

THE INQUIRING MIND

On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

One remarkable feature of our species is its propensity for inquiry. We humans are neither oblivious to nor indifferent about our surroundings. Nor is our interest in our surroundings purely practical. Rather, as beings that are both reflective and rational, we often find ourselves fascinated and puzzled by the world around us. We desire to know, to *understand* how things are, were, or might someday be. As a result, we make intentional and sustained efforts to figure things out. We inquire.

Yet inquiry can go well or it can go poorly. Sometimes the difference is attributable to a relatively mechanical factor, as when a person fails to reach the truth on account of a defective cognitive faculty, for example, poor vision, weak hearing, or a faulty memory. Often, however, the success or failure of an inquiry has a more personal source. This is due to the fact that inquiry has a robustly *active* dimension. It involves observing, imagining, reading, interpreting, reflecting, analyzing, assessing, formulating, and articulating. Success in these activities is hardly guaranteed by the possession of sharp vision, sensitive hearing, or an impeccable memory. Rather, it requires an exercise of certain intellectual *character* traits. It can require, for instance, that one engage in *attentive* observation, *thoughtful* or *open-minded* imagination, *patient* reflection, *careful* and *thorough* analysis, or *fair-minded* interpretation and assessment.¹ As this suggests, inquiry makes substantial personal demands on inquirers. It demands an exercise of a range of “intellectual character virtues.”

Typically, when we think or speak of “character” or “virtues,” we have something distinctively moral in mind. We think of a virtuous person as one who is appropriately moved or motivated by ends like social justice or the alleviation of human suffering. Such a person is fair, respectful, benevolent,

¹ See Hookway (2000; 2001; 2003) for more on the structure and demands of inquiry, and on the importance of intellectual virtues for meeting these demands.

compassionate, and generous. As we have just seen, however, and as we will explore in much greater detail in the pages that follow, personal character is not exhausted by moral character. It also has an epistemic or intellectual dimension: a fully or broadly virtuous person can also be counted on to care deeply about ends like truth, knowledge, evidence, rationality, and understanding;² and out of this fundamental concern will emerge other traits like inquisitiveness, attentiveness, carefulness and thoroughness in inquiry, fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, and *intellectual* patience, honesty, courage, humility, and rigor.³

These virtues are the central subject matter of the present book. One aim of the book is to provide a reasonably deep and illuminating account of what intellectual virtues amount to—of their underlying nature, structure, and role in the cognitive economy. A second aim is more abstract: it is to evaluate the role that reflection on intellectual virtues should play within epistemology, which (broadly construed) is the philosophical study of knowledge and related intellectual goods.⁴ Accordingly, the book is intended as a contribution to the growing literature in “virtue epistemology,” which is a recent collection of approaches to epistemology that give the concept of intellectual virtue a central and fundamental role.⁵

As this brief preview suggests, my objective in the book is largely theoretical in nature. It is not primarily to inspire change in the intellectual conduct or character of my readers; nor is it to specify the practical steps a person might take to become intellectually virtuous. Nevertheless, I hope it is not outrageous to suppose that something like the present inquiry might have at least a modest effect in this regard. For, as Aristotle noted long ago, one expedient to becoming good is getting clear on the nature and structure of the good itself.⁶ And a major

² This dimension of personal character may still be part of “moral” character on a sufficiently broad conception of morality. For more on the distinction between the intellectual and moral realms, and for a corresponding distinction between intellectual and moral virtues, see the Appendix.

³ “Intellectual,” in the preceding sentence, is intended to modify, not just “patience,” but also the immediately subsequent virtue terms. I employ this construction throughout the book so as to avoid repeated use of “intellectual” when referring to several of the traits in question (e.g. intellectual courage, intellectual honesty, intellectual integrity, intellectual rigor, and so on).

⁴ This is a broad but apt conception of the field. See Alston (2005: 2–3) and Roberts and Wood (2007: 3) for more on this conception.

⁵ For overviews of the field, see Wood (1998), Zagzebski (1998), my (2004) and (2008), and Battaly (2008), Greco and Turri (2009).

⁶ Of the “chief good,” Aristotle famously says: “Surely, then, knowledge of the good must be very important for our lives? And if, like archers, we have a target, are we not more likely to hit the

part of what I shall attempt to do here is uncover the nature and structure of one important dimension of personal worth.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I undertake three main tasks. First, I develop three extended illustrations of intellectual virtue so as to better “fix the referent” of the discussion. Second, I offer a brief account of the history and present landscape of virtue epistemology. Third, I offer an overview of the rest of the book.

