

Four Varieties of Character-Based Virtue Epistemology

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Abstract

The terrain of character-based or “responsibilist” virtue epistemology has evolved dramatically over the last decade—so much so that it is far from clear what, if anything, unifies the various views put forth in this area. In an attempt to bring some clarity to the overall thrust and structure of this movement, I develop a fourfold classification of character-based virtue epistemologies. I also offer a qualified assessment of each approach, defending a certain account of the probable future of this burgeoning subfield.

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 what exactly the term “virtue epistemology” picks out or what the defining tenets or commitments of this novel approach are supposed to be.

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This confusion is evident in two recent characterizations of virtue epistemology. John Greco and Linda Zagzebski, both leading figures in the field, define “virtue epistemology” in terms of a thesis about the “direction of analysis” of certain basic epistemic concepts. Greco 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” (2004, par. 1). Similarly, Zagzebski 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” (1998, 617; cf. Axtell 2000, xiii). But even at the time these characterizations were written, they failed to account for the full range of views within the field. Several virtue epistemologists (for instance, 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 focus instead on matters of intellectual character and virtue that are largely independent of more standard epistemological questions and issues. And in recent years, the field has continued to expand in this direction (see, for example, Hookway 2006 and Baehr 2006a, 2006b, and Forthcoming).

In this paper, 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 a fourfold classification of approaches to virtue epistemology, together with an assessment of each approach.

There are, however, two limitations of the paper 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, intellectual courage, honesty, and so forth, 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 faculty-based or “reliabilist” approaches to virtue epistemology, they are not my immediate or central concern.² This is noteworthy given that some of the leading contributors to virtue epistemology proper (for example, Greco and Ernest Sosa) are proponents of a faculty-based approach. Nonetheless, the theoretical differences between the two approaches are significant enough, and my space here is limited enough, that I shall focus almost exclusively on character-based approaches. Fortunately, this is not a

major liability, for the lot of character-based approaches is considerably more diverse than that of faculty-based approaches and therefore stands in greater need of a broad, systematic treatment. Moreover, character-based approaches represent a considerably more novel—and in the judgment of some a more *interesting*—innovation within epistemology.³

The second limitation is also related to the paper's scope but in a different way. For each of the four main approaches to character-based virtue epistemology, I identify the central challenge and go some way toward considering the likelihood of its being overcome. However, given the relatively broad scope of the paper, together with limitations of space, my assessment of the relevant views is necessarily less than exhaustive. Thus, while I shall take a stand regarding the plausibility of each of the four approaches, I do not consider debate on these matters entirely closed. My hope, however, is that by clarifying the structure of the field and offering a substantive preliminary assessment of its various elements, the paper nonetheless 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 of the relevant views 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 has been and remains the *nature, limits, and sources* of knowledge. Some of the topics and debates 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.⁴ My claim is that we can begin to distinguish between varieties of virtue epistemology based on what these approaches imply concerning 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, for example, to solve (or in certain cases to *dissolve*) 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. One example is Zagzebski, who defends an analysis of knowledge according to which knowledge is, roughly, true belief produced by “acts of intellectual virtue” (1996, 264–73). 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.⁵ To be sure, this represents an extremely high view of the conceptual connection between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology.

Other authors 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 the field: directions and inquiries that are largely *independent* of traditional concerns about the nature, limits, and sources of knowledge.⁶ 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 a virtue-based one. Likewise, Robert Roberts and Jay Wood 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 (2007, 23–30). Accordingly, 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 main varieties of character-based virtue epistemology: “conservative” approaches, which appeal to the concept of intellectual virtue as a way of engaging 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 the two main 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 epistemologists need not adopt this strong of a stance: they need not regard an appeal to the concept of intellectual virtue as “saving the day” within or as properly transforming traditional epistemology. Instead, they might posit considerably weaker or peripheral conceptual connections between these two relata. For instance, I have argued in recent years 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 in 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, if a person’s agency impacts her “evidential situation,” she must operate in a minimally virtuous way. I shall 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 the arguments just noted are aimed at identifying conceptual links between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology, these links are at most secondary or peripheral: they do not amount to giving the concept of intellectual virtue a “central or fundamental” role within traditional epistemology.⁷

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 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—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 approach to 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 approaches⁸ (see Figure A).

