, that needs to be established by a thorough investigation of the relevant empirical literature. It would be surprising if creativity, flexibility, and curiosity were the only responsibilist traits susceptible such criticism.

Psychology thus offers an empirical solution to the generality problem: intellectual traits are finely individuated not only by their characteristic motivations but also by seemingly trivial and epistemically irrelevant situational influences such as mood elevators. If this is right, responsibilists face

<sup>23</sup> M. Schaller and R. Cialdini, 'Happiness, Sadness, and Helping: A Motivational Integration', in R. Higgins and E.T. Sorrentino (eds.), *Handbook of Motivation and Cognition*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990), pp. 265–96.

<sup>24</sup> A. Isen, 'Asymmetry of Happiness and Sadness in Effects on Memory in Normal College Students', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 114 (1985), pp. 388–91; A. Isen, T. Shalke, M. Clark, and L. Karp, 'Affect, Accessibility of Material in Memory, and Behavior: A Cognitive Loop?' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36 (1978), pp. 1–12.

<sup>25</sup> A. Isen and K. Daubman, 'The Influence of Affect on Categorization', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 47 (1984), pp. 1206–17.

<sup>26</sup> A. Isen, M. Clark, and M. Schwartz, 'Duration of the Effect of Good Mood on Helping: "Footprints on the Sands of Time"', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34 (1976), pp. 385–93.

<sup>27</sup> F. Ashby, A. Isen, and A. Turken, 'A Neuropsychological Theory of Positive Affect and its Influence on Cognition', *Psychological Review*, 106 (1999), pp. 529–50.

a dilemma. They can accept local traits like *curiosity while in a good mood* as virtues, or reject them. If responsibilists say that such traits are not virtues, skepticism rears its ugly head: if most people are at best locally curious, then most people have unjustified beliefs, which do not count as knowledge. When faced with the choice between saying that the subjects in Isen's experiments did not really know the answers to the problems they solved and saying that they did know but were not intellectually virtuous, I am inclined to go with the latter option, and I suspect that most other epistemologists would be too. Results like the ones discussed here suggest that we should accept *epistemic situationism* and reject *classical responsibilism*.

On the other horn of the dilemma, if responsibilists say that such narrow traits really are intellectual virtues, then they need to explain how these dispositions are to be construed as admirable. It is hard to see why someone should be praised for being *creative while in a good mood* or *curious while in a good mood*. Such traits are presumably truth-conducive (that much is not at issue), but responsibilist virtues are meant to be both truth-conducive and praiseworthy. Perhaps local intellectual virtues really are praiseworthy, though. Perhaps they only seem not to be because of a pragmatic implicature that dogs their attribution. If someone says, 'Lisa is curious while in a good mood,' he might be taken to mean that Lisa is intellectually lazy otherwise. Thus, while his attribution is meant as praise, it sounds like blame. Considerations like this might help to reconcile responsibilists to local traits. Presumably, though, full-bore global intellectual virtues are more praiseworthy than local intellectual virtues. It may be admirable to be curious while in a good mood, but presumably it is even more admirable to be curious regardless of mood. Articulating a whole theory of local intellectual virtues would take us too far afield, but such a view might plausibly serve as a fallback position for classical responsibilism.

#### IV.2. *The challenge to inquiry responsibilism*

If the foregoing arguments are correct, classical responsibilism fails to provide an adequate account of justification and knowledge. Perhaps, though, inquiry responsibilism can survive an encounter with the empirical evidence. In this section, I argue that that hope is not met. I will use the virtue of *intellectual courage* as an example of how seemingly trivial and epistemically irrelevant situational factors influence epistemic and doxastic conduct. It will turn out that most people are not intellectually courageous but at best intellectually courageous in the face of non-unanimous dissent. This fine-grained trait is only minimally admirable, like one of Doris's local

virtues or Robert Merihew Adams's 'modules of virtue.'<sup>28</sup> Extrapolating, I will suggest that if similar arguments apply to the other global virtues, then much of our epistemic conduct can be explained without reference to such dispositions. If this is right, inquiry responsibilism cannot claim empirical adequacy. It may stand as a purely normative theory, but as a thick, explanatory-cum-evaluative theory, it applies to few actual people.

