

## Naturalizing Epistemic Virtue

Edited by ABROL FAIRWEATHER AND OWEN FLANAGAN.  
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In its original formulation in Sosa (1980), virtue epistemology (VE) was a contribution to naturalistic epistemology in much the spirit of Goldman (1979)'s process reliabilism. Indeed, Sosa (1980) offered the view as a new reliabilism and Goldman (1993: 274) later framed his reliabilism as a detailed naturalistic articulation of VE. This form of VE—reliabilist VE—flourishes today. Its distinctive combination of naturalistic credentials and respect for epistemology's normative character remains a major selling point. A rival VE—responsibilism—came to share the stage after Zagzebski (1996). Its naturalistic qualifications are less clear, and it faces empirical challenges and broader questions about its ability to illuminate knowledge as displayed throughout the animal kingdom. Such challenges have been extended to reliabilist VE, prompting a re-evaluation of VE's compatibility with naturalism.

*Naturalizing Epistemic Virtue* is a state-of-the-art collection that will benefit anyone interested in this re-evaluation. The editors may overstate its novelty when they say it will 'launch a powerful and largely unexplored position in epistemology: naturalized virtue epistemology', a claim that will surprise anyone familiar with reliabilist VE. Sosa has long emphasised that his category of 'performance normativity' is a species of the attributive normativity that, as Thomson (2008) observes, admits of easy naturalisation. But the editors make no overstatement in saying that VE has exhibited 'insufficient attention to the empirical grounding of [its] theories'. So the volume promises to fill a gap. And it largely fulfils the promise: the empirical sophistication throughout is outstanding, and the new proposals are exciting. While the volume could have been better in some ways, it is worth the investment for followers of naturalised epistemology.

Although the papers are not divided into sections, they sort well into two categories. Several papers address the metaphysics and language of normative epistemology, contributing to the *metaphysical naturalist* view that all facts are metaphysically grounded in natural facts. They merit attention well beyond VE-interested circles. Indeed, most aren't about VE except in a broad sense that includes proper functionalism and epistemic consequentialism, views Sosa (1993) and Zagzebski (1996) distinguish from VE. The other papers address specific empirically-oriented questions, contributing to the *methodological naturalist* outlook that philosophical theory-building should cohere with and be informed by relevant science.

I begin with the contributions to metaphysical naturalism. Graham's 'Warrant, Functions, History' rehearses the proper functionalist view he's developed elsewhere and elucidates the etiological conception of function on which it rests. The discussion of functions is impressively detailed and will aid anyone interested in function's place in epistemology. As a contribution to the VE literature, the paper is perhaps less helpful. Graham characterises his view as 'virtue-reliabilist', which invites the question of why we should prefer it to competing views like Sosa (2007)'s that don't invoke proper function but rather a kind of competence on which no etiological constraints are imposed. Graham dismisses the intuition that Swampman initially has any warrant-relevant epistemic competence (p.31), a place where Sosa (1993) claims an advantage. It is also unclear how Graham's view illuminates more than the animal side of epistemology, as Sosa (2015) argues that we need more than a functional notion of aptness to understand the reflective side.

Neta's 'The Epistemic Ought' develops a novel proper functionalist account of the epistemic 'ought' and argues that it not only implies but is *implied by* 'can'. The account seemingly suffers from problems Neta raises for earlier theories. Neta objects that Feldman 'does not help us to understand what it is about our being believers, and about the standards of good performance for believers, that makes it the case that we...ought to comply with those standards' (42). Yet Neta thinks the epistemic 'ought' is the species-relative functional 'ought' in statements like 'This caterpillar ought to be eating anise, parsley, carrot, or other host plants', which are made true by species' 'goal-states'. And we can imagine species with epistemically problematic goal-states. Neta skirts this objection by conjecturing that *operating rationally* is the goal-state of creatures to which epistemic 'oughts' apply. But the conjecture receives no empirical support and wouldn't obviously help: it threatens metaphysically circularity by grounding epistemic 'oughts'—which include 'oughts' of rationality—in facts involving similar 'oughts'.