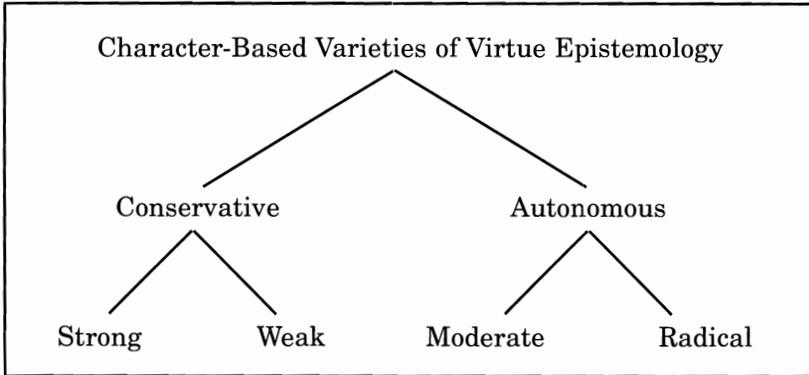


Figure A.

One natural motivation for Radical Autonomous VE is the sense that traditional epistemology is somehow fundamentally misguided or futile and that a more direct or independent concern with intellectual virtue holds the promise of a more vital theoretical alternative. One example of Radical Autonomous VE along these lines is Jonathan Kvanvig's 1992 book *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind*.⁹ 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" (1992, 169). 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 (170–73), the relative merits of different kinds of epistemic communities and the bodies of knowledge these communities generate (176), and the evaluation of "structured chunks" of information (vs. discrete propositions, 182–86). Because of the fundamental role that Kvanvig's proposed approach gives to the concept of intellectual virtue, and because he intends it as a *replacement* for traditional epistemological

projects and concerns, this approach represents a clear instance of Radical Autonomous VE.¹⁰

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 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 (1987, 63–64, 253). 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” (13). This perspective “turns questions about, and conditions for, epistemic responsibility into focal points of explication and analysis” (3).

I began in this section by delineating two general types of character-based virtue epistemology: conservative and autonomous. I have shown 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 to transform traditional epistemology. Weak Conservative VE is the view that the conceptual connections between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology, while genuine, are more secondary or less central. Radical Autonomous VE is the view that an autonomous or independent concern with intellectual virtue ought to *replace* traditional epistemological concerns. Moderate Autonomous VE is the view that an autonomous or independent approach is a proper *complement* to traditional epistemology.

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*.¹¹ 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 (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 much-needed way.

2. Evaluating the Varieties

The aim of this paper is not merely to illuminate the relevant terrain. It is also to provide at least an initial *assessment* of the four main approaches to character-based virtue epistemology. I turn now to this task. I begin with a consideration of the two more ambitious approaches and argue that neither appears to be very promising. I shall then turn to consider the prospects of the remaining two approaches, arguing that both appear to have considerable plausibility. As noted earlier, while these assessments are necessarily limited in scope and depth, they are 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.

2.1 *Strong Conservative VE*

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.¹² This is because traditional debates about the nature, structure, and limits of knowledge are debates about 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.¹³ Consider, for instance, the problem of skepticism about the external world. Nonskeptical responses 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ This in turn suggests that the central challenge facing Strong Conservative VE is to show that something like an exercise of intellectual virtue is an essential feature of knowledge.

The most straightforward way of evaluating Strong Conservative VE, then, 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 indeed possible apart from an exercise of intellectual virtue is that otherwise, the class of knowers would be limited (implausibly) 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).¹⁶ This is possible even where the relevant motives and actions do not arise from a *settled disposition* or *character trait* on the part of the agent.

But even for an attenuated position like Zagzebski's, a serious problem remains, for we also appear to be capable of knowing many things absent any virtuous intellectual motives or actions. Right now, for instance, I seem to 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.¹⁷

Zagzebski does more than any other defender of Strong Conservative VE to accommodate knowledge of this sort, which she refers to as "low-grade" knowledge.¹⁸ While her discussion suggests more than one possible reply,¹⁹ I shall focus here on

what is apparently her preferred response, which is also, to my mind, the *prima facie* most plausible one. Zagzebski suggests that while intellectually virtuous motives and actions *seem* to be 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 (1996, 280–81). To add to this suggestion, let us suppose that in the cases in question, virtuous and nonvirtuous agents alike also 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 can accommodate them.