1.1 *Intellectual virtue: some examples*

To get a better sense of what intellectual virtue amounts to, it is helpful to consider a few concrete instances of it.⁷ The first example is taken from a recent account (Miller 2002) of Abraham Lincoln’s well-known efforts at self-education:

Lincoln’s life would be punctuated by intense projects in self-education and research, starting with his “picking up” “somehow” reading and writing. Surely it is a little unusual for a twenty-three-year-old man, now on his own and making his way in the world, to go to some trouble to borrow a textbook on grammar—walking six miles to borrow it—and then on his own (asking for some assistance) to teach himself that rudimentary subject. Lincoln himself, in his longer autobiographical piece, included two of the more striking of his grown-up personal educational projects. . . . The first of these was his studying grammar. . . . The second of his remarkable projects in adult self-education—this one perhaps still more impressive—further along in life and reported now to the world by himself, was this: “He studied and nearly mastered the six books of Euclid, since he was a member of Congress” . . . Lincoln left out of his account his teaching himself surveying in order to take a job as a deputy surveyor. He had to learn the practical application of the principles of trigonometry, and got two

right mark? If so, we must try at least roughly to comprehend what it is. . . .” (NE 2000, 1094a 22–30, trans. Crisp). A concern with inspiring intellectual change on the part of philosophical readers is not entirely foreign to epistemology. In his *Discourse on Method* (1968), for instance, Descartes extols a wide range of intellectual character traits with an eye toward improving the intellectual practices and habits of his reader (see especially Discourse II, pp. 35–44). A similar point holds for certain segments of Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1996) (see especially BK. IV. chs. 12–20). For a recent philosophical treatment of intellectual virtues aimed explicitly at inspiring growth in these traits, see Roberts and Wood (2007: esp. ch. 1).

⁷ Here and elsewhere I alternate between the use of “virtues” (plural) and “virtue” (singular). We can think of “virtue” as an overall state or condition of character consisting in the possession of several individual “virtues.”

books on the subject of surveying, and learned enough to do the job... More important, he studied the law. He borrowed books from John T. Stuart, read and studied Blackstone, taught himself to be a lawyer. (52)

This impression of Lincoln as an unrelenting autodidact is confirmed by the following account of his reading habits:

[I]t would be quite a study to go through the available record to identify all the places, times, and postures in which those who had known Abraham in Indiana and in New Salem remembered him reading a book: reading while the horse rests at the end of a row, reading while walking on the street, reading under a tree, reading while others went to dances, reading with his legs up as high as his head, reading between customers in the post office, reading stretched at length on the counter of the store. In Lord Charnwood's classic biography an employer says: "I found him... cocked on a haystack with a book." (48)

A related example, also from nineteenth-century American history, is the self-education of Frederick Douglass. A Maryland slave, Douglass was prevented by his master from learning to read on the grounds that it would make him useless and unhappy. In his autobiography, Douglass explains that what was to his master "a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn" (2001: 32). So Douglass took his education into his own hands:

The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent on errands, I always took my book with me, and by going on part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. (34)

Douglass's plan was successful indeed, for within a couple of years he was voraciously consuming whatever literature he could get his hands on, from the Bible to newspapers to political treatises.

The cases of Lincoln and Douglass illustrate the point that intellectual virtue is fundamentally rooted in a deep and abiding desire for knowledge

and understanding—a desire for “cognitive contact with reality,” as Linda Zagzebski (1996) has described it. They also suggest that this fundamental motivation tends to spawn a range of more specific characteristics or virtues, including intellectual courage, diligence, determination, perseverance, ingenuity, and resourcefulness. Finally, the cases illustrate the fact that the aim or goal of intellectual virtue is relatively broad in scope, that is, that an intellectually virtuous person is characteristically curious about a rather wide range of ideas and subject matters.

A third and somewhat different example is drawn from C. P. Snow’s 1934 novel *The Search*, which chronicles the rise and fall of a talented and ambitious young scientist named Arthur Miles. In the passage that follows, Miles describes his admiration for his good friend and colleague Constantine:

[Constantine] recalled and concentrated all the ecstatic moments I had found in science. Here was a man of the greatest powers who spent his time doing rather dull experiments very accurately. He did not pretend that he would not like something more exciting; but that might come his way; meanwhile, he went happily on, doing his own work, reading everyone else’s, fitting it all into a great cosmic scheme. His research was not as well-known as mine. He had not gone as far. He was content with it. He lived in something like poverty. He was the secretary of one or two international editorial bodies, which did valuable, humble, completely unrewarded work.