Before proceeding with the empirical evidence, some conceptual analysis is called for. There is an unfortunate paucity of responsibilist research on intellectual courage. Montmarquet glosses it as 'the willingness to conceive and examine alternatives to popularly held beliefs, perseverance in the face of opposition from others (until one is convinced one is mistaken), and the determination required to see such a project through to completion' (1993, p. 23). Elsewhere, he says that intellectual courage enables its bearer 'to pursue his own enquiries, to learn from others, yet not to be unduly bound to their opinions regarding his enquiries' (1987, p. 487) and to avoid 'forming beliefs for reasons related to their popularity with others' (p. 493). Zagzebski says that intellectual courage involves refraining from operating under the 'assumption that the views of others are more likely to be true than her own' and that the intellectually courageous person 'must be willing to withstand attack when she has good reason to think she is right' (pp. 177-178).

Surely there is a lot more to intellectual courage than this, though. Robert Roberts and Jay Wood develop a helpful 'map' of intellectual courage, yet even their analysis leaves out many specifications of intellectual courage.<sup>29</sup> Consider for a moment just the courage to investigate. What threats might prevent one from investigating? Some are external. Recall for instance the tale (apocryphal, though still apt) of the bishops who refused to look through Galileo's telescope. They were afraid that the testimony of their senses might lead them to give up their faith in geocentric Ptolemaic astronomy. Since that faith was required by the church hierarchy, they did their best to avoid encountering evidence that would undermine it. Other threats to investigation are internal. A cuckold might refuse to follow the trail of evidence leading to his wife's infidelity for fear that his heart would break.

Congruent specifications of other varieties of intellectual courage should also be made. There is intellectual courage to believe in the face of external threats, and a different intellectual courage to believe in the

<sup>28</sup> R.M. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*, (Oxford UP, 2006), at p. 125.

<sup>29</sup> R. Roberts and J. Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, (Oxford UP, 2007), in chapter 8.

face of internal threats. Montmarquet and Zagzebski seem mostly or perhaps entirely concerned with the former, but surely internal threats exist as well. Some truths are hard to take; they demand a certain cruelty towards oneself. Someone who truly desires to believe the truth and avoid error will force herself to accept unpleasant truths.

Related to the courage to believe is the courage to trust. If one flies in a passenger jet, one trusts the pilot to guide the plane to its destination. When one eats out at a restaurant, one trusts that the cook knows how to store and prepare food hygienically. As one reads the newspaper, one trusts the reporter to get things right. The flipside of the courage to believe and trust is the courage to doubt. Montmarquet and Zagzebski consider only the courage to doubt popular opinion. This is one specification of the courage to doubt – the type required for external threats. But there is also the courage to doubt oneself. Uncertainty is disquieting. It is often much easier to believe than to suspend judgment. When the evidence does not tell strongly in one direction or another, it takes a kind of intellectual courage to remain in doubt.

Finally, consider the intellectual courage to speak and more generally to express thoughts, judgments, and opinions. It seems that this type of courage responds only or at least primarily to external threats. Saying what you really think can lead to social or legal sanction. It might therefore appear that this type of courage is actually a specification not of intellectual courage but of social courage. I claim that it is both because of its relation to the courage to believe and investigate. It is hard to imagine how one could investigate thoroughly without communication. The objections, suggestions, and counterarguments of other people are crucial to the pursuit of truth. While the lone genius may be able to dream up all of the potential problems with his view, the rest of us mere mortals need to engage in dialectical scrutiny to evaluate the ultimate plausibility of our views. It follows that if one wants to investigate well and believe the truth, one needs the courage to express one's own view – a point that John Stuart Mill makes in chapter 2 of *On Liberty*. The studies I describe in this section pertain most directly to the intellectual courage to speak one's mind.

In 1937, the Turkish social scientist Muzafer Sherif published a study on social power over perception.<sup>30</sup> He wanted to show that many norms were upheld because there was apparent unanimity in support of them, and not because there was any rational reason for them. To argue for this

<sup>30</sup> M. Sherif, 'An Experimental Approach to the Study of Attitudes', *Sociometry*, 1 (1937), pp. 90–8.

audacious claim, he designed a clever experiment based on the so-called autokinetic effect. Imagine that you are in a room that is completely dark except for a single point of light on the wall. In such a situation, you have no frame of reference for the position of the light. After staring at it for some time, it will appear to move – not because it actually does move (in fact, it remains stationary throughout the experiment) but because your eyes wander, creating the impression of movement. How far exactly does the light appear to move? It is hard to say, especially because the correct answer (not at all) is the one thing that seems definitely wrong. Add to the situation that several experimental confederates affirm with great vigor that the light moved exactly three inches (or seven inches, or one inch, or what have you). What would you be inclined to say?

In Sherif's study, participants almost always converged on the unanimous response of the confederates – whatever it was. He took this to show that the participants' vision of reality was skewed by the announced perceptions of their peers. I and most other commentators have seen this interpretation as overblown, but at the very least the study seems to show that apparent unanimity can generate consent when the object of judgment is highly ambiguous. This is a far cry from disconfirming the existence of intellectual courage, but it suggests that unanimity might influence judgment in less uncertain cases as well.