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* (1996, 280). 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.²⁰ Consider my belief that music is presently playing in the background. While it is possible that this belief involves the sort of low-level intellectual motives or actions described above, surely these 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 can 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 one or more of my sensory modalities.²¹

It appears, then, that this response to the problem of low-grade knowledge is unsuccessful. One further consideration reinforces this conclusion. I have been assuming that in the cases in question, certain minimal or low-level intellectual motives or actions are operative. But this concession is too generous, 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 (see Baehr 2006a). 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.²²

I have examined the central challenge facing Strong Conservative VE and have found the most natural and *prima facie* plausible response to this challenge to be unsuccessful. Thus, this assessment, while falling short of a comprehensive or exhaustive critique of Strong Conservative VE, provides at least some initial reasons for thinking that the prospects of this approach are grim.

2.2 *Radical Autonomous VE*

I turn now to consider the second of the two more ambitious varieties 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 approach 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 philosophical questions and issues that are distinct from the questions of traditional epistemology but that nonetheless can form the basis of an alternative approach to the discipline. Because this is also the central challenge for *Moderate* Autonomous VE, I shall postpone a discussion of it to the section on *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) should merit the lion's share of attention in epistemology? Why think that traditional epistemology should be *abandoned* in favor of an alternative, 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 Radical Autonomous VE in the literature. This is Kvanvig's *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind* (1992).²³

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 abandoned (see, for instance, 1992, vii–x and 186–87). 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" (vii). 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 a 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" (167, vii). According to Kvanvig, this defect could be remedied if epistemologists were to turn their attention to matters of intellectual virtue. For this reason, he spends several chapters examining whether and how the concept of intellectual virtue might figure into the landscape of traditional epistemology (see chs. 2–5). But based in part on the sorts of objections raised against Strong Conservative VE above, he eventually concludes that the synchronic, belief-based framework of traditional epistemology leaves no room for the relevant kind of concern with intellectual virtue. This in turn leads him to the conclusion that traditional epistemology should be abandoned in favor of an independent or autonomous virtue epistemology.²⁴

While interesting and provocative, Kvanvig's argument does not ultimately warrant the repudiation of traditional epistemology. First, it is doubtful that the meta-epistemological condition he endorses is a genuine *requirement* on any plausible epistemology. Surely one important goal of epistemology is simply to provide an accurate and illuminating account of the basic nature and structure of knowledge, that is, to deepen our reflective *understanding* of this concept. However, if a particular theory of knowledge clearly fares well with respect to this goal, but not with respect to Kvanvig's desideratum, presumably it would be hasty and unfortunate to dismiss this theory as an epistemological failure.²⁵ Put another way, if a given account of knowledge goes a considerable way toward capturing the essential nature or structure of knowledge, this by itself would seem to make it epistemologically worthwhile. It is not essential that the theory *also* have the kind of practical value that interests Kvanvig.²⁶ If this is right, then even if traditional theories of knowledge fail to satisfy Kvanvig's meta-epistemological requirement, this does not justify a wholesale rejection of these theories.

A second problem with Kvanvig's argument concerns 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" (1992, vii). This