I had met many other scientists who would have claimed to do what Constantine did, working with intelligent devotion, not caring over-much how knowledge was obtained as long as it duly came. But, in moments of doubt, I had never been satisfied with their intelligence or their devotion. To question either in Constantine’s case would have not been worldly-wise but merely absurd. I did not know a more remarkable mind; nor anyone who wanted so little for himself. (174)

Like Lincoln and Douglass, Constantine is driven by a firm desire for knowledge and understanding—a desire that reveals something significant about his personal character or about who he is as a person. And here as well the desire in question gives rise to a range of other virtuous traits, for example, to intellectual carefulness, diligence, and perseverance. Finally, the passage suggests that intellectual virtues involve an “intelligent devotion” to epistemic goods that *overrides* or *outranks* various other desires and concerns. Constantine places greater value, for instance, on the advancement of scientific knowledge than he does on goods like professional status, honor, and wealth. In this respect, he also exemplifies virtues like intellectual humility and generosity.

Examples of better and worse intellectual character are legion in literature and real life.⁸ I offer this small sampling mainly to illustrate the idea that there is in fact an intellectual or epistemically oriented dimension of personal character and to provide some indication of its substance. The examples also are intended to provide some sense of the underlying psychological structure of intellectual virtue, specifically, of the fact that individual intellectual virtues tend to “flow” from something like a desire for truth or knowledge—a desire that outweighs and subordinates various competing desires.

1.2 *Virtue epistemology*

With an initial idea of what intellectual virtues amount to before us, I turn now to a very brief history and overview of the field of virtue epistemology, which again is an approach to the philosophical study of knowledge and related intellectual goods that gives a central and fundamental role to the concept of intellectual virtue.

1.2.1 *A very brief history*

Aristotle is widely regarded as the first philosopher to identify a class of intellectual virtues distinct from the class of moral virtues and to give them a central role in an account of human knowing. He defined intellectual virtues as “states by virtue of which the soul possesses truth by way of affirmation or denial”; and he identified “art” (*techne*), “scientific knowledge” (*episteme*), “practical wisdom” (*phronesis*), “philosophic wisdom” (*sophia*), and “intuitive reason” (*nous*) as the five central intellectual virtues (*NE* 1139b). As this list suggests, Aristotle did not think of intellectual virtues as character traits, but rather as cognitive capacities or powers.⁹

In the centuries following Aristotle, a limited number of philosophers (most notably Thomas Aquinas) continued to focus on intellectual virtues in their discussions of knowledge. By the modern period, however, the attention of philosophers writing about knowledge began to shift away from the characteristics of excellent cognitive *agents* and onto the status and properties of certain

⁸ For discussions of some intellectual *vices*, see Frankfurt (1988), Battaly (2010), and my (2010).

⁹ See Montmarquet (1993: 19–20). The character model of intellectual virtue that I am concerned with here instead resembles Aristotle’s account of *moral* virtue (see Zagzebski 1996: 137–57 for a helpful discussion of Aristotle’s distinction between moral and intellectual virtues).

beliefs (e.g. belief in an external or material world).¹⁰ As a result, ensuing centuries witnessed increasingly fewer treatments of intellectual virtue; and by the middle of the twentieth century, talk of intellectual virtue had all but vanished from mainstream philosophical discussions of knowledge.¹¹

The modern period also witnessed a general philosophical drift from an ancient and medieval preoccupation with *moral* virtue. Virtue-oriented accounts of the moral life began to give way—owing largely to the influence of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill—to discussions about the nature of morally right action, for example, about whether a morally right action is better understood as one that conforms to the moral law (Kant) or one that “maximizes utility” (Mill). Here as well the notions of virtue and character began to fade into the background.

