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Virtue Epistemology and the Epistemology of Virtue

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The ancient Greeks almost universally accepted the thesis that virtues are skills. Skills have an underlying intellectual structure (*logos*), and having a particular skill entails understanding the relevant *logos*, possessing a general ability to diagnose and solve problems (*phronesis*), as well as having appropriate experience. Two implications of accepting this thesis for moral epistemology and epistemology in general are considered. Thinking of virtues as skills yields a viable virtue epistemology in which moral knowledge is a species of a general kind of knowledge that is not philosophically suspect. Also, the debate between internalists and externalists in epistemology is subversively resolved as moot by adopting this strategy: the locus of justification for a belief is in the nature of skill. Thus, the contingent fact that some skills allow Homo Sapiens an 'internal access', while others do not, is theoretically neutral when considering the nature of justification *per se*.

There was once a philosophical consensus that virtues are skills.[1] Now, it is uncommon for philosophers to agree, and this was as true in the past as it is in the present. So, it is noteworthy that in ancient Greece there was an overwhelming consensus that the virtues are skills; so overwhelming, in fact, that there was only a lone dissenter (to be named next paragraph). The thesis that virtues are skills is powerful, with ramifications for both moral epistemology and epistemology in general. This essay demonstrates how identifying the virtues as a subset of skills solves two important problems. The first concerns the perennially tendentious status of moral knowledge. Thinking of virtues as skills yields a viable epistemology in which moral knowledge is shown to be a species of a general kind of knowledge that is not philosophically suspect. The second concerns the long-standing debate between internal-

[1] I am most obliged to Julia Annas for the lessons I've learned from her, in both discussion and print. I received comments on various drafts from her, William Alston, Glendon Good, Michael Lynch, J. Christopher Maloney, Kurt Meyers, David Schmidtz, and from two anonymous referees, and I thank all for their help. I thank B. K. S. Iyengar for inspiration. Much of the research for this paper was done in July of 1996, while visiting with Baba Parkash Puriji, of Gurgoan India; from him, I caught a glimpse of the relations between being wise and being graceful, and I am profoundly grateful. The writing has been completed during an extended visit at the University of Arizona; their support and hospitality are greatly appreciated.

ists and externalists in epistemology and the proposed solution is subversive. The debate is shown to be moot when one adopts a variety of virtue epistemology based on this thesis: one finds the locus of the justification for a belief to be in the nature of skill. Thus, the contingent fact that some particular skills allow *Homo Sapiens* an "internal access", while others do not, is a theoretically neutral fact when considering the nature of justification *per se*.

Not a surprise, the dissenter to the thesis that virtues are skills among the ancient Greeks was Aristotle, though it should be noted that the Peripatetics, those of the school of Aristotle's legacy, did not reject their progenitor's position regarding this matter.[2] Unfortunately, Aristotle's dominance in modern virtue theory, both in ethics and epistemology, has led modern moral philosophers and epistemologists to all but ignore the idea that virtues are skills.[3] Be that as it may, a full defense of the thesis that the virtues are skills would entail a detailed presentation and critique of Aristotle's arguments for why it is false. This is very interesting territory; Aristotle is uncharacteristically uninsightful when it comes to both the nature, and perhaps more importantly, the practice and performance of a skill. Given the obvious fact that Aristotle was a consummate expert in what he did, he seems to have had little insight into expertise. (He is not alone in this among experts, of course.) Consider, just for a moment, a gloss on his foremost argument against the thesis: since virtues are concerned with how and why one acts, while skills are concerned with what one makes or produces, virtues are not skills (*NE*, 1140a). The problem with the argument lies in what might be called its "consumerism": Aristotle says skills are valuable for what they make. This, however, neglects the point of view of the practitioners of skills, the experts and the artisans. From their point of view, part (and perhaps the most important part) of the value of a skill is the very practicing and performance of it. Aristotle's argument is unsound when the value of expertise *to the expert* is taken into account; for them, the finished product is never as compelling as the current project. And while giving a full account of Aristotle's arguments is itself enticing, taking it on first would be methodologically out of order. The first project is to get a good grip on what a thesis like "virtues are skills" means, as well as an understanding of (at least some of) its implications. Only after this can we do justice to a critique of it.[4] This means putting aside various rejections of the thesis, and focusing on a positive presentation of it.

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2 This ignores the Skeptics and Cyrenics who would not endorse any positive philosophical thesis. For more on Aristotle on here, see Chapter 2 of Bloomfield (forthcoming).