claim is also 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 use to a person striving for the epistemic good? Indeed, surely some of the more plausible and sophisticated accounts of knowledge and justification in the literature have *something* to offer in the way of practical insight or usefulness. This is true of some of the better accounts of epistemic reliability and proper function, of various doxastic and evidential principles, and of the so-called basing relation (to name just a few). These accounts function, not merely to uncover the basic nature and structure of their subject matter, but also to provide some guidance or instruction relative to achieving the epistemic good. This is reminiscent of Aristotle's famous claim that a person with an informed and accurate conception of *eudaimonia* or happiness is, like an archer with a focused view of his target, considerably more likely to achieve this state than a person with an uninformed or inaccurate conception (*NE*, book 1, ch. 2 [1094a]). Likewise, achieving the *epistemic* good can be facilitated by the possession of a robust and illuminating conception of this good, even if the conception in question is abstract or technical. I am not suggesting, of course, that familiarity with traditional theories of knowledge is *necessary* for epistemic success but, rather, that such an understanding can contribute at least to some extent to this goal and, thus, that traditional epistemology is not entirely void of the sort of value 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 a whole, for in principle, any number of reasons might be given for abandoning traditional epistemology. Moreover, it is worth noting that I concur with Kvanvig on the point that one desideratum of an approach to epistemology is the kind of practical or action-guiding significance he identifies, and that traditional theories would be even more successful or worth taking seriously if they were stronger in this regard. My point, once more, is simply that this is not a *requirement* of an approach to epistemology (and that even if it were, this requirement would be satisfied at least to some extent by several traditional theories). Accordingly, while my critique of Kvanvig's argument does not spell doom for Radical Autonomous VE at large, it does, I take it, illustrate an important point, namely, that Radical Autonomous VE shouldered 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.²⁷ 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 episte-

mology, the prospects of Radical Autonomous VE are bound to appear questionable at best.²⁸

2.3 Weak Conservative VE

We have examined two of the four main varieties of character-based virtue epistemology and have 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 are considerably less ambitious than their “strong” or “radical” counterparts. 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 concept of intellectual virtue a central or fundamental role within traditional epistemology. I shall attempt to illustrate what I take to be the promise of Weak Conservative VE by briefly reiterating some recent arguments that, if compelling, amount to a vindication of this approach’s central thesis.

As noted earlier, I have argued recently (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. The first of these accounts is reliabilism, which says that knowledge is, roughly, true belief produced by reliable or truth-conducive cognitive traits. The traits that reliabilists have in mind tend to be highly mechanistic and impersonal: they include things like vision, hearing, memory, and introspection.²⁹ I think that reliabilists are right to regard such traits as the basis of epistemic reliability, but only with respect to limited “fields” of propositions (propositions about the appearance of one’s immediate surroundings, say) and within limited environments (for example, “normal” environments with good lighting). That is to say that when in the relevant environments, reaching the truth about the relevant subject matters requires little more than properly functioning faculties of the sort just mentioned; it requires little more than good “cognitive mechanics.” I think that reliabilists are mistaken, however, to think that such traits are the basis of epistemic reliability with respect to *all* propositional fields and environments, including some that pertain to the most valued and sought after forms or instances of knowledge.³⁰ Reaching the truth about philosophical, scientific, mathematical, historical, moral, or religious reality, for example, or reaching the truth in circumstances or environments in which doing so requires overcoming significant obstacles, does not (in the typical case) depend primarily 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: for example, 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 epistemic reliability with respect to the sorts of propositions and environments just noted.³¹ The claim, then, is that to the extent that reliabilists fail to include intellectual character virtues in their repertoire of reliable traits or "knowledge-makers," they are unable to account for the status of much of the knowledge that is most important to us as human beings.

If this is correct, then the concept of intellectual virtue has at least some role to play within a reliabilist account of knowledge. It is not, for reasons already noted, the *focal* point of such an account. It is, however, necessary for understanding one form or dimension of this focal point, that is, one form or dimension of epistemic *reliability*. Finally, it is worth noting that the conceptual connection in question has certain theoretical reverberations. As I explain in much more detail in "Character, Reliability, and Virtue Epistemology" (2006b), the inclusion of intellectual character virtues in reliabilism's repertoire of "knowledge-makers" generates several new and challenging theoretical questions and problems. These questions arise mainly from certain structural differences between intellectual character virtues, on the one hand, and the more mechanistic, faculty virtues, on the other. And these are questions with which any plausible reliabilist account of knowledge must reckon.

Evidentialism offers an account of epistemic justification that is typically characterized as a competitor of a reliabilism.³² According to evidentialism, a person is justified in believing a given claim just in case (roughly) her evidence supports this claim.³³ 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 (Baehr Forthcoming). 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 inquiry about this issue. While this person's belief may satisfy the evidentialist's condition for justification, her belief intuitively is unjustified.