Jenkins's 'Naturalism and Norms of Inference' defends a 'naturalistically respectable' account of the epistemology of inference and specifically of 'solid inference' (54), which stands to inference as knowledge stands to belief. Her core account is not automatically naturalistic, since it appeals to the

potentially normative notions of probability and ‘responsiveness’ to probability-relations (56), on the first of which Jenkins is surprisingly neutral (57). But she proceeds to explain responsiveness in a way inspired by her empiricist account of mathematical knowledge in *Grounding Concepts*. This explanation confirms the naturalisability of ‘solid inference’. While the account seemed more a sketch of a larger project than a detailed theory, the big vision on offer contrasted refreshingly with the smaller-picture papers in the volume. While among the volume’s best papers, this paper is also among those least connected to the theme of naturalistic VE, touching on virtue only in the extremely broad sense that classifies solidity as a ‘virtue’ of inference.

Copp’s ‘Indirect Epistemic Teleology’ develops a meta-normative epistemic rule consequentialism on which ‘the truth of normative epistemological claims depends on the content of the set of epistemic standards such that people’s generally subscribing to it would do most to ameliorate the epistemic problem’ (74). As one might expect in a contribution from a prominent ethical theorist, it displays a sophistication about normativity and meta-normative theorizing surpassing that in most epistemologists’ work. While the paper beautifully exemplifies how ethics and epistemology should liaise, it wasn’t clear how Copp’s view outperforms earlier epistemic rule consequentialisms (though Copp notes differences of detail with Goldman). The piece also seemed surprising in a VE-themed volume. If VE is to parallel virtue ethics, it ought to rival epistemic consequentialism, not collapse into it. Since Copp’s view seems an alternative to VE, one would like to hear how it betters VE, especially on VE’s main selling points—viz., solving the Gettier problem and illuminating the value of knowledge.

Fairweather and Montemayor’s ‘Epistemic Dexterity’ aims to criticise Greco (2010)’s combination of virtue reliabilism and explanatory salience contextualism about knowledge-attributions, and propose an alternative account inspired by Ramsey’s success semantics. They offer two main objections to Greco: (i) explanatory salience contextualism ‘does not really appeal to the *motivations* of the agent, and rather focuses exclusively on the causally salient factors of a situation’ (135), and (ii) by understanding explanation interest-relatively and ‘assum[ing] a uniform type of agency’, it fails to ‘preserve objective information constitutive of causal chains’ and ‘comport adequately with the experimental evidence’ (131-2). While the critique of Greco was novel and the alternative intriguing, the latter wanted detail and its Ramseyan trappings seemed distracting. Rather than rehearsing Ramsey on truth for several pages, it would have been better to state their final account directly and unpack it more carefully.

Hazlett’s ‘Expressivism and Convention-Relativism about Epistemic Discourse’ offers a convention-relativist semantics inspired by Sosa’s claims about the ‘insulated’ character of epistemic evaluation. On this view, ‘utterances...in epistemic discourse express beliefs about how things stand relative to the central organizing value (or values) of the critical domain of the epistemic’ (232). It is *conventionalist* because what makes a value epistemic is determined by how academics use ‘epistemic’. This didn’t seem the best embodiment of Sosa’s point. Insulated epistemic evaluations aren’t academic property. The folk often talk about the quality of the evidence, where this quality is of an insulated sort. I also found Hazlett’s ‘reverse open question argument’ unpersuasive. While epistemic evaluation leaves some normative questions open—just like moral and prudential evaluation!—it closes others: if there’s good evidence that p, one has a reason to believe p. Since epistemic reasons are reasons of the right kind for belief and we can’t heed the call of wrong-kind reasons in doxastic deliberation, the latter arguably aren’t reasons for belief but rather reasons for *belief-affecting actions*. Hazlett broaches a nearby worry in considering whether epistemic goodness might simply be doxastic goodness. But his reply rests questionably on treating goodness evaluations as the basic epistemic evaluations.