3 A noted exception here is Linda Zagzebski who attends to and rejects the thesis in her book *The Virtues of Mind* (1996). The thesis has not been ignored by philosophers who specialize in Greek philosophy. See, for example, Annas (1995, 1993, forthcoming); Irwin (1995, 1977); Striker (1986). Nussbaum (1994) contains an extended discussion of the analogy between philosophy (ethics) and medicine, a paradigm skill.

4 Aristotle's rejection of the thesis that virtues are skills leads him into problems concerning the status of philosophy. Either he must say it is not a skill or that practicing it is not a

The Epistemology of Virtue.

The moral virtues were, for the Greeks, courage, *sophrosune* (often translated narrowly as "temperance"), justice (as found in just people and not institutions), and wisdom, and these were seen as skills to be learned, in the manner of medicine and navigation. Indeed, the Greeks schools thought that living well is itself a skill to be learned. The idea that the virtues are skills was most extensively developed in the early Platonic dialogues, especially in *Gorgias*, and by the Stoics, but it bears note that Plato held on to the thesis until his last dialogues like *Statesman*. In *Gorgias*, Socrates argues that the moral virtues are skills, where these are contrasted with knacks, like the knack of flattery. In particular, he argues that rhetoric, a form of flattery, is not a skill for it lacks an underlying *logos*, or theoretical/intellectual structure, which all skills have. Flattery aims at the pleasure of the person being flattered, period. Thus, acts of flattery are justified solely by the fact that they produce pleasure in those being flattered. In cooking, considered by Plato to be another form of flattery, when one adds a spice, the only reason that can be given is that this spice will please the palate. If leaving it out were more pleasing, then it would be left out. The same can be said with fashion design, often translated in the *Gorgias* as "ornamentation". If the cut of a dress is not pleasing to the eye, then it is bad fashion; but there is no underlying rationale that justifies what superficially pleases the eye. So, designing fashion is importantly different than the skill of making clothes that are well constructed, durable, comfortable, etc. (Irwin, 1979). Ornamentation is contrasted by Plato to the designing of an exercise regime for an athlete. In devising training or nutritional programs to improve people's health, what is added or taken out is not determined by what will be pleasing; the choices are justified by an understanding of the workings of the human body. An individual prescription concerning training or nutrition can be justified by how its effects lead to the better functioning of the body: there is an underlying *logos* to training and nutrition, based on the mechanics and functioning of the body, that fashion design and cookery lack. Thus, for Plato being a trainer or nutritionist reflects having an understanding of the principles defining the highest functioning and nutrition of the body. Being an expert trainer or nutritionist is being a possessor of a skill. Similarly, practicing flattery is to be contrasted with practicing philosophy, which was thought by Plato to entail being virtuous (cf. note 4). A virtuous act can be justified by the principles and rules which are conducive to living well, where what constitutes this is understood in terms of having knowledge about the kinds of creatures human

beings are and what makes us flourish. *Eudaimonia* has a *logos*, and being virtuous is being an expert in a skill: the skill of living well.[5]

Knacks lack *logoi*, while virtues and skills do not. A way to further the understanding of *logoi* is to examine the role of rules in virtues and skills and the notion of an exception. Beginners follow rules differently than experts, and we see this as being the case in both virtues and skills. As beginners, we learn first by learning general rules and principles, but upon gaining a deeper appreciation for the field we are learning, and for the principles of the field themselves, we learn to see that in particular cases a general rule must be broken. Part of what makes an expert an expert is knowing when it is correct to break the rules; experts are able to recognize exceptions.[6] For example, a nutritionist may recognize that a tendency to anemia will necessitate the

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virtue. The treatment of contemplation in Book X of *NE* makes his problems even more complicated.

5 Famously, there is a deeply anti-hedonistic streak running through the *Gorgias*. And whether or not rhetoric, fashion design, or cookery are in fact skills or are merely flattering knacks is not to the point. Nevertheless, the following is a telling quote to support the thesis that cooking is merely a knack, from an article by Deborah Hornblow in the *Hartford Courant* (6/17/97) about a well-respected local chef named Bernie Gorski:

"Gorski's peripatetic maneuverings[!] have been prompted by an appetite for learning and culinary adventure, a literal 'feeling in the middle of your body that pulls you toward it', he says, pointing to the space between his heart and his stomach. 'You just follow it', he says, shrugging amiably."

If one balks at the notion that the great chefs have mere knacks, consider juggling which is perhaps a clearer example. What is important is the analysis of skills and how they differ from knacks; the former have an intellectual structure that the latter do not.