Because the explanation for this person's lack of justification apparently lies with her manifestation of various intellectual *vices* (inattentiveness, carelessness 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 the agent (qua agent) is uninvolved with 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 sorts of cases in question. Accordingly, 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 (again, see Baehr Forthcoming for more on this point). If this argument is compelling, it represents a second way in which the concept of intellectual virtue bears 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. The arguments demonstrate how the concept of intellectual virtue might figure into the landscape of traditional epistemology in a certain background, secondary, or peripheral way. Moreover, I take it that the arguments have sufficient *prima facie* plausibility to warrant some optimism about the prospects of Weak Conservative VE, or at least to justify taking seriously the *possibility* of such an approach. And of course there is little reason to think that the connections identified above are the *only* potential points of contact between the concept of intellectual virtue and the positions and debates central to traditional epistemology.³⁴ We may conclude that while Strong Conservative VE is unpromising, the prospects of Weak Conservative VE are considerably better.

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 reply that the focus is, say, "the intellectual virtues and their role in the cognitive life considered in their own right," while perhaps indicative of a viable and interesting research program, is not

sufficient in this context, for it 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. Defenders of either version of autonomous virtue epistemology must, then, be explicit about the positive theoretical focus of the virtue-based approach they endorse. I shall refer to this as the “theoretical challenge.”

This challenge may not seem to pose a very serious threat to the viability of an autonomous virtue epistemology. But when one looks at some of the seminal attempts to defend a version of Moderate Autonomous VE, this appearance dissipates. 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 that (for one reason or another) fail to have much epistemological traction.³⁵ 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 (1987, 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” (58–59; my italics; for similar passages, see 61–66, 131–44, and 172–77). Characterizations like this, while perhaps 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 common sense.³⁶

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,³⁷ his discussions of such an alternative at times 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 the epistemologist *qua* epistemologist. To be sure, epistemologists sometimes offer "epistemic evaluations" in the sense that they construct theories of knowledge and justification that can then be applied in the assessment of 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?³⁸

My claim is *not* that the discussions of Code, Hookway, or others 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 the discussions of both Code and Hookway at times point in some promising directions.) It is rather that the discussions in question are not sufficiently explicit or convincing on this score and that, consequently, their proposed "alternatives" to traditional epistemology come off looking questionable.³⁹

While the "theoretical challenge" is genuine, it is not insurmountable. Indeed, there are 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 shall briefly enumerate several theoretical issues or projects that, when taken together, warrant at least some optimism about the possibility of a relatively autonomous, virtue-based epistemological research program.⁴⁰ 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 proponents of Moderate Autonomous VE.

Several challenging and broadly epistemological questions arise with reflection on the precise *nature* of an intellectual virtue. Here the central question is 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 appear to be incompatible. Julia Driver (2000, 2003) 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 (for example, intellectual carefulness, thoroughness, attentiveness, fairness, etc.) are reliable in this sense; and since it also seems plausible to regard any 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 example, maintains that the traits in question are intellectual virtues on account of certain of their internal or psychological features considered *in their own right*. This includes a *desire* for truth or knowledge, which Montmarquet and others regard as *intrinsically* valuable.⁴¹ An account of this sort has the advantage of being able to explain the apparent personal worth or value associated with the traits in question, 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 which (like Driver’s) says that intellectual virtues (as such) are strictly *instrumentally* valuable. A third account wedds the two just noted. Zagzebski argues that a trait is an intellectual virtue just in case it is reliable *and* involves an intrinsically valuable motive (1996, 168–83).⁴² 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 problem lies not with the possibility that a single trait might *be* both instrumentally and intrinsically valuable but, rather, with the

idea that such a trait might be an intellectual *virtue* in a single and univocal sense: that it might satisfy the conditions of just one, rather than two separate, concepts of intellectual virtue.⁴³ Mixed accounts also run the risk of inheriting any defects internal to either of the accounts they are 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.

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 to be reliable. But this is not so obvious 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, if at all, 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* (for example, 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 internal (and reasonable) perspective, is extremely cognitively successful. Owing to the work of a Cartesian demon, however, this person is in fact extremely *unreliable*. According to the authors in question, 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 the individuation of intellectual virtues and related matters, is also something that merits further thought and reflection from “autonomous” virtue epistemologists.