By the middle of the twentieth century, however, a number of moral philosophers, inspired in part by Elizabeth Anscombe’s paper “Modern Moral Philosophy” (1958), began returning to a more ancient, character-based approach to ethics in an effort to avoid flaws which they regarded as endemic to modern moral philosophy. In the decades that followed, this migration gained considerable momentum, with virtue ethics being regarded by many today as a veritable “third force” (alongside Kantianism and consequentialism) within normative ethics.¹²

It was not until 1980 that a return to virtue began to take hold in the neighboring field of epistemology. That year, Ernest Sosa argued in “The Raft and the Pyramid” that the concept of an intellectual virtue provides a way of dealing with various longstanding debates in mainstream epistemology. Like Aristotle, Sosa did not conceive of intellectual virtues as traits of character; instead, he thought of them as (roughly) reliable or truth-conducive cognitive faculties or abilities like memory, vision, hearing, reason, and introspection.¹³

¹⁰ This shift was not complete, however. For instance, works by Descartes (1968: 38–44), Locke (1996: 172–5, 292–35), and Hume (1997: 102–3, 111–12) contain fairly extensive treatments of some of the more volitional or characterological aspects of the intellectual life, often mentioning various intellectual virtues and vices by name.

¹¹ As Guy Axtell (1998; 2000) and others have noted, what contemporary virtue epistemologists regard as intellectual character virtues were at the heart of some of the (broadly epistemological) work of American pragmatists like John Dewey in the first half of the twentieth century.

¹² For an instructive account of the relation between virtue ethics and virtue epistemology, see Solomon (2003). For a recent overview of virtue ethics, see Copp and Sobel (2004).

¹³ This is not to say that Aristotle’s and Sosa’s positive accounts of intellectual virtue are very similar; indeed they are not. Again, Aristotle does not treat cognitive faculties like vision or memory as intellectual virtues; and Sosa’s conception of intellectual virtue does not include states like *techné*, *phronesis*, or *sophia*. It would, however, be worth exploring how exactly the two groups of qualities are related.

Finally, in 1984, Lorraine Code, receiving some inspiration from virtue ethics and Sosa's view in epistemology, proposed a distinctively *character*-based version of epistemology. Her primary interest was "epistemic responsibility," which she identified as the chief intellectual character virtue—a virtue "from which other virtues radiate" (1987: 44). Distinguishing it from Sosa's faculty-based "virtue reliabilism," Code dubbed her approach "virtue responsibilism" on the grounds that the traits in question are the defining qualities of a responsible thinker or inquirer.¹⁴

As this quick overview suggests, contemporary virtue epistemology has, since its early days, been comprised of two notably different approaches: a faculty-based or "reliabilist" approach and a character-based or "responsibilist" approach. Each camp has continued to attract its share of converts. John Greco (2000a; 2010) and Alvin Goldman (1992; 2001) have given the notion of an intellectual virtue conceived as a reliable ability or faculty a central role in their accounts of knowledge. Jonathan Kvanvig (1992), James Montmarquet (1993), Linda Zagzebski (1996), Christopher Hookway (2000; 2003), and several others have followed Code in making matters of intellectual character a primary focus. Of special note in the latter domain is Zagzebski's book *Virtues of the Mind* (1996), which provided the first comprehensive and systematic virtue-theoretical approach to epistemology. More than any other work in the field, Zagzebski's book is responsible for putting character-based virtue epistemology on the philosophical map.

While I shall have some occasion to address faculty-based or "reliabilist" varieties of virtue epistemology in the course of the book, and while (as we will see in Chapter 4) the distinction between these and character-based approaches is considerably less sharp than it might initially appear, my primary focus will be "responsibilist" or character-based forms of virtue epistemology—for again I am most interested in the nature and epistemological significance of the relevant excellences of intellectual *character*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Axtell (1997) helped codify these labels. See that paper and Chapter 4 of this book for extended discussions of the distinction between "virtue reliabilism" and "virtue responsibilism."

¹⁵ Some philosophers today (e.g. Harman 1999 and 2000 and Doris 1998 and 2002) object to the very concept of character or virtue in light of certain experimental data suggesting that human behavior is often influenced more by arbitrary situational factors than by any personal or characterological qualities like virtues or vices. These "situationist" objections to virtue ethics have been met with no shortage of critical replies in recent years. For a sampling of these replies, see Merritt (2000), Sreenivasan (2002), Miller (2003), Kamtekar (2004), Sabini and Silver (2005), Adams (2006), and Snow (2009). While I find the situationist literature fascinating and challenging in various ways, I think the critical response succeeds at showing that it does not present a mortal threat to many reasonably traditional conceptions of virtue. Nonetheless,

1.2.2 *Four varieties of character-based virtue epistemology*

In light of this focus, it will be helpful to take an even closer look at the theoretical terrain of character-based virtue epistemology and to mark some distinctions between the different approaches that have emerged in recent years.¹⁶ (Henceforth, for ease of discussion, I shall use the term “virtue epistemology” to refer