6 Another important difference between beginners and experts in skills is that the former need props or supports of which the latter have no need. And what emerges here is a lesson in normative ethical theory. One of, and perhaps the most important difficulty in getting a handle on the nature of a morally good, happy, or *eudaimonistic* life concerns the role of external goods. To be as brief as possible, Aristotelians think that virtue is necessary but not sufficient for happiness, and that external goods like some money, good health, freedom, etc. are also necessary for happiness. Socrates and the Stoics think that virtue is sufficient for happiness. There seems to be little room for compromise on such an important issue, but if the virtues are skills then at least we can make sense out these matters somewhat. If it is to be expected that beginners will need props which experts do not, then we can explain the debate by noting that experts are self-sufficient in ways that beginners are not. In learning to live well, people who are only on their way to being virtuous may need help and (external) support in coming to possess the virtues. To take the grain of truth in Maslow, it will be hard, if not impossible, to *learn* to be moral when one is starving. On the other hand, once people become virtuous, nothing can harm their good life; nothing can be taken away that will affect a virtuous person's *eudaimonia*. Thus, (contra Aristotle) if Priam was truly virtuous, then his misfortunes do not affect the quality of his life. Aristotle's faith in common sense deems such a conclusion absurd (though it certainly would not be to Socrates), but this is chiefly due to the fact that those who produce common sense are not fully virtuous. It is only to be expected that as these folk set common standards for morality, they build in the need for external supports, goods, and other moral crutches, all which seem to them necessary for being happy. The situation is simply different for the virtuous. My thanks to Kurt Meyers for helping see this important point aright.

breaking of some general rules of good eating, and such exceptions will be justified. Similarly, while the general rule not to lie is to be followed in the vast majority of cases, when Nazis are at the door demanding to know where the Jews, gypsies, or homosexuals are, the exceptions to the rule stand clear (*contra* Kant).[7]

So, the rules or principles of a *logos* are central to a skill, and we can perhaps best further our understanding of the importance of *logoi* to virtues as well to skills, by considering *phronesis*, often translated as "practical rationality". While it is rarely noted, *phronesis* has two parts: diagnosis and problem solving, the former preceding the latter.[8] Diagnosis will be addressed more below; for the moment let us begin with how problems are solved. Skills are teleological in that they have a goal or a purpose and the general principles of solving the problem of attaining goals are constituted as *phronesis*. *Phronesis* itself is not a skill, for it has no *logos* of its own. Rather, it is embodied within the *logos* of each skill. Being an expert in practical rationality is being an expert in solving problems that comes with a general understanding of how things (bodies, machines, psychologies, nature) are organized, and how they work. *Phronimoi* have a general understanding of the principles of mechanics and the tendencies of nature. It is, for example, by thinking like those who are practically rational that we look for the simplest solution to a problem or answer to a question, while avoiding Rube Goldberg contraptions and explanations. Ockham first nicked himself while day-dreaming about *phronesis*. Thus, while *phronimoi* are not automatically experts in all skills, they do know general principles that will make them sensitive to which aspects of a new situation are salient to an explanation of what is presently going on.

The role of *phronesis* in virtue ethics is, of course, well known. When one is placed in an ethical situation, calling for, say, bravery or temperance, one must figure out the appropriate action, and act in a way that can be justified. Ethical situations are problems in need of solutions, where a solution is a virtuous act. Perhaps examining one or two particular skills in a little more detail will be helpful in seeing the kinds of epistemic processes that are involved in skills generally.

The typical examples of skills discussed by the Greeks are those of being a navigator or a physician. There are of course many others not familiar to the Greeks, e.g. being a chess player or an auto-mechanic. Two other skills that are *prima facie* radically different from each other are being an animal tracker and being a yogi. Here are quotations from two experts explaining

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7 For more on proper function and univseralizability, see Bloomfield (1998).

8 Sometimes the recognition of a problem must precede its diagnosis or its solution, but recognition will be ignored here.

portions of the *logos* of their skills, which despite their differences sound very much alike. First, the tracker:

> As deer walk, they place a front foot down and the corresponding hind foot comes forward to set down almost directly on the track just made by the front one. What appears to be a single deer track is in reality the hind foot overlapping the front. Close study in wet snow or mud reveals that the hind foot falls a fraction of an inch either outside or inside the front. This frequently indicates the sex of the animal. Bucks have bigger chests and smaller hips; does have a wider pelvic structure, due to the birth canal, and narrower chests. Therefore, if the hind foot falls a fraction of an inch *inside* the print of the front foot, you're probably following a buck (Wensel, 1996).