Other relevant issues and questions arise with reflection on the internal *structure* of an intellectual virtue. According to Zagzebski, the fundamental psychological requirement of any intellectual virtue is a *motivation* for truth and related cognitive goods (1996, 166–68). While something like this requirement

is plausible, intellectual virtues seem essentially to have a certain *cognitive* or *doxastic* component as well.⁴⁴ 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 might 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?⁴⁵

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 (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 might be the intentional object of an 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. In these areas, the goal of an intellectually virtuous person is likely to be *others’* acquisition of various cognitive goods.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

Some of the recent work of Robert Roberts and Jay Wood suggests a considerably different type of focus and methodology that might profitably be pursued by a proponent of 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.⁴⁸ As noted above, they devote entire chapters of their recent book *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (2007) to analyses of virtues like intellectual firmness, courage and caution, autonomy, generosity, and humility.⁴⁹ And again, their aim in these chapters is not to identify the necessary and suffi-

cient conditions for the relevant traits but, rather, to offer a “conceptual map” of the characterological dimension of cognitive flourishing (2007, 23–30). 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 worthwhile philosophical results. For any virtue *V*, the following sorts of questions might be addressed: What are the basic actions, feelings, attitudes, motives, judgments, etc., characteristic of *V*? What is it 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 (for instance, 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 can shed on the nature and structure of individual virtues, but also because it can help shore up and illustrate some of the more general or fundamental philosophical questions surrounding intellectual virtue (for instance, whether there is a univocal concept of intellectual virtue that “covers” all putative instances of intellectual virtue⁵⁰).

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 challenging subject matter, inquiring in the face of threats to one’s well-being, evaluating testimony, collaborating with others in intellectual ventures, 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 investigating the intellectual virtues from a broadly 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*?⁵¹

A fine 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 (for example, 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 argues convincingly that the proper corrective is a certain "testimonial sensibility" partly constituted by an intellectual virtue she labels "reflexive critical openness" (2003, 8–11, 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. As such, it is a model of the sort of inquiry that a defender of an autonomous virtue epistemology might profitably undertake.⁵²

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 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?); and (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 offer support for 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 warrants at least some optimism—hopefully even 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.”⁵³

3. Conclusion

I 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 traditional epistemology, sees this concept as occupying a mere “secondary” or “peripheral” role in this context. And a more promising alternative to Radical Autonomous VE is Moderate Autonomous VE, according to which an independent concern with intellectual virtues and their role in the intellectual life offers 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.⁵⁴

Notes

¹ The last systematic account of the literature in virtue epistemology, published more than a decade ago, was Guy Axtell’s “Recent Work in Virtue Epistemology” (1997).

² The terms “virtue responsibilist” and “virtue reliabilist” originate, respectively, with Code 1987 and Axtell 1997. Some examples of virtue reliabilism are Greco 2000 and Sosa 1991 and 2007.

³ See, for example, Blackburn 2001, in which he characterizes a faculty-based virtue epistemology as little more than a revamped reliabilism.

⁴ 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 nontraditional epistemology be drawn too sharply.

⁵ See, for example, Zagzebski 1996, 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 that incorporates both character virtues *and* faculty virtues.

⁶ The two sorts of approaches are not strictly mutually exclusive, since 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.

⁷ Another way to put the point is that the arguments in question do not assert or presuppose that an exercise of intellectual virtue is a *defining* feature of knowledge. I shall have more to say about this in my assessment of Zagzebski’s account of knowledge below.

⁸ I use the terms “moderate” and “radical,” 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.

⁹ While ultimately stopping short of calling for a total repudiation of traditional epistemology, Code (1987), Roberts and Wood (2007), and Hookway (2003) also, and for reasons similar to Kvanvig’s, flirt with Radical VE.

¹⁰ At times, Kvanvig’s position regarding the status of traditional epistemology is somewhat less clear (see, for instance, 1992, 171). However, at several other points (for instance, 150, 158, 168, 170, and 187), he seems clearly to be calling for the rejection of traditional epistemology. At any rate, the actual content of his argument (discussed below) is such that, if valid, it apparently eliminates any motivation for traditional epistemology.