Further studies have shown that once participants alight on an arbitrary norm, it is hard to shake them from it. Rohrer, Baron, Hoffman, and Swinder, for instance, showed that when participants in a Sherif-style autokinetic study were brought back to the lab months or even years later, they stuck to the norm established in their first session, even in the face of a new unanimous majority.<sup>31</sup> If it were not for the arbitrary nature in which the norm was generated, this might suggest that participants had something like intellectual courage. The fact that they were so easily influenced at first, however, suggests that some other psychological mechanism is at work. In another follow-up study, Jacobs and Campbell found that norms could be passed from generation to generation, Ship of Theseus-style.<sup>32</sup> Once a group had established a unanimous judgment about how far the light had moved in an autokinetic study, it was very hard to dislodge that judgment, even when the members of the group were slowly replaced by naive participants so that, by the end of the study, all mem-

<sup>31</sup> J. Rohrer, S. Baron, E. Hoffman, and D. Swinder, 'The Stability of Autokinetic Judgment', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 49 (1954), pp. 595–7.

<sup>32</sup> R. Jacobs and D. Campbell, 'The Perpetuation of an Arbitrary Tradition Through Several Generations of Laboratory Microculture', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 62 (1961), pp. 649–58.

bers were genuine participants rather than confederates and none had been part of the initial group.

Unsatisfied with Sherif's heroic interpretation of these studies, Solomon Asch designed his own experiment.<sup>33</sup> He wanted to show that the only reason participants' responses coalesced around an arbitrary norm in the autokinetic studies was that the stimulus was so ambiguous. After all, going along with the majority when you have no strong independent evidence of your own is not irrational; it might even be wise. Surely when the correct answer was clear, he reasoned, participants would have the courage of their convictions, even in the face of unanimous dissent. To his dismay, Asch found the opposite. In a now-famous experimental design eponymously titled the *Asch paradigm*, he tested the old saw, 'Who are you going to believe? Me, or your own eyes?' In the experiment, seven confederates and a single participant judged serially and aloud which of two lines was longer. The correct answer was always obvious to the naked eye. Nevertheless, occasionally the confederates unanimously said that the shorter line was longer. After hearing the confederates rattle off their wrong answers, participants often went along with the majority. They did display discomfort, tension, and doubt, but all the same they announced their concurrence with the unanimous majority. Roughly a quarter of the participants refused to bend to the majority, but about a third went with the majority more often than not. Over the course of a typical experiment of this sort, between 50% and 80% of the participants will cave at least once.

Variations on the paradigm established some boundary conditions. The effect disappeared when only one confederate was present, was quite weak when two were present, but went into full effect with just three. If just a single confederate went against the grain, conformity with the majority dropped below 10%. All this is comforting to a degree; the majority is not a sovereign governor of the individual. Nevertheless, the comfort is cold. If people are so easily swayed to go along with a view they realise is absurd when the potential sanction for dissent is only a rictus of scorn, how can they be counted on to display intellectual courage when the stakes are raised? Is the local trait of intellectual courage in the face of a non-unanimous majority really all that praiseworthy?

<sup>33</sup> S. Asch, 'Effects of Group Pressures upon the Modification and Distortion of Judgment', in H. Guetzkow (ed.), *Groups, Leadership, and Men*, (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press, 1951); *Social Psychology* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952); 'Opinions and Social Pressure', *Scientific American*, (1955), pp. 31–5; 'Studies of Independence and Conformity: A Minority of One against a Unanimous Majority', *Psychological Monographs*, 70 (1956).

In follow-ups to the initial Asch studies, other psychologists extended the domains in which the effect was found. Richard Crutchfield tested the effect of a unanimous majority on many types of judgments.<sup>34</sup> In some cases, the question had to do with factual, mathematical, or logical question, such as which of two figures had a greater area, which of two lines was longer, which of several numbers naturally followed a given sequence, and so on. In these cases, roughly a third of the participants went with the obviously wrong majority opinion. In other cases, the question had to do with more difficult matters of value, such as whether trials and tribulations made one a better person, whether the respondent would make a good leader, or whether free speech could be legitimately suspended by a threatened society. In these cases too, about a third of participants caved in the face of perceived unanimity.

Stanley Milgram – designer of the infamous studies in conformity – cut his teeth on the Asch paradigm. In a cleverly designed study, he had adults participate in an Asch-style experiment when they thought they were actually interviewing for a job.<sup>35</sup> Subjects believed that they were testing a new signaling system for aircraft, but in fact they were part of a psychological experiment. They were asked to say which of several tones matched in pitch a given tone. As in the original Asch study, unanimity produced striking conformity. Even when they had a financial incentive to get the answer right, subjects went along with the perceived majority in a large number of cases.