I offer here a very brief outline of my own six-part perspective on the topic and its relevance to the present inquiry. (1) The experimental data in question concern the possession of *moral* virtues. As such, they do not immediately bear on the possession of intellectual virtues, and thus do not immediately threaten standard ways of thinking about intellectual virtues. (2) I make very few claims in the book concerning any *persisting* or *broadly efficacious* aspects of intellectual virtue. Rather, my characterization of the relevant traits focuses mainly on the particular desires, beliefs, and other psychological states that constitute them—states that need not be thought of in the “globalist” terms that situationists find objectionable. (3) I think standard views of the minimal or basic requirements for (moral or intellectual) virtue are more attenuated and situation-specific than situationist critiques of them tend to suggest (see e.g. Doris’s “globalist” target on pp. 22–6 in 2002). Consequently, I think they are considerably less threatened by the relevant experimental data than many situationists would have us think. (4) Similarly, I think “full” or “complete” intellectual virtue is not very widely distributed and thus that we should not expect it to make a very strong showing in the relevant experimental contexts. (5) Some situationists may see (4) as an indication that the concept of (at least *full* or *complete*) virtue is useless or irrelevant. My own take on this matter, however, is that many accounts of moral and intellectual virtue are intended as accounts of a particular (moral or intellectual) *ideal*. As such, I think the accounts in question have considerable *regulative* or *action-guiding* power, and thus are not at all useless or irrelevant (see Roberts and Wood 2007 for a prime example). (6) That said, I do not think that an account of, say, ideal epistemic character is the *only* source of information that might be helpful for regulating our intellectual lives. In fact, were situationists to provide empirical data concerning the factors that tend to influence our intellectual (vs. our moral) development and activities, I think this data could also play an important regulative role. It might, for instance, shed significant light on our *present* intellectual situation in a way that would be helpful vis-à-vis our attempts to move beyond this situation and closer to the intellectual ideal. In this way, I am inclined to regard traditional and many situationist portrayals of character and virtue as complementary. This irenic picture does not appear to occur to Doris, who seems to think (2002: 149–52) that one must choose *between* thinking of virtue as a kind of action-guiding ideal, on the one hand, and giving serious attention to what situationist experimental data (allegedly) suggest concerning the rather less than ideal state of human character, on the other. This brief sketch of my response to situationism obviously is no substitute for an elaboration or defense of it; but it is all I have the space for here.

¹⁶ A further motivation for the classification that follows is the remarkable theoretical heterogeneity of the published work in this area. As William Alston (2005) observed, “What is nowadays called ‘virtue epistemology’ is a sprawling, diverse, even chaotic territory. There is not even a rough commonality as to what counts as an intellectual virtue, much less how it functions in belief formation or how this bears on epistemic status” (153). For more on this point, and for an elaboration of (something very much like) the classification I articulate here, see my (2008).

specifically to character-based approaches and “intellectual virtues” to refer to intellectual *character* virtues.)

One important and salient difference among the various authors working in this area is how they conceive of the relationship between (1) the concept of an intellectual virtue and (2) the problems and questions of traditional epistemology.¹⁷ For some, an appeal to intellectual virtue promises a solution to many of the most difficult and longstanding problems in traditional epistemology. Zagzebski (1996), for instance, argues that giving the concept of intellectual virtue a central role in an account of knowledge yields a satisfactory account of the nature of knowledge, a rebuttal to skepticism, a solution to the Gettier problem, and a way of resolving the debate between internalists and externalists. She sees an appeal to intellectual virtue as having a kind of salvific and transformative effect on traditional epistemology.¹⁸ Others, however, see reflection on matters of intellectual virtue as motivating fundamentally new directions and inquiries in epistemology—directions and inquiries that are largely independent of traditional concerns about the nature, structure, limits, or sources of knowledge.¹⁹ Hookway (2000; 2003), for instance, commends an approach to epistemology that focuses on the domain of *inquiry* rather than on individual beliefs or items of knowledge; and because intellectual character virtues like carefulness and thoroughness, sensitivity to detail, intellectual perseverance, honesty, and adaptability often play a critical role in successful inquiry, he contends that such an approach will be virtue-based. Robert Roberts and Jay Wood (2007) have recently defended an approach to virtue epistemology that focuses on *individual* intellectual virtues and makes little attempt to address or “solve” the problems of traditional epistemology in virtue-theoretic

¹⁷ By “traditional epistemology,” I mean (roughly) epistemology in the Cartesian tradition, the central focus of which is the nature, structure, limits, and sources of knowledge. Some of the topics and debates that have been or are central to this tradition include global and local skepticism, the nature of perception, rationalism vs. empiricism, the problem of induction, the analysis of knowledge, foundationalism vs. coherentism, internalism vs. externalism, and the Gettier problem. For an overview and representative sample, see Bonjour (2002).