¹¹ As this suggests, other ways of carving up the relevant terrain may be possible (including ways that might somehow “in principle” seem to make more sense). But again, my concern is to shed some light on the field of virtue epistemology *in its present stage of development*.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ An apparent counterexample to this may be Hookway 2003, in which Hookway attempts to show that the concept of intellectual virtue is relevant to the problem of skepticism but *without* claiming that this concept merits a place in an analysis of knowledge. While I cannot develop the point here, I will simply note that the skeptical problem that concerns Hookway is *not* the traditional one: by his own admission, Hookway is not, for instance, trying to show that it is possible for us to have non-question-begging reasons for some of our beliefs about the external world. Thus, despite its value in other respects, Hookway's discussion is unlikely to be of much interest to a traditional skeptic.

¹⁵ And indeed, for some of the traditional questions (for example, 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.

¹⁶ This is essentially what is involved with the performance of "acts of intellectual virtue." See Zagzebski 1996, 279, for a development of this point.

¹⁷ Of course on a broader conception of intellectual virtue—for example, 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).

¹⁸ See especially Zagzebski 1996, 277–83. It is not easy to tell, however, just what Zagzebski thinks *makes* something an instance of low-grade knowledge (for example, 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 need not settle this issue here.

¹⁹ Two other replies suggested by her discussion are, very briefly, as follows. First, Zagzebski sometimes (1996, 262f) seems tempted to bite the bullet and deny that the cases in question amount to genuine knowledge. This is extremely problematic, however, given that the cases in question have seemed to epistemologists for centuries to be among the *clearest* and *least controversial* cases of knowledge. (Note that this does *not* amount to saying that they are *paradigm* cases of knowledge [cf. 69 and 278], for the notion of a "paradigm" case in this context has a normative dimension that the notion of a "clear" or "uncontroversial" case does not; the former, but not the latter, presumably represents the upper normative boundary of human cognition.) Second, Zagzebski's discussion sometimes (279–80) suggests that a true belief counts as knowledge just in case it was formed in a way that an intellectually virtuous person might form it under similar conditions. The implication is that because such persons presumably form beliefs of the relevant sort *without* manifesting any virtuous actions or motives, the cases in question turn out to count as knowledge on her view. Aside from the fact that this represents a major departure from her original position (according to which virtuous motives and actions *are* a requirement for knowledge), this alternative position remains problematic. When intellectually virtuous persons form beliefs in the relevant, mechanistic way, they do not do so *qua* virtuous persons (again, they do not manifest any virtuous motives or actions). The result is that nothing pertaining to the notion

of intellectual virtue explains why the beliefs in question count as knowledge, which in turn reveals that the modified position is not genuinely *virtue*-based.

²⁰ This condition is necessary, among other reasons, for dealing adequately with the Gettier problem. See Zagzebski 1996, 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).

²¹ In response, 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 common sense). See, for instance, 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). 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.

²² 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 the kind of case at issue does *not* involve any virtuous motives or actions.

²³ 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).

²⁴ For a sketch of this alternative approach, see Kvanvig 1992, 170–88.

²⁵ I am assuming, uncontroversially I hope, that this represents a genuine possibility: that is, it is possible for a theory of knowledge to fare well relative to the goal of facilitating understanding without faring well relative to the practical standard that interests Kvanvig.

²⁶ As I explain below, I am not denying that the theory in question would be even *better* if it were to satisfy Kvanvig's condition. That is, I am not denying that this condition represents a genuine theoretical *desideratum* but, rather, that it is a theoretical *requirement*.

²⁷ This problem is exacerbated by the fact that it takes very little in the way of philosophical or theoretical commitment to motivate a considerable range of traditional epistemological issues and questions. While I cannot develop the point in any detail here, the basic idea is that a concern with true belief, taken together with the fact that we lack immediate or unproblematic access to whether our beliefs are in fact true, motivates a further concern with the notion of good *evidence* or good epistemic *reasons* (the latter being our best indication of the truth or probable truth of our beliefs). Reflection on the notion of good epistemic reasons, however, gives rise to a number of difficult, and characteristically *traditional*, epistemological questions: What is the underlying or logical structure of such reasons? Are any of our beliefs (including those about the external world) really supported by such reasons? What are the fundamental *sources* of such reasons? Etc. This again is meant to underscore the fact that it takes relatively little to motivate a substantial segment of traditional epistemology, which in turn underscores the formidable character of the central challenge facing Radical Autonomous VE (for again, this approach insists that traditional epistemology is unmotivated and should be abandoned).

