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Connecting virtues

CONNECTING VIRTUES

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The literature on the virtues has seen several shifts and turns in its relatively short history. The first landmark was the renewed interest in the moral virtues urged by proponents of virtue ethics, who, starting from the late '50s, proclaimed their dissatisfaction with deontologist and consequentialist views in moral theory. Despite a number of divergences among various figures of virtue ethics, their core and shared move was shifting the focus of normative moral theory from mere acts (including the consequences of an act and the normative requirements that make an act right or wrong) to the agents performing those acts. In particular, virtue ethicists shed light on the character traits—that is, the virtues—that allow a moral agent to act well. Thus, virtue ethics led to a renewed discussion of many themes that lay at the centre of the debate in ancient and medieval philosophy, among which we shall mention the problem of the unity/disunity of the virtues, the role of practical wisdom as the key to living virtuously and avoiding akratic behaviour, the relationship between virtue, happiness, and flourishing, and the relationship between the good and the right. Insofar as moral philosophers interested in the virtues are still discussing these topics, we can think of their work as a contribution to the original approach to the virtue-theoretic discourse.

Then, in the '80s, the interest in the virtues reached the domain of epistemology, where at the time a lot of discussion was devoted to solving the Gettier problem—that is, to finding plausible ways to back up the tripartite analysis of knowledge with some extra conditions. The debate about moral virtues offered to epistemologists the possibility of leaving neutral and individualistic approaches to the analysis of knowledge behind to endorse an agent-centred epistemological perspective. Ernest Sosa's first attempt to propose a virtue epistemology was grounded in Aristotle's idea that the virtues require reliable success as well as in Aristotle's account of intellectual virtues as dispositions that lead the rational soul to the truth (virtue reliabilism).[1] Following these Aristotelian principles, Sosa developed his virtue epistemology around the notion of virtues as cognitive faculties (e.g., visual perception, memory, or introspection) that allow an epistemic subject to perform well in the epistemic domain (i.e., to acquire knowledge).[2] However, for others, a virtue epistemology must capture another Aristotelian principle, namely the idea that a virtue is an acquired character trait for which an agent is somehow responsible—at least in the relevant sense according to which they cannot be responsible for, for example, the limits and the deterioration of their visual capacities—and which can be cultivated through education (virtue responsibilism).[3] Accordingly, these virtue epistemologists focused on the role that specific intellectual virtues such as intellectual courage, open-mindedness, intellectual humility, intellectual honesty, and epistemic justice play in our intellectual inquiry.

There is no need for us to go into much detail, as the important point we want to stress is the turn currently taking place within the virtue-theoretic panorama and the fundamental contribution of virtue

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[1] See Aristotle, EN VI, 2, 1139b 12-13.
[2] See, for instance, Sosa 2007, 2015.
[3] See, among the first proponents of this view, Code 1984, Montmarquet 1992, and Zagzebski 1996.

ethics and virtue epistemology to the current philosophical discussion. Several virtue theorists have started developing a genuine interest in questions related to the links among various approaches to the virtue-theoretic discourse as well as to the possibility of extending this framework to other philosophical domains. Most works on the virtues in epistemology, ethics, or other areas are frequently isolated from each other, yet they would enormously benefit from being brought into a conversation. The main thrust of this special issue is to offer a plausible remedy to bridge this gap. In particular, its aim is to break down barriers between different philosophical perspectives on the study of the virtues—both to highlight the interplay and overlap among virtues pertaining to different philosophical areas and to stress the peculiarity of specific virtues within their own fields.

The goals of this project are rooted in recent advances within virtue theory and, in particular, in the core idea that a serious concern for the agent and their character traits can be extremely helpful for addressing urgent philosophical issues. A few important manifestations of this assumption in the current debate need to be mentioned here (without any claim to be exhaustive), as this special issue purports to share their spirit and possibly bring such spirit to further domains of inquiry. Firstly, the serious challenge posed by situationism, which threatened the very idea of a character trait (see, e.g., Harman 1999; Appiah 2008; Doris 2010), eventually helped virtue ethicists to take an empirical approach to character more seriously, and therefore to elaborate more plausible versions of traditional views of what counts as a character trait (see, e.g., Russell 2009; Annas 2011; Alfano 2013; Kristjánnson 2013; Miller 2017). Secondly, and partly along the same lines, virtue theorists are now more inclined than ever to work jointly with different kinds of psychologists, especially within the positive-psychology movement (see, e.g., Peterson and Seligman 2004; Park 2009; Peterson 2006), to sketch out a plausible account of human happiness and flourishing, and to find joint strategies to foster character development and human well-being. Even if some divergences endure (see Schwartz and Sharpe 2006; Kristjánsson 2013; Vaccarezza 2016), the synergy between the two movements is surely a healthy and mutually enriching one whose results are increasingly benefiting reflection on both sides.