¹⁸ See, for example, pp. 279–81, 291–5, or 329–34. Fairweather (2001), Axtell (2007; 2008; 2010), and Napier (2009) also support giving the concept of intellectual virtue a significant role in an account of knowledge. Axtell, however, does not limit his conception of intellectual virtue to the relevant character traits; instead he endorses a “thinner” conception of intellectual virtue which incorporates both character virtues and faculty virtues.

¹⁹ These two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, even Zagzebski (1996), who again is the leading proponent of the former approach, sees important connections between intellectual virtue and certain epistemic concepts that have been neglected by traditional epistemologists, for instance, wisdom and understanding. Moreover, her extensive work on the nature and structure of an intellectual virtue fits squarely in this second category.

terms. Their aim is rather to provide something like a “conceptual map” of the domain of excellent intellectual character. Accordingly, they offer chapter-length analyses of several individual virtues, including love of knowledge, intellectual firmness, courage and caution, humility, autonomy, generosity, and practical wisdom.

There are, then, two general approaches to character-based virtue epistemology: “conservative” approaches that appeal to the concept of intellectual virtue as a way of engaging or addressing traditional epistemological problems and questions; and “autonomous” approaches that focus on matters of intellectual virtue in ways that are largely independent of traditional questions, but that are still broadly epistemological in nature.

Each of these main varieties admits of two sub-varieties. Conservative approaches to virtue epistemology can be either strong or weak, depending on how substantial they think the connection is between the concept of intellectual virtue and the problems and questions of traditional epistemology. Zagzebski’s approach is a clear instance of what I shall refer to as Strong Conservative VE, since again, she envisions the concept of intellectual virtue playing a *major* and *central* role within traditional epistemology. But a weaker variety of conservative virtue epistemology is also possible. In recent years, for instance, I have argued (and will argue again in subsequent chapters) that the concept of an intellectual virtue cannot form the basis of an adequate analysis of knowledge (2006a; Ch. 3), but that it does merit a kind of *secondary* or *background* role in both reliabilist (2006b; Ch. 4) and evidentialist (2009; Ch. 5) accounts of knowledge. While supporting the idea that there is some theoretical connection between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology, the suggestion is that this connection is considerably more modest and less extensive than Zagzebski and others have thought. Thus I refer to the view that the concept of intellectual virtue might play a weak or minimal or secondary role in connection with traditional epistemology as Weak Conservative VE.

Autonomous varieties of virtue epistemology also come in stronger and weaker forms. The guiding assumption in this area is that matters of intellectual virtue have epistemological “traction” or significance independent of more traditional epistemological concerns. According to what I shall call Strong Autonomous VE, an autonomous virtue-based approach should *supplant* or *replace* traditional approaches. In this vein, Kvanvig (1992) argues that there is no significant role for the concept of intellectual virtue to play within traditional epistemology, but that this concept is nonetheless central to epistemology proper; consequently, he goes on to claim that the

traditional, Cartesian approach to epistemology should be jettisoned in favor of a virtue-based approach. Other proponents of an autonomous virtue epistemology have staked out a less ambitious position, claiming instead that their approaches are a proper *complement* to—and thus can exist peaceably alongside—more traditional approaches to epistemology. Code, for instance, makes clear that her approach is not aimed at replacing traditional epistemology, but rather at shedding light on areas that traditional epistemology has tended to neglect (1987: 63–4; 253). Roberts and Wood adopt a similar line (2007: ch. 1). I shall refer to this less radical perspective on autonomous virtue epistemology as Weak Autonomous VE.

