

Introduction: Symposium on Stichter's *The Skillfulness of Virtue*

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The 'skill model' of virtue has received increasing levels of attention over the past decade, at least partly due to its prominence in the work of Julia Annas (2011, 1995). Building on this earlier work, some of which is his own, Matt Stichter now delivers a bold and empirically grounded new book, *The Skillfulness of Virtue* (2018), an extended defense of the skill model of virtue that utilizes the available psychological research on self-regulation and practical expertise. Stichter examines the idea (familiar in antiquity) that the virtues might be analogous to practical skills, and he defends a very strong version of this thesis, that the virtues *actually just are* a special kind of practical skill.<sup>1</sup> A morally virtuous person is one who achieves expertise in moral skills; and he helpfully extends this empirically grounded thesis beyond the case of ethics, to encompass epistemic virtue as well. Stichter's book makes a major contribution to virtue theory that will shape future research on the skill model of virtue in philosophy and moral psychology, but also potentially in empirical psychology and other disciplines.

*The Skillfulness of Virtue* merits careful consideration. This symposium brings together six philosophers with widely varying philosophical orientations. The six contributors are Mark Alfano, Ellen Fridland, Bana Bashour, Scott Woodcock, Mara Neijzen, and myself. The first five papers were originally presented at the 2019 Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Vancouver, Canada. The sixth paper (my own) was originally presented earlier, at the 2014 Kansas Philosophical Society meeting in response to a paper of Stichter's that later developed into central sections of the book. The six papers have all of course been developed since their original presentation, most of them quite significantly. Few of the papers are anything like standard academic book reviews; and several make original philosophical contributions. In response to these central elements of the symposium, Stichter provides substantive replies to all six contributors, allowing him the final word here. The symposium should be of interest to anyone whose work touches on character development, practical skill, or the moral and epistemic virtues.

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<sup>1</sup> On the skill model of virtue in antiquity, see Angier and Raphals (2021), Barney (2021), Annas (1993).

Mark Alfano's paper (2020) leads the group with a helpful overview of Stichter's book, especially in relation to recent work on empirical psychology, the situationist challenge, and the 'replication crisis' in social psychology. Alfano challenges specific points made in almost every chapter, allowing Stichter to clarify his position. Ellen Fridland (2020) seeks to expand (rather than challenge) Stichter's account of skill as a complex form of self-regulation. She suggests supplementing Stichter's preferred account of mental schemas and mental models with an account of *action* schemas informed by recent psychological literature on motor skill. The suggestion is fruitful. Indeed, Fridland and Stichter have now collaborated on a paper that takes up Fridland's suggestion in order to understand how a virtuous person can *reliably* act well in manner that is nevertheless spontaneous or intuitive, a hallmark of virtuous activity (Fridland and Stichter 2020). Bana Bashour (2021) nevertheless expresses some worries. Her paper deploys everyday examples of skill acquisition in order to argue that Stichter's reliance on self-regulation and deliberate practice in skill acquisition—involving what Stichter refers to as goal setting and goal striving—leaves him with an overly intellectualist account of virtue acquisition. Scott Woodcock's insightful paper (2020) invites clarification from Stichter on three points in particular: the articulability of the virtuous person's reasons, the role of motivation and practical wisdom in Stichter's 'virtue as skill' account, and what Woodcock sees as the 'indeterminacy' of the virtues in comparison to non-moral expertise, in chess for example (this is the 'action guiding' objection to virtue ethics). Mara Neijzen (2021) presses another apparent disanalogy between virtue and skill. She argues that the general availability of thick ethical terms gives the virtue novice a robust starting point that the skill novice seems to lack. By contrast, my own paper (Birondo 2021) encourages Stichter to press the analogy further. Aristotle's initial move *away* from the skill model of virtue leads us to overlook a cognitive-conative form of practical intelligence that unifies robust forms of practical expertise such as medicine. Insofar as the skill model of virtue is compelling, it needs to draw on a robust conception of expertise (similar to Greek *technê*) rather than the ordinary, anemic conception of practical skills.

These six papers provide insights, from a wide variety of approaches, on Stichter's novel defense of the skillfulness of virtue by enlisting recent psychological research on self-regulation and expertise. With the inclusion of Stichter's careful replies, the symposium contributes to the expanding research on practical skill, practical wisdom, and virtue. The hope is that this

symposium, like *The Skillfulness of Virtue* itself, will contribute to a better understanding of moral development and the acquisition of moral and epistemic virtue.

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