Thirdly, both virtue ethics and virtue epistemology are currently raising their voices about the impact of virtue-theoretic approaches on the philosophy of education, with a particular interest in the role of virtue formation in traditional school curricula. Since Carr and Steutel's work in *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* (1999), several other moral philosophers have already addressed this important issue (e.g., Kristjánnson 2014; Russell 2015), and further research is going to appear in the coming years as a response to Linda Zagzebski's recent work *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (2017), which approaches the topic of virtue and education from an exemplarist perspective (see, e.g., Kristjánsson 2006; Sanderse 2013; Carr and Harrison 2015; Croce and Vaccarezza 2017). It is also a pleasure to notice that the last few years have seen the rise of several research centres working on these topics all over the world: after the founding of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues based at the University of Birmingham (which hosted Carr and Harrison's Knightly Virtues Programme, the first attempt to bring character education to British schools [2015]), further centres have been founded in the United States (the Institute for the Study of Human Flourishing at the University of Oklahoma) and in Italy (Aretai – Center on Virtues at the University of Genoa).

As regards the interest of virtue epistemologists in the philosophy of education, the brightest and most concrete witness is offered by Jason Baehr's research (e.g., 2011, 2016) and commitment to help found a new charter middle school in Long Beach, California, named Intellectual Virtues Academy of Long Beach. According to this institution, a school is a place that fosters growth in intellectual character virtues in a supportive academic environment and equips students to "engage the world with curiosity and thoughtfulness, to know themselves, and to live well".[4] Besides Baehr's seminal work, recent research in this area has addressed several main topics, including the following: (i) the importance of specific intellectual virtues in the context of education, such as intellectual humility, inquisitiveness, and open-mindedness (see, e.g., Kidd 2016a; Watson 2015; Riggs 2016; Tanesini 2016a); and (ii) the epistemic aims of education and the variety of educational strategies that allow us to achieve those aims (see, e.g., Kotzee 2014; Porter 2016; Pritchard 2013, 2016; Siegel 2017).

Another area which both virtue ethicists and virtue epistemologists have recently started to (re)investigate is the relationship between virtues and vices. The debate on the interconnection of the virtues—whether having a virtue requires having them all; whether one can be genuinely virtuous in some respects while lacking other virtues—has contributed to casting light on the need for a more detailed framework for understanding how virtues relate to their vices, as it has showed that there might be cases in which, for example, displaying benevolence is overtly in contrast with being just, to the extent that a profound benevolence might appear as a vice rather than as a virtuous trait. Recent work in this area includes the important collection *Virtues and Their Vices* (Timpe and Boyd 2014), several projects on the role of intellectual vices in epistemology (see, e.g., Cassam 2016; Kidd 2016b, 2017; Tanesini 2016b), and well-known research on epistemic injustice and its corrective virtues (see Fricker 2007; Battaly 2017).

As a final important instance of how virtue theory is benefitting current philosophical discussion, a new wave of interest in the virtues and their role in public life has arisen from current research in political philosophy. However, a few remarks are needed in this regard. Within the classical republican tradition, interest in civic virtues, aimed at ensuring stability in a well-ordered republic, has never faded (see, e.g., Pettit 1997; Dagger 1997; Honohan 2002; Brennan and Pettit 2003). This tradition, rooted in Machiavelli's writings and ending up with both modern civic humanism and civic republicanism, has always grounded the maintenance of a stable republic not only in the existence of just laws, but also— and foremost—in the creation of good customs among citizens. This means, practically speaking, carrying out three strategies: first, "[selecting] institutions that inspire virtue; second, one might design institutions to economize on the stock of virtue readily available; third and finally, one might attempt to inculcate virtue (through education, religion, public mythology, etc.) so as to bridge any gap left by the former" (Lovett 2014: 512). In contrast, rival approaches to political theory seem to have long underestimated (and therefore insufficiently theorized about) the political significance of virtues broadly conceived. However, even those scholars we may call "republican liberals"—despite criticizing the main tenets of both civic humanism and civic republicanism—are increasingly trying to reconcile the language of rights and that of virtues, provided these liberal virtues are taken in a merely