We have seen that virtue epistemology as a whole is comprised of two main approaches: a faculty-based or “reliabilist” approach and a character-based or “responsibilist” approach. The latter, again, is my main concern in the present work. We have seen furthermore that the domain of character-based virtue epistemology itself admits of two varieties—one “conservative” and the other “autonomous”—and that each of these varieties can take either a weaker or stronger form. For a more detailed reiteration of the structure of character-based virtue epistemology, see Table 1.1.²⁰

Table 1.1 *Varieties of character-based virtue epistemology*

| Conservative VE: the concept of intellectual virtue is useful for addressing one or more problems in traditional epistemology | | Autonomous VE: the concept of intellectual virtue can form the basis of an approach to epistemology that is independent of traditional epistemology | |
|---|---|---|---|
| <i>Strong Conservative VE:</i> the concept of intellectual virtue merits a central and fundamental role within traditional epistemology | <i>Weak Conservative VE:</i> the concept of intellectual virtue merits a secondary or background role within traditional epistemology | <i>Weak Autonomous VE:</i> an independent focus on intellectual character and virtues complements traditional epistemology | <i>Strong Autonomous VE:</i> an independent focus on intellectual character and virtues should replace traditional epistemology |

²⁰ This is but one possible way of carving up the territory in virtue epistemology. It is inspired mainly by the particular way in which the literature in this area has evolved over the past decade or so. Thus it is aimed primarily at providing an illuminating account of the field in *its present state* (not in a state that it merely might have taken or that it might take some time in the future).

1.3 *An overview of the book*

We are now in a position to consider the central project and claims of the book. In Chapter 2, I extend the present introduction to intellectual character virtues. I do so by undertaking two main tasks. First, I identify six “natural groupings” of these traits based on the role they play in the context of inquiry. Second, I distinguish intellectual character virtues from a range of other intellectual excellences, including intellectual faculties, talents, temperaments, and skills. I argue that while intellectual virtues are often closely related to these other excellences, they nonetheless are distinct from them. This chapter, together with the present one, is aimed at providing an overview of the intellectual virtues for the relatively uninitiated, that is, for readers who presently lack a very firm or robust conception of the traits in question. (Those already well-acquainted with the intellectual virtues and virtue epistemology may wish to skip ahead to Chapter 3).

In Chapter 3, I turn to a discussion of Strong Conservative VE, focusing mainly on Zagzebski’s virtue-based account of knowledge. I begin by arguing that an exercise of intellectual character virtues (or anything similar) is not, when added to true belief, sufficient for knowledge. I go on to argue that neither is an exercise of intellectual virtues necessary for knowledge. The immediate conclusion is that the concept of intellectual virtue (where an intellectual virtue is understood as a trait of character) is unlikely to play a central role in a plausible analysis of knowledge. But this in turn entails, or so I argue, that the concept of intellectual virtue is unlikely to play a central role within traditional epistemology at large. I conclude that the prospects of Strong Conservative VE are poor.

In the two chapters that follow, I turn to a defense of Weak Conservative VE, that is, of the thesis that reflection on the intellectual virtues merits a secondary or background role in connection with one or more issues in traditional epistemology. In Chapter 4, I argue that intellectual character virtues satisfy the conditions for reliabilist “knowledge-makers” or justifiers, and that consequently reliabilists of any stripe must give greater attention to matters of intellectual character. I also show how this expansion of the focus of reliabilism generates new theoretical questions and challenges for any reliabilist epistemology.

In Chapter 5, I consider the significance of intellectual virtue for evidentialism, that is, for the view that a belief is epistemically justified at a given time just in case it is supported by the believer’s evidence at that time. I begin by identifying cases in which a belief satisfies the evidentialist’s central condition for epistemic justification but intuitively is unjustified. I proceed to argue that

the solution for evidentialism is to adopt a further condition according to which (within a certain range of cases) justification also requires conducting oneself in a minimally intellectually virtuous way. The conclusion of Chapters 4 and 5 is that while the concept of intellectual virtue may not have a central or transforming role to play within traditional epistemology, neither is it wholly irrelevant. Weak Conservative VE therefore prevails.

The three chapters just described (Chs. 3–5) are the most straightforwardly epistemological chapters in the book and thus are likely to be of special interest to more traditionally minded epistemologists. In Chapter 6, the focus of the book shifts in ways that are, I hope, still likely to engage the interest of traditional epistemologists, but that are also likely to be appealing to many other philosophers, including (but not limited to) moral philosophers. The overarching question in Chapters 6–9 is whether reflection on the intellectual virtues considered more or less in their own right (or apart from the issues of traditional epistemology) can form the basis of an independent, broadly epistemological research program; and, provided that it can, just what such a program might amount to.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I develop an account of the nature and basic structure of an intellectual virtue. Chapter 6 is a defense of what I call a “personal worth conception” of intellectual virtue, according to which the traits in question are intellectual virtues because they contribute to their possessor’s “personal intellectual worth,” that is, to their possessor’s intellectual goodness or badness qua person. According to the account, the primary basis of personal intellectual worth, and thus of intellectual virtue, is a positive psychological orientation toward or “love” of epistemic goods like knowledge and understanding. I elaborate on the content of this orientation and respond to a range of potential objections.