Now, the yogi:

> People do not pay attention to the correct method of standing. Some stand with the body weight thrown only on one leg, or with one leg turned completely sideways. Others bear all the weight on their heels, or on the inner or outer edges of the feet. This can be noticed by watching where the soles and heels of the shoes wear out. Owing to our faulty method of standing and not distributing the body weight evenly on the feet, we acquire specific deformities which hamper spinal elasticity (Iyengar, 1977).

In this instance, we have two disparate skills with similar *logoi*, based on the similarities of the effects of natural selection and physics on the evolution and physiognomy of deer and human beings. But the similarities between these and the *logos* of civil engineering can also be discerned. And there are obvious similarities to be found between tracking animals and navigating ships. The same can be said of similarities between being a yogi, being a doctor or a midwife.

This is not an argument suggesting that the domains of all skills somehow overlap with each other. (Nor is it an argument for the "unity of virtues" thesis.) The point is that there are similarities in the intellectual processes involved in becoming an expert in a subject matter; there are rules to follow if one's goal is to master a field. There are also similarities in the ways that experts think when practicing their skills. The same epistemic processes are used by experts in different skills in the analysis of the domains of their respective fields. Practical rationality, *phronesis*, figures in them all. The same epistemic processes, those constituting *phronesis*, are used by the morally virtuous in determining the proper course of action in moral situations.

Thus, the fact that *phronesis* is essential to being an expert in the virtues as well as to being an expert in a skill is a powerful reason to regard the former as a subset of the latter. In considering the fact that the intellectual structure guiding moral behavior conforms to *phronesis*, while also informing the intellectual structure of empirical (and philosophically non-suspect) bodies of knowledge like medicine and navigation, we find a powerful reason to regard moral knowledge as a subset of the kind of knowledge one gains in learning

any skill. And this is itself reason to think that moral knowledge is not epistemically tendentious, and moral epistemology poses no special problems.

Further confirmation for this conclusion comes when examining the other aspect of *phronesis*, namely diagnosis. When one is placed in a situation in which one's skill is being called upon, one must first evaluate the situation before one figures out the appropriate thing to do, or solves the problem. This initial evaluation is a diagnosis. Before doctors decide upon a treatment, they must first figure out what the patient's condition is. Before navigators decide which direction to head, they must first figure out where they are. Before chess players decide upon a move, they must first figure out the relative strengths and weaknesses of the configuration of pieces. This "figuring out" process is diagnosis. In order to perform diagnosis, one must have an understanding of the *logos* of the skill being called upon, as well as experience in picking out the signs or symptoms of the current situation; that is, picking out the elements of the situation that are salient to identifying and solving the current problem. One must diagnose the situation. Thus, diagnosis is our epistemic access to the facts of the matter.

How exactly diagnosis works is not fully understood, but there are some elements of the story that are fairly familiar. Perhaps most importantly, as noted, diagnosis proceeds by the "reading" of signs or symptoms: abduction is performed from the inferential basis of the signs to their underlying causes. In inspecting a situation with expert eyes, some features of the scene stand out as salient, insofar as the expert has learned that these are the features that are in some relevant way causally related (or perhaps logically related) to the underlying nature of situation, such that a catalogue of them will help lead to a determination of the proper course of action, given that particular set of circumstances. Salient features, signs, or symptoms stand out as such to experts for (at least) three reasons: (i) their general understanding of how things work; that is *phronesis*; (ii) their understanding of the principles which are operative in a given situation; that is their knowledge of the *logos* of situations of a kind; and (iii) their experience in dealing with or observing such situations in the past.

There are numerous ways that signs and symptoms can be related to the underlying nature of a circumstance. A brief discussion of some of these relationships should prove helpful, if only to illustrate the complexities that need to be worked out by a full blown theory of diagnosis. Signs arise due to underlying causes, yet some signs are more closely linked to their causes than others. Thus, the most "direct" link between a sign and an underlying cause is a constitutive link: the numbers of rings in a tree trunk is its age in years, while also being a sign of its age. Similarly, a sharp angle found in the femur between hip and knee joint is, and is a sign of, a broken leg. Slightly less direct is when the underlying cause directly gives rise to the sign. Small stress fractures in a bridge's support will be a sign of a lack of structural