²⁸ It should also 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.

²⁹ See, for instance, "Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology" in Goldman 1992 or Sosa 1991.

³⁰ That reliabilists *do* suggest as much seems clear both from what they say and from what they fail to say about the relevant character virtues. See Baehr 2006b for a development of this point.

³¹ This does not mean that well-functioning cognitive faculties are irrelevant; indeed, as I argue in 2006b, intellectual character virtues typically manifest themselves in the operation of cognitive faculties. The point is rather that in the cases in question, an agent's success at reaching the truth is to be explained in terms of a manifestation of her intellectual virtues (where this may very well involve the operation of certain faculties) rather than the brute or untutored operation of the faculties themselves. Put another way, the *seat* of the agent's reliability is her intellectual character virtues.

³² 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.

³³ 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 to a thesis about knowledge.

³⁴ See, for example, 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.

³⁵ As I explain in more detail 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 common sense; 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 common sense, is not (unlike cognitive science, say) exclusively or primarily empirical, and is distinct from (even if closely related to) that of ethics.

³⁶ For a related worry concerning whether Code successfully outlines a genuine epistemological *alternative*, see BonJour 1990.

³⁷ See especially Hookway 2003.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ Two other discussions and a possible diagnosis are worth noting. First, I think Kvanvig (1992), while sensitive to the need to outline a positive theoretical research program, fails to make good on the claim that the program in question will be genuinely or deeply *virtue*-based. See, for instance, the sorts of questions he says are central to his proposed alternative on p. 176. For several of these questions, it is difficult to see why an answer would involve any appeal to intellectual virtue. Second, Montmarquet (1993) defends a virtue-based account of doxastic justification that he claims is essential for an adequate understanding of *moral* responsibility. Montmarquet himself acknowledges that the concept of justification that interests him is different from the concept that interests epistemologists. Accordingly, his analysis comes off looking more like the proper subject matter of *ethics* than of epistemology. A possible *diagnosis* of the failure of at least some autonomously minded virtue epistemologists to overcome the "theor-

etical challenge” (including Code and Hookway) is that they assume, hastily, that because the traits in question are of *practical* epistemic significance, they must also be of *epistemological* significance. See, for instance, Hookway 2001, 200, and Code 1987, 26–27. But this, it seems to me, is an invalid inference. Epistemology is a *philosophical* or *theoretical* discipline. It trades in various challenging questions, problems, puzzles, etc., that arise with philosophical reflection on the cognitive life. However, the mere fact that something is helpful for reaching the truth does not by itself show that this thing will be amenable to distinctively philosophical inquiry. I think a similar error is made in some of the virtue ethics literature. See Louden 1997 for a similar point.

⁴⁰ Some of these issues and questions are discussed in Baehr 2006a.

⁴¹ Dancy 2000 suggests a similar account. Kvanvig 1992, ch. 6, and Zagzebski 1996 also contain related discussions.

⁴² See Lahroodi 2006 for a partial defense of mixed and “externalist” or consequentialist accounts of intellectual virtue.

⁴³ Thus it may be that Driver and Montmarquet are offering analyses of different, but equally legitimate, concepts of intellectual virtue and that Zagzebski is attempting to run these concepts together into a single analysis.

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ A related question is whether intellectual virtues must be possessed by individuals, or whether they can also be possessed by social groups. For a discussion of this and issues related to the social dimension of intellectual virtue, see Lahroodi 2007b.

⁴⁷ 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 nonegoistic 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.

⁴⁸ Another good example of this general approach is Lahroodi and Schmitt 2008, in which the authors offer an account of the virtue of curiosity.

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ See Roberts and Wood 2007 for a defense of the claim that there is no such concept.

⁵¹ 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 *common sense*.

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 (see Hookway 2001 and 2003 and Code 1987) might be viewed as motivating inquiries of this sort.

⁵² Another fine example is Battaly 2006, in which Heather Battaly examines various systematic ways in which intellectual virtues bear on and can be cultivated in the context of classroom instruction.

⁵³ See 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, 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*.

⁵⁴ I am grateful to several 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 earlier versions of the paper were read.

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Four Varieties of Character-Based Virtue Epistemology

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