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instrumental sense and not as part of a controversial conception of human flourishing (see Lovett 2014: 516).

This special issue covers several of these key themes within virtue theory. It includes ground-breaking articles offering original solutions to longstanding issues in virtue theory, such as the plausibility of different lists of virtues, the relationship between virtues and the vices that oppose them, and the connection between moral and intellectual virtues. In addition, this issue offers insights into cutting-edge fields of application of the topic of virtue, such as the import of positive psychology's take on virtues for moral philosophers, the role of intellectual virtues in an age of neuromedia, virtuous dispositions related to testimonial ethics, and the role of some neglected virtues for political philosophy.

The project is structured in three main sections: (i) Moral Philosophy, (ii) Epistemology, and (iii) Political Philosophy. The first section tackles long-debated issues concerning virtue theory within the moral-philosophical field, such as the plausibility of drawing a single list of virtues, and the stance to be taken in the debate on generalism vs. particularism. It also offers novel accounts of particular virtues, thus providing new solutions to vexed questions and showing how advances in virtue research can improve our understanding of single virtuous traits.

The section is opened by Sophie-Grace Chappell's fascinating contribution. By making use of an original style, which admittedly represents a tribute to Thomas Aquinas and mimics the structure of a *quaestio disputata*, Chappell offers a positive answer to the old question of the possibility of drawing a single, correct list of the virtues. Having defined the virtues of character as "permanently admirable and reliably beneficial dispositions of the will that always express our attachment and orientation to the good", and having established their principle of individuation in the need to face all sorts of difficulties, Chappell is in a position to list seven virtues which fit such a description and will always be part of a single correct list: faith, hope, love, justice, self-control, courage, and wisdom.

In the second contribution of the section, drawing both on a philosophical analysis and on the available psychological literature, Christian Miller casts light on the extremely neglected virtue of generosity in order to spell out the necessary conditions for possessing it and to reveal its surprising complexity. A generous action, in Miller's account, is one (i) involving the giving of a gift which is valuable in the eyes of the giver, (ii) ultimately motivated by an altruistic desire to benefit the recipient, (iii) morally optional or supererogatory, and proving to be (iv) cross-situationally consistent and (v) stable. Miller defends an ultimately "subjective" approach to generosity, according to which for someone to be generous it is enough that she thinks she is benefitting others, even if it is objectively not the case. Then, he considers three other plausible candidates for necessary conditions of generosity: reliable success, a specific manner to donate, and lack of presumptuousness. Finally, Miller briefly maps the relevant moral field, and argues that both compassion and generosity are types of benevolence, and that they partly overlap.

Maria Silvia Vaccarezza's aim in her article is to take a stance on the debate within Aristotelian scholarship on moral particularism vs. generalism so as to get a fuller grasp of the master virtue of *phronēsis*, or practical wisdom. Vaccarezza starts by sketching a portrait of what she labels "radical Particularistic Reading (PR)", and contrasts it with the view she favours, namely the "Priority of

Particulars Reading (PPR)". In particular, she argues that PPR succeeds in accounting for the priority Aristotle assigns to practical perception while at the same time counterbalancing that priority by means of two interpretive strategies and of a novel reading of some neglected passages of Aristotle's works. These passages, Vaccarezza argues, offer plenty of insight to support a moderate particularistic (or "qualified generalistic") reading. Finally, she applies such reading to educational practice to claim that qualified generalism holds true also at an applied-educational level.