integrity to the eye of an engineer, who may, just by the location of the fractures, be able to infer where the problem is. Similarly, we know that being out of breath after climbing a flight of stairs is a sign of an unhealthy cardiovascular system. Slightly less direct than this is when the sign is itself already a natural reaction to, or effect of, the underlying nature of the situation. So, a fever is one way the body's immune system reacts to certain problems. Thus, a fever is a sign that one is sick, but note how this differs from being out of breath. (A fever is a sign that the body is attempting to heal itself; easily running out of breath is not.) Note also that signs like fevers are too indirect, by themselves, to make a precise diagnosis from: the body might respond to a variety of disorders with a fever. All we can know from a fever alone is that there is a problem of the type to which the body reacts with a fever. Even less direct signs than these are used by some experts, but individually, these provide even less insight into the circumstances. A chess player lays out a trap with a lure for an opponent. If the opponent takes the bait, this is either a sign that he has been taken in by the trap, or a sign that he is setting a trap of his own, or a sign that he is trying to cover up a weakness or cause a distraction, etc. There seems to be, in some types of situations, an inverse relationship between the directness of the links between signs and their causes and the amount of knowledge about the situation that can be garnered by observing those signs.

This is only one example of the ways that signs and causes can be related to each other, and obviously, the relationships between signs, underlying causes, and the epistemology of skills are manifold. Untangling them all here would be next to impossible. What is important at this point is that each skill will have its own diagnostic processes. And part of being an expert in a skill (that is having knowledge of its *logos*, possession of *phronesis*, and experience) is having the ability to "read" the proper signs.

To apply these thoughts directly to moral epistemology, suppose we find ourselves confronted by the infamous cat-burning punks. Regardless of what we eventually decide to do, given what we see, we must first make our evaluation of the situation. We have learned as a general moral principle that it is wrong to cause needless suffering; indeed it might be that there is a constitutive link between causing needless misery and being vicious, as there is between the number of rings of a tree and its age. (Though one swallow does not make a summer and (most times) one cruel act does not make a vicious person). We also see that the screams of the cat and the glee of the punks seem to indicate that there is needless suffering going on here if, upon considering all the surrounding circumstances, we find them unable to provide any special pleading for this to be something other than it appears. We diagnose that the punks are doing something wrong for fun (perhaps fun specifically because it is wrong), and given the further general principle that those who do wrong for fun are vicious, morally bad people, we thus ascribe

the property of *being vicious* and *morally bad* to the punks. Our epistemic access to the *viciousness* and *badness* of the punks (or perhaps to those states of their characters) is through diagnosis.

What we then (ought to) do, whether we merely pass judgment, intercede, dispense desert, etc., will depend at least in part on who we are—parent, patron, policeperson, or priest—and thus what our obligations and duties are as well. But, epistemically, this is the same sort of process that a doctor goes through when he sees a friend who is out of breath after a flight of stairs, and concludes (makes the diagnosis) that the friend is out of shape. Whether the doctor chooses to speak to the friend *qua* doctor, or *qua* friend, or say nothing at all, will depend mostly upon the nature of the friendship and what the doctor's obligations really are in this particular case. In any case, our epistemic access to the facts that define the domain of a skill is through the diagnostic elements of *phronesis*. How one ought to behave in the diagnosed situation, determining what one ought to do, is the realm of problem solving. Importantly here, we see the intersection of knowing that and knowing how in the possession of skills and virtues: diagnosis is knowing that a certain type of situation obtains and knowing how is knowing what to do at that point.[9] Intervening on behalf of a second caught cat, about to be burned, might be courageous or reckless. Doing nothing might be cowardly (much of this turns on the contingent particulars of the situation). Similar examples could be given for the other virtues as well. In any case, however, acting virtuously entails being able to determine what is going on and what to do about it. And, thus, adopting the thesis that virtues are skills hands us a viable moral epistemology by reducing the problem of moral epistemology to the analysis of the epistemology of diagnosis and problem solving employed by doctors, navigators, and chess players. And while understanding fully the epistemology of skills in general is itself a daunting task, it is not a particularly moral task.[10]

There is (at least) one further point in favor of adopting the thesis that virtues are skills and (at least) one other lesson to be learned from it. First, the point in favor. Assuming that there is such a species of knowledge as moral knowledge (something that expressivists may want to deny), one may be either a moral realist or irrealist; either way, the question of how we gain moral knowledge looms challengingly. Irrealists (and constructivists can be included here) can think that moral propositions are descriptive, as opposed to expressive or imperative, and thus are apt for truth and falsity. Such irrealists think that the truth makers for moral propositions are in some way essentially dependent upon our conceptual abilities, moral practices, conventions,

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9 My thanks go at this point to an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to the distinction between knowing how and knowing that. This insight runs deep.