Studies like these suggest that the virtues identified by inquiry responsibility are not the sorts of traits that many people possess. Rather than being *intellectually courageous*, people are at best *intellectually courageous unless faced with unanimous dissent of at least three other people*. Surely, though, if intellectual courage is admirable anywhere, it is admirable in the face of unanimous dissent. What good is an intellectual virtue that leaves one in the lurch precisely where it would be most appropriate, most beneficial, and most praiseworthy? In *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Oscar Wilde's avatar, Lord Darlington, quips, "I can resist everything except temptation."

As in the previous section, I could go on, but I hope to have at least motivated the idea that inquiry responsibility is in the same troubled state as classical responsibility, that the situationist challenge extends not only to curiosity, creativity, and flexibility, but also to intellectual courage,

<sup>34</sup> R. Crutchfield, 'Conformity and Character', *American Psychologist*, 10 (1955), pp. 191–98.

<sup>35</sup> S. Milgram, 'Nationality and Conformity', *Scientific American*, December (1961), pp. 45–51.

and that the normative credentials of local intellectual virtues are hard to burnish.

Now, it is of course possible to respond to this challenge as many have responded to the situationist challenge to virtue ethics by contending that, after all, virtue is quite rare, and so if most people are not intellectually courageous, that hardly counts as a bullet for virtue epistemologists to bite. On the one hand, Code seems amenable to this idea when she says, 'It is important in giving an account of virtue, either moral or intellectual, to acknowledge that this is an account of an ideal, perhaps never fully realisable' (p. 45). On the other hand, she quite rightly goes on to say that it is necessary 'to keep its requirements nearly enough within the reach of the ordinary human being that there can be many virtuous persons, if perhaps none *perfectly* virtuous.' The question is not whether the studies discussed in this section tell against ecumenical perfect virtue. The real question is whether these studies tell against 'near enough' virtue for 'ordinary human beings.' It seems that there could not be 'many virtuous persons' if the intellectual virtues are the global, coarsely-individuated traits so-far identified by responsibilists.

Another response available to responsibilists is to admit that many people fall short of the ideal of intellectual virtue, but to claim that it is nevertheless possible to fall short of the ideal while possessing an admirable approximation of the ideal. Someone who caves in to public opinion occasionally is more admirable than someone who caves in to public opinion often. Here it may be helpful to make a distinction between high-fidelity and low-fidelity virtues. High-fidelity virtues require near-perfect consistency; low-fidelity virtues require much better consistency than could be expected without the trait in question. For example, the high-fidelity intellectual virtues include curiosity, open-mindedness, fair-mindedness, intellectual humility, thoroughness, and intellectual carefulness. If someone acts in accordance with thoroughness in 80% of her inquiries, that hardly makes her thorough. By contrast, low-fidelity intellectual virtues include creativity, insightfulness, and originality. (These lists are not meant to be comprehensive or uncontroversial, but I hope they at least point in the right direction). If someone has an original insight even once a week, that might qualify her as insightful. The evidence I have brought to bear in this article is more damning to high-fidelity intellectual virtues than to low-fidelity intellectual virtues. However, the low-fidelity intellectual virtues of creativity, insightfulness, and originality are also the least truth-conducive, a point I mentioned above. At most this distinction will salvage the low-fidelity inquiry virtues, which would constitute at best a partial vindication of responsibilism.

## V. CONCLUSION

I have argued that several of the intellectual virtues traditionally countenanced by classical responsibilism and inquiry responsibilism are empirically inadequate. They fail to explain a sufficient portion of behavior when compared with the explanatory power of seemingly trivial and epistemically irrelevant situational factors such as mood elevators. While it may be possible to retreat by claiming that virtue is rare, such a retreat threatens to make justification and knowledge rare as well. One could opt instead for a theory of local intellectual virtues, which are empirically supportable and even truth-conducive. They are only minimally admirable, however, so retrenching into a theory of local intellectual virtues would make it difficult for responsibilism to address questions of epistemic value.