In the final contribution of the moral section, Alan T. Wilson offers a framework for a novel understanding of another neglected virtue: honesty. In particular, he draws on Christian Miller's recent work on the topic to propose "success criteria that … need to be met by any plausible account of honesty", namely the following: (i) meeting the "unification challenge"—that is, explaining "why the trait is thought to be manifest in a range of seemingly distinct behaviours", including truthfulness, respect for property, proper compliance, fidelity to promises, and forthrightness; (ii) generating plausible verdicts "concerning who should (or should not) be classed as an honest agent"; (iii) being compatible with a corresponding account of dishonesty; and (iv) providing an explanation for why honesty is valuable and constitutes a moral virtue. Then, Wilson defends a motivational account of honesty, which, as opposed to views focused on reliable behaviour or a tendency to produce certain outcomes, has as its core claim that honesty "centrally involves a deep motivation to avoid deception".

The second section introduces four original ways virtue epistemology successfully applies to other domains—some within, others outside, mainstream epistemology—by providing novel responses to old questions as well as by addressing more recent issues. In particular, the section explores topics such as the relationship between virtue epistemology and enhanced performances, the role of intellectual virtues in social epistemology, the importance of having an epistemology of education informed by virtue epistemology in order to face an upcoming technological revolution such as neuromedia, and the relationship between epistemic vices and motives in vice epistemology.

In his contribution, J. Adam Carter evaluates the place of enhanced performances—the performance of athletes under the effect of a performance-enhancing drug—within Sosa's virtue epistemology. In particular, Carter tackles Sosa's recent idea that such performances fall short of aptness because they do not arise out of an agent's genuine competence. Carter shows how that idea leaves Sosa with an uncomfortable dilemma to deal with whenever we take into consideration cases of cognitive enhancement—cases in which one's cognitive performances are boosted by some kind of drug. Carter's suggested way out of the puzzle highlights the connections between virtue epistemology and the fields of ethics and the philosophy of mind and cognitive science. Specifically, he draws insights from Fischer and Ravizza's guidance-control thesis in the debate on moral responsibility to set up a parallel argument for epistemic responsibility, while he refers to Pritchard's take on cognitive integration—which reconciles virtue epistemology and extended cognition—to split the horns of the dilemma and avoid Sosa's conclusion.

Michel Croce's aim in his article is to apply virtue epistemology to a recent issue in social epistemology: the problem of evaluating whether epistemic paternalism can be an epistemically justified practice. Specifically, Croce tackles the issue from a novel perspective, namely by asking *who* can be rationally entitled to undertake epistemically paternalistic interferences for the benefit of another. He

argues that experts, when defined along Goldman's lines, are not the best candidates to provide that service. Virtue epistemology plays a crucial role in Croce's account because it provides the tools for introducing a virtue-based framework that distinguishes various kinds of epistemically privileged subjects (e.g., experts and epistemic authorities). Thus, it makes room for individuating the key features of a *virtuous paternalist interferer*: a subject who relies on a specific set of intellectual virtues—which Croce calls novice-oriented abilities—to interfere with someone's inquiry for their own epistemic good. The paper focuses on situations where the interferer is an epistemic subject, but the last section broadens the argument to account for circumstances in which collective agents such as groups and institutions undertake epistemically paternalistic interferences.

The ground-breaking topic of educating in a futuristic age of technological development is tackled by Duncan Pritchard. In his contribution, Pritchard depicts neuromedia as a technological revolution that will make information-processing technology so integrated with our cognitive processes that we will not be able to distinguish between on-board processes and the technology itself. If it becomes real, this particular kind of extended cognition will have a strong impact on education: any concern with, for example, helping the young make good use of their memory and learn a language would become unnecessary, as they could count on their extended memory and rely on the technology to speak any language they want. In such a scenario, it becomes even more fundamental to select the most apt epistemic aim of education, which Pritchard individuates in helping the young build their intellectual character. For while technology will help us, it will not be able to make us intellectually virtuous, as intellectual virtues cannot be off-loaded onto technology. Thus, Pritchard explores several ways an epistemic agent can be intellectually virtuous in their interaction with the new technology, but he also sheds light on how technology can aid the development of our intellectual character.