10 For more on diagnosis and moral epistemology, see Bloomfield (forthcoming).

or agreed upon attitudes, where none of these entail any "realistic" ontology of moral properties. (The best presentation of this form of irrealism in ethics is Horgan and Timmons, forthcoming.) For these irrealists, moral knowledge is possible, but it will not be knowledge of moral facts that are in some important way independent of our contingent ways of living. Realists, of course, think that there is moral knowledge, and the gravest challenges that have arisen for moral realists are calls for them to explain our epistemic access to (seemingly causally impotent) mind independent moral facts (Harman (1988), Wright (1992)). But regardless of whether or not the facts upon which moral knowledge is based are in some important sense mind independent, irrealists and realists alike must explain how moral knowledge arises. The fact that the present theory of moral epistemology fails to adjudicate in any way between metaethical theories of such different ontologies is a powerful point in its favor.

There is one other lesson to learn from the thought that the virtues are skills. The Greeks were unanimous (Aristotle too!) in thinking that our final end, whatever it is, is such that it is not for the sake of anything else, and that all we do, we do for the sake of it. (This, by itself, is a purely formal constraint, and does not entail any substantial thesis about the nature of morality or teleology (Annas, 1993).) They were also unanimous in thinking that our final end is *eudaimonia*. The disagreements were over the nature of *eudaimonia*. One might think that the intellectual virtues, whatever they are, are for the sake of *eudaimonia*, and thereby construe epistemology as a branch of ethics. (This seems to be the conclusion of Zagzebski (1996).) This however would be a mistake. If the virtues are a subset of skills, then the epistemology of skills, moral and otherwise, will be independent of any particular ethical theory; for while all skills have a *logos*, there is nothing especially moral about having one. (Hence arise the problems of *Hippias Minor*.) Indeed, many *logoi* have no moral content at all. Even though the pursuit of knowledge is, in the end, for the sake of living well, the analysis of the epistemology of skills is independent of the particular *logos* of our human *eudaimonia*. If this is not clear, consider the fact that were we radically different kinds of creatures, the elements of our *eudaimonia* would be different, though the epistemology of skills would remain the same. Thus, the epistemology of skills is independent of morality and ethics. And this is as it should be, for typically we think that moral knowledge, if there is any, is a species of knowledge. Thus, ethicists must turn to epistemologists for help in understanding the nature of moral knowledge, and epistemology fails to be subsumed by morality.

Pace Aristotle, it is true that none of the above constitutes a proof that the virtues are a subset of skills. Still, it is hard to imagine what such a proof would look like. At the very least, what the above indicates is that we can gain fruitful insights about virtue by looking carefully at skills. At the very

least, we find helpful analogies between virtues and skills. But, resting on the considerations surveyed and the authority of the collective voices of the ancient Greek philosophers, the thesis that the virtues are skills shall be hypothetically adopted for the remainder of the essay. In this way, we can see how it bears on epistemology in general, and in particular on the debate between internalists and externalists about justification.

Virtue Epistemology.

As a transitional topic between moral epistemology and virtue epistemology, a few comments on the role of the emotions in virtue seem apt. There are good reasons to think that our emotions can serve as an epistemic access to what we value. For example, one finds oneself angered at an insult directed at someone about whom one never really gave much thought; revealing that the person was more cared for than realized (Stocker with Hegeman, 1996). Fitting emotions into the framework of the moral epistemology just sketched above is fairly easy: when our emotional systems are in proper working order, we may use our emotional reactions to the situations in which we find ourselves as signs or indications of what is going on. (Obviously, moral psychologists, among others, have quite a lot of work to do in giving an account of what it is for our emotions to be in "proper working order".) Our emotional reactions can help us diagnosis a set of circumstances. If, say, we find ourselves not trusting or "feeling uneasy around" someone, though we may not be able to say exactly why, this should still be a sign to us to be consciously wary of the individual. We may emotionally react to a situation, and this reaction can give us insight into the situation itself. If this is so, then emotions are linked to situations as fevers are linked to certain sicknesses; signs like emotions and fevers may be natural and appropriate reactions to stimuli. (Notice the rough-grained, but nevertheless helpful, texture of the diagnoses made solely from both a fever or not trusting someone.) Obviously, emotions interact with our evaluative systems in myriad ways, and the above is just one of many configurations.