In Chapter 7, I situate this conception of intellectual virtue vis-à-vis several accounts of intellectual and moral virtue in the literature. Here I give special attention to the views of Linda Zagzebski (1996), Rosalind Hursthouse (1999), Julia Driver (2000), Thomas Hurka (2001), and Robert Adams (2006). In addition to identifying several similarities and differences between my account and these others, I also develop a number of substantive criticisms of the latter.

Chapters 8 and 9 examine the nature and structure of two *individual* intellectual virtues: namely, open-mindedness and intellectual courage. These chapters are aimed mainly at specifying the “characteristic psychology” of the virtues in question. In Chapter 8, I begin by considering an initially plausible account of open-mindedness according to which this virtue consists primarily of a disposition to temporarily “set aside” one’s viewpoint about an issue in order

to give a fair and impartial hearing to an opposing viewpoint. I argue against this view, opting instead for a broader account which allows, first, that open-mindedness can be manifested outside the context of intellectual opposition or conflict, and second, that an exercise of open-mindedness need not involve any kind of rational assessment. I also consider the question of when, or with respect to which ideas or viewpoints, one ought to be open-minded.

In Chapter 9, my focus turns to intellectual courage. Here I defend the view that intellectual courage is a disposition to persist in a doxastic state (e.g. belief) or course of action (e.g. inquiry) aimed at an epistemic good despite the fact that doing so involves an apparent threat to one's well-being. In the course of this defense, I explore a number of issues, including the significance of fear and danger relative to the essential "context" of intellectual courage, the sorts of states and activities in which intellectual courage can be manifested, the possibility of ill-motivated intellectual courage, and when an exercise of intellectual courage is appropriate or virtuous.

Chapter 10 draws together several elements of the preceding chapters by considering their implications for the viability of the four main varieties of character-based virtue epistemology outlined in Chapter 1. The central focus here is Strong Autonomous VE and Weak Autonomous VE (the prospects of the other two varieties will already have been made clear by this point). I argue that the central challenge for Strong Autonomous VE is to make good on the claim that an autonomous, virtue-based approach to epistemology ought to *replace* more traditional approaches to the discipline. I examine the only extant defense of Strong Autonomous VE (Kvanvig 1992) and argue that it falls short. While I reject Strong Autonomous VE, I go on to argue that Weak Autonomous VE has considerable promise, and indeed, that it likely represents the way of the future in character-based virtue epistemology. I also offer an overview, based mainly on the discussion in Chapters 6–9, of the theoretical substance of such an approach. Finally, I explain why an approach of this sort is indeed proper to *epistemology* (broadly construed), rather than to ethics or any other philosophical discipline.

In the Appendix, I consider the relation between intellectual virtues and moral virtues. I begin by delineating three possible views of this relation: (1) what we call "intellectual virtues" just *are* moral virtues; (2) intellectual virtues are a proper subset of moral virtues; and (3) intellectual virtues are fundamentally distinct from moral virtues. I defend a position according to which a trait's being an intellectual virtue depends on its being oriented toward distinctively epistemic goods, while a trait's being a moral virtue depends on its being others-regarding. The result is that there is substantial overlap between

the class of intellectual virtues and the class of moral virtues, and that consequently a position somewhere between (2) and (3) is correct.

As this overview makes clear, the book proceeds on two main tracks. On the one hand, it is intended to shed substantial light on the nature and structure of an intellectual virtue (Chs. 6 and 7), the defining character of two individual virtues (Chs. 8 and 9), and the relation between intellectual virtues and other intellectual and moral excellences (Ch. 2 and the Appendix). It is also, however, intended to support the following three meta-epistemological claims: (1) the concept of intellectual virtue does not merit a prominent or central role within traditional epistemology (Ch. 3); (2) it does, however, merit a secondary or background role (Chs. 4 and 5); and (3) apart from any concern with traditional epistemology, philosophical reflection on intellectual virtues can form the basis of a more or less autonomous epistemological research program (Chs. 6–10). My hope is that the book will advance the discussion within virtue epistemology both by providing a lens through which to understand what has gone on in the field over the past couple of decades and by identifying several new and promising lines of inquiry.