The Epistemology section concludes with Alessandra Tanesini's contribution on vice epistemology, one of the most recent advances in virtue epistemology. Tanesini defends from recent attacks the view that intellectual character vices involve a motivation to actively turn away from the epistemic good. After introducing some counterexamples to the thesis—according to which, intellectual character vices require epistemically bad motives or, at least, the absence of good motives—Tanesini argues that all the examples feature what she calls a non-instrumental aversion to epistemic good, which undermines the force of the counterexamples and shows that they are in fact compatible with the motivational account of epistemic vices. To provide a successful defence of such a view, Tanesini appeals to the distinction between justifications of, rationalisations of, and explanations for acts and beliefs and argues that the distinction supports the motivational account of epistemic vices. For the fact that vice attribution is a genuinely explanatory practice entails that we consider vices to have a psychological component explaining someone's actions and/or beliefs, which on Tanesini's view is exactly what is required for having a motivation.

The final section of this issue is devoted to political philosophy, and aims at applying the framework of the virtues to fields traditionally analysed with other conceptual tools. More specifically, it enquires into whether it is legitimate to complement traditional accounts of democratic agency—focused on rationality and reasonableness—with a picture of the moral and intellectual traits needed by citizens. In particular, contributions in this section investigate which of the traditional virtues may best

serve the purpose of enabling full democratic agency, and whether Aristotelian-type civic virtues can be complemented by traits found in different traditions, such as American pragmatism.

Philip Deen's contribution discusses whether a sense of humor can be considered as a political virtue. The author's central claim is that a sense of humor amounts to a secondary virtue conducive to the cardinal political virtues of sociability, prudence and justice. In particular, Deen defends the view that humor is instrumental to political virtue rather than a virtue in itself. The paper's argument is developed through a critical analysis of the current debate over a sense of humor as an excellent trait, where the author draws from recent findings in psychology to stress the idea that humor can, and in fact should, be connected to political virtues in various ways. Then, after introducing the case of Donald Trump as an exemplar of a sense of humor as a vicious trait, Deen explores in detail three ways a sense of humor can be politically virtuous. A sense of humor can be virtuous in its relationship with sociability when it fosters a sense of equality and mutual affection among the citizenry. It can be virtuous insofar as it is a way of expressing he virtues of humility and transcendence to the extent that they are conducive to prudence. Finally, a sense of humor, unlike wit, can be virtuous in its relationship with justice whenever it fosters respect for the institutions and social bonds.

In her essay on citizens' political prudence, Valeria Ottonelli vindicates by means of a reconstructive method the importance of this neglected and undertheorized virtue in a democratic society. Despite a long tradition of thought which makes political prudence the key political virtue of the enlightened statesman, contemporary theories of democratic prudence tend to be exclusively concerned with the behaviour and responsibilities of professional politicians, rather than those of ordinary citizens, both out of a concern for feasibility and as an attempt to avoid having substantial conceptions of the good life play any role in the democratic process. To reverse such an attitude, Ottonelli starts by offering a Weberian analysis of the virtuous traits of a prudent politician: political passion, sense of proportion, and responsibility. All of these traits, Ottonelli argues, can be recognized in the political action of ordinary citizens. In the following two sections, she shows the relevance of citizens' political prudence for democratic theory, and the ways it can fail to be properly exercised. Finally, she concludes by contending that, potential ill uses of political prudence notwithstanding, the importance and value of its exercise should be protected and secured by means of adequate institutional devices.

In the final contribution of the section and of the whole issue, Nancy E. Snow sketches an account of hope as a democratic civic virtue. Against the backdrop of the current political scenario, dominated by the resurgence of populism in several countries including the United States, Snow points to hope as an especially valuable civic virtue, which could help democracies facing current challenges. After offering her account of hope, she contends that the United States' becoming a nation of worriers, as opposed to one of carers (see Hage 2003), is partly due to a lack of social hope. "Paranoid nationalism", Snow contends, results from a scarcity of hope. Then, against the background of such a fragmented and divided political context, she provides examples of what hope as a democratic civic virtue looks like in the United States today. Drawing upon a distinction between pure and impure virtues, she is then in a position to define conclusively hope both as a pure and an impure democratic civic virtue as the "disposition of openness to the political possibilities a democratic government can

provide". In her conclusion, Snow suggests that her conception of hope is best theorized within a modified pragmatist account—that is, one fortified with empirical psychological evidence.

Acknowledgments

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