Aristotle thought that the moral virtues entail an integration of our cognitive and affective faculties. One might think that emotions ought therefore to be built into the intellectual virtues, as Aristotle built them into the moral virtues. (This would obviously be the case for someone who thought that the intellectual virtues are a subset of moral virtues, like Zagzebski (1996).) But there are reasons to avoid this conclusion. *Prima facie*, there might be reasons to keep affect out of epistemology. But more importantly, we pre-theoretically think that passions and emotions can work against our making sound and well thought out decisions, so that virtuously careful thinking, where the goal is knowledge, will be reflective and dispassionate thinking. One might then conclude that the emotions can have no role at all in the intellectual

virtues. But one need not go so far. One in possession of the intellectual virtues need not discount emotions totally, but they must be employed properly. An exact story about how this is to be done would be a long one, but an illustration might presently suffice. If one is a judge, one very well might be moved by feelings of pity or anger toward the defendant in the course of a trial. And the information that these emotions may provide to the judge might be valuable to the judge when rendering a final verdict. But this is compatible with saying that it would be epistemically wrong of the judge to be in the grips of such emotions when actually deciding upon a verdict. The reason for this is that impartiality is an intellectual virtue for judges, and emotions often interfere with impartiality. So, while emotions are helpful and valuable to us, especially morally but also epistemically, we should not take them to be a necessary feature of the intellectual virtues.

Virtue epistemologists have staked their claim on the thought that there are certain intellectual virtues which, when developed and effectively operative, are central to our knowledge gathering techniques. The general hope of virtue epistemologists is that we can understand justification, the elusive final goal of epistemology, by understanding the kinds of dispositions that the intellectually virtuous person possesses. So, virtue epistemology has two general tasks. First, there is a need to characterize intellectual virtues in general. Second, there is a need to determine exactly what the intellectual virtues are. There are (at least) two ways of proceeding as well. One may begin with some paradigm example of an intellectual virtue and build the characterization of all intellectual virtues on this model. Unfortunately, there is too much discrepancy among the opinions of what should count as a paradigm: should we select intellectual courage or a prodigious memory? The better way to proceed is to try to characterize the virtues generally, and then specify what is special about the intellectual virtues themselves, and only subsequently identifying them. This latter method is begun here, though no attempt will be made to draw up a list of intellectual virtues.

We begin by seeing that the virtues are a subset of skills. But not all skills are virtues: the skill of being a cobbler is not one we would wish to deign a virtue (though there is an excellence or *arete* to be obtained in making shoes). The skills in which we are interested are those that lead to true beliefs, those skills that are the intellectual virtues. Thus, to make the point clear, what is presented here is a brand of virtue epistemology, even though the initial focus is on skills *per se*. And characterizing virtues as skills does put us a long way down the path of understanding the nature of the intellectual virtues themselves, for skills have their own epistemic flavor. It does not, however, help settle the question concerning which skills get to count as intellectual virtues. The main disagreement about the general characterization of intellectual virtues between virtue epistemologists concerns whether the intellectual virtues are like courage and open to introspective access, or, on

the other hand, whether they can be cognitive processes like a good memory which are non-introspectible. This is the debate between internalists and externalists about justification played out in the field of virtue epistemology.[11]

Many have found the debate tiresome, in so far as it has seemed that the two sides have been talking past one another. One conclusion that can be reached is that there is no single sense of "justification" and that it is a concept which has no unified account.[12] This would not spell the doom of epistemology by any stretch, but it would make epistemology a fairly disparate study which investigates the various but unrelated ways that beliefs can be (become) justified. From a theoretical standpoint, however, it would be preferable to find "justification" to be helpfully univocal. There are three ways such a resolution could occur. The first two are for either the internalists or the externalists to show the other that one of the two positions is the correct one, capturing or highlighting the "deepest" or "essential" aspects of justification. The last way would be to show how the nature of justification does not turn on the distinctions between internalism and externalism; in this way the debate over the role of first person constraints is shown to be beside the point. It is this last resolution that emerges from the thesis that virtues are skills. What confers justification upon a belief is its emerging as a product of the *logos* of one (or many) of the skills that comprise the final list of intellectual virtues. Some of these skills like perseverance, will be amenable to internalist treatment, others like a good memory will not. But these differences do not inform the account of justification in the least. And this is as it ought to be: what we are able to access is surely determined by our contingent human introspective abilities and such contingencies should have nothing to do with an analysis of justification *per se*. Making the case out for these claims will comprise the balance of this paper.

Characterizing the positions of internalism and externalism is a difficult bit of business. The debate is manifold in aspect and there is no single canonical representation of it. Both internalism and externalism come in a number of different varieties (approximately the same number as that of philosophers who have seriously considered the issue), and there are even possibilities for

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[11] For an internalist virtue epistemology see Montmarquet (1983) (1993), and Zagzebski (1996). For externalist virtue epistemology see Goldman (1992) and Plantinga (1993).