My arguments thus far have critiqued only some of the intellectual virtues. Others remain unexplored. Perhaps they resist the situationist challenge better than curiosity, creativity, intellectual flexibility, and intellectual courage. In this concluding section, I consider two candidates for overcoming the situationist challenge to responsibilism: conscientiousness and the need for cognition. Echoing Jesse Prinz's normativity challenge to virtue ethics, I argue that neither is admirable in the way that responsibilism requires.<sup>36</sup>

One prominent model in personality psychology is the so-called 'Big Five' – openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Someone's personality can be sketched in broad outline by assigning him an ordered quintuple on these orthogonal, continuous dimensions. For instance, someone might be highly conscientious, slightly introverted, rather disagreeable, and quite neurotic. Responsibilists consider conscientiousness an intellectual virtue; Montmarquet even considers it the sole cardinal intellectual virtue. It is therefore tempting to look to the Big Five for empirical credentials. Unfortunately, the conscientiousness of personality psychology has little to do with the conscientiousness of responsibilism. Recall that, according to Montmarquet, conscientiousness is the desire to attain truth and avoid error. When personality psychologists use the term, however, they have something much broader and less intellectually focused in mind. Conscientiousness for them includes personal austerity, the ability to delay gratification, productivity, the need for control, and compulsivity.<sup>37</sup> While some of these dispositions may be

<sup>36</sup> J. Prinz, 'The Normativity Challenge: Cultural Psychology Provides the Real Threat to Virtue Ethics', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 13 (2009), pp. 117–44.

<sup>37</sup> R. McCrae and O. John, 'An Introduction to the Five-Factor Model and its Applications', *Journal of Personality*, 60 (1996), pp. 175–215.

both epistemically relevant and admirable, others are not. In addition, conscientiousness is correlated with unhappiness in the face of difficulty, which makes it hard to reconcile with any view that treats the intellectual virtues as components of eudaimonia.<sup>38</sup> This trait, whatever its empirical credentials, hardly seems like an intellectual virtue.

Need for cognition seems to suffer from the same problem. This personality trait was initially studied by Cohen, Stotland, and Wolfe, who glossed it as ‘a need to structure relevant situations in meaningful, integrated ways [...] to understand and make reasonable the experiential world.’<sup>39</sup> However, the methods they used to test for expressions of the need for cognition reveal that it was far from an intellectual virtue. People score high in need for cognition if they find it hard to tolerate ambiguity and rely on heuristics and experts rather than investigating for themselves.<sup>40</sup> More recent studies of need for cognition have revised the meaning of the term to avoid this unwanted association. Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, and Jarvis, for instance, characterise it as a ‘tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive activity.’<sup>41</sup> This is more promising, but it seems that need for cognition so construed accounts for 20% to 40% of the variance in relevant behavior (pp. 199–203) – a figure that puts it right up against the Mischellian ceiling but would at best qualify it as a low-fidelity virtue. Furthermore, in the only philosophical investigation of need for cognition currently in the literature Reza Lahroodi concludes that the drawbacks of need for cognition may outweigh its benefits because its bearers allocate their intellectual resources inefficiently (p. 232) and are especially prone to the sorts of mood effects discussed above (p. 237).<sup>42</sup> In addition, the need for cognition as studied by psychologists so far is just a general tendency to engage in effortful thinking and to enjoy such activity, regardless of topic (p. 235). Just as giving money to others thoughtlessly is not the same thing as generosity, so enjoying thinking about any topic whatsoever should not be considered an intellectual virtue.

<sup>38</sup> C. Boyce, A. Wood, and G. Brown, ‘The Dark Side of Conscientiousness: Conscientious People Experience Greater Drops in Life Satisfaction Following Unemployment’, *Journal of Research in Personality*, 44 (2010), pp. 535–9.

<sup>39</sup> A. Cohen, E. Stotland, and D. Wolfe, ‘An Experimental Investigation of Need for Cognition’, *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 51 (1955), pp. 291–94, at p. 291.

<sup>40</sup> J. Adams, ‘Advice Seeking of Mothers as a Function of Need for Cognition’, *Child Development*, 30 (1959), pp. 171–6.

<sup>41</sup> J. Cacioppo, R. Petty, J. Feinstein, and W. Jarvis, ‘Dispositional Differences in Cognitive Motivation: The Life and Times of Individuals Varying in Need for Cognition’, *Psychological Bulletin*, 119 (1996), pp. 197–253.

<sup>42</sup> R. Lahroodi, ‘Evaluating Need for Cognition: A Case Study in Naturalistic Epistemic Virtue Theory’, *Philosophical Psychology*, 20 (2007), pp. 227–45.

Although need for cognition and the conscientiousness of personality psychology may not provide the succor responsibilists seek in response to the situationist challenge, other intellectual virtues may yet withstand critique. Showing that they do is a task responsibilists will presumably clamor to accomplish. If they fail, though, reliabilists would do well to steer clear of mixed theories as much as they can – assuming, of course, that reliabilism itself is immune to situationist critique.

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