Miller’s ‘Moral Virtues, Epistemic Virtues, and the Big Five’ walls off a potential refuge for virtue theorists fleeing empirical onslaught. He argues that the support for character traits in ‘Big Five’ personality psychology won’t help virtue theorists for three reasons: (1) the ‘Big Five’ categories could be viewed as mere summary labels rather than genuine traits, (2) these categories don’t correspond to normatively significant traits, and (3) the evidenced traits are cognitively impenetrable, and so unsuited for responsibilist use. The paper’s command of the empirical literature is stellar, but its relevance to VE is unclear. Zagzebski (1996) doesn’t claim that one cannot know if one lacks virtuous epistemic traits, but rather that knowers must exhibit the motivations characteristic of virtuous thinkers. Reliabilist VE uses a weaker conception of virtue that needs no support from character psychology.

The contributions from Battaly and Henderson and Horgan exhibit a similar problem, wielding supreme command of empirical arguments with unclear bearing on VE. Battaly ‘uses empirical work...to argue that acquiring knowledge is not always sufficient for acquiring epistemic virtue’ (175). While this jibes with Aristotelian themes in ethics, the epistemological relevance is unclear. The only epistemologists who disagree—viz., intellectualists about skill—aren’t addressed. Henderson and Horgan use empirical arguments against computationalism to support an anti-codification theme

familiar from virtue ethics, but the bearing on VE is unclear. VE doesn't emphasise this theme like virtue ethics. VE does oppose rule-based accounts of person-level knowledge, but it needn't oppose computationalist accounts of subpersonal processing (e.g., Marr's theory of vision). Indeed, early reliabilist VE's 'faculties' sound like Fodorian computationalism's modules.

Pritchard's 'Re-evaluating the Situationist Challenge' uses the distinction between modest and robust VE to parry the situationist objection that virtuous traits aren't manifested enough to be required for knowledge. Whereas robust VE holds that apt belief is necessary and sufficient for knowledge, modest VE only holds that it is necessary for knowledge that one's belief *partially* manifest epistemic virtue. Although it seems wise to address situationism by weakening VE, simply retreating to modest VE won't help. Situationists don't merely hold that virtues play a minor explanatory role in comparison to situations. They claim that virtues often play *no* role, since we largely lack virtues. Pritchard's strategy needs supplementation by an alternative diagnosis of situationist experiments, compatible with our having and manifesting virtues often enough.

Alfano's 'Stereotype Threat and Intellectual Virtue' uses an interpretation of the data on stereotype threat to defend a radical social externalism about virtue. He thinks the virtues of stereotype-threatened subjects are not *masked* but rather *diminished*, supporting the conclusion that epistemic virtue is constitutively determined by social environment. The argument against the masking view seemed unconvincing. Alfano's conceptual argument (171) crucially assumes a simple consequentialist account of virtue that implies that no full-fledged virtues can be masked. The implication is a reductio of that account. Curiously, Alfano's final view that one's social environment merely constitutively determines one's *second-order* dispositions doesn't even conflict with the masking diagnosis, which concerned first-order performance. A related point undermines his empirical argument on p.171, which merely suggests that second-order dispositions (and so environment) *causally influence* first-order dispositions. This thesis is uncontroversial. It doesn't establish *constitutive* social externalism vis-à-vis first-order virtues.

While the naturalistically-fuelled reasoning in this book is sometimes shaky and one occasionally feels that empirical sophistication prevails at the expense of philosophical relevance, the book is worth reading. While many contributions aren't about VE and the volume doesn't cohere well as an assessment of its naturalistic credentials, the papers that aren't about VE are fantastic, and the ones about VE represent the naturalistic state of the art.

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