[12] Sosa fits into this category, insofar as he thinks that there are two kinds of knowledge, animal (with no internal access) and reflective (with internal access). This is very similar to the position being offered here, insofar as it does not force a choice between internalism and externalism. Sosa's position does force one to accept two kinds of knowledge, while accepting that virtues are skills allows one to hold that there is only one kind of knowledge (that based on skills) but that some skills will be contingently "reflective" while others are contingently "animal". I take this to be an improvement on Sosa's handling of the matter, not an argument that he has gotten it wrong.

It is worth noting as well that Alston also thinks that justification has no univocal sense. See "Epistemic Desiderata" in his 1989 volume.

mixed positions: externalist internalisms and internalist externalisms. Here, hopefully, is a rough characterization that will helpfully further the present dialectic. Internalism about justification states that, at least in part, what confers justification upon a belief is a particular ability that justified believers must possess which gives them some epistemic grasp of, or access to, why a belief is justified; typically, in order for a belief to be justified, the agent must be able to adduce reasons for why the belief ought to be deemed justified. Internalists think that agents must be able to account for their justified beliefs. Externalism, on the other hand, is typically defined in contrast to internalism: specifically by denying that there are either "first person" constraints placed on when a belief is justified, or special "account-giving" abilities that agents must possess in order to have justified beliefs. A popular form of it is the view that a belief is justified when it is produced by a reliable process, where "reliability" is understood to be a matter independent of our first person epistemic ken. Making the distinction between the two sides effective but as weak as possible, one might say that internalists tend to stress the activity of justifying more than externalists.

Returning to the thesis that the virtues are skills, we can see how adopting it makes the general debate between externalists and internalists more understandable by explaining how the debate between them arises, while also clarifying its intricacies. Beginning at the beginning, the Greeks seem to have adopted an internalist stance toward skills, while an externalist variant is easily derivable.

Plato's own position on this score is not pellucidly clear; especially if we take the following two quotations from the *Gorgias* to be exemplification's of it.

> I call it [flattery] not a skill but a knack, because it has no rational account (*logos*) by which to bring forward what it brings forward as being whatever they are in their nature, so that it cannot say what each thing's explanation is. I do not call a skill anything that is unreasoned (*alogon*) (465a).

and further into the dialogue:

> I said that medicine has enquired as to the nature of what it cares for and the explanation of the things it does, and can give a rational account of each of them. But as for the knack concerned with pleasure, it goes after the object of all its concern entirely without skill, enquiring not at all about the pleasure's nature or explanation, and quite without reason, making practically no distinction, and preserving by practice and experience only memory of what usually happens (501a).

Most interesting about these two quotes, borne out well here in Annas' translation (1995) and in other translations as well (1953, 1994), is the oddness of the antecedent of the pronoun "it". "It" is what "gives the account". Now, typically we think that only people can give accounts, and so these passages

have been interpreted as supporting what can be understood as an internalist's understanding of a skill (Annas (1995), p. 232–33). According to this interpretation, part of what it is to be an expert in a skill is to be able to give an account of one's actions; one must be able explain the nature of the situation in which one is acting and be able to give justifications (which will issue from the *logos* of the skill) for the judgments one makes and the actions one performs. On the other hand, one who has the knack of flattery needs no understanding of the nature of the pleasure that flattery aims at, and merely preserves, by practice (habit?), the memory of what usually works or fails to (cf. note 5). Practitioners of knacks, like jugglers tossing bowling pins, go on "without reason".

And this fits our characterization of internalism quite nicely: at least part of what confers justification on a belief is the ability to give an account, based on expertise of the relevant skill, of why the belief ought to be deemed justified. At the very least, those who are skilled must be able to actively give, to articulate, the justifications of their beliefs and actions; they must have access to the *logos* of the skill, and explain how this knowledge is being brought to bear on the particular situation. But the above passages can also be read as saying that the skill has the justifications built-in, so that practitioners of the skill are justified, regardless of their ability to articulate the underlying principles of the skill even though they are there. This interpretation is engendered by examining the strange use of "it" in the quotes. If it is experts, that is people, who are to give the account, why call them "it"? The passages themselves do not refer at all to the practitioners of the skills. If we take the quotes literally (perhaps too literally?), they read as if it is the *practice*, and not the practitioner, that can or cannot (or does or does not) "give the account". If this is the case, then the best way to interpret the passages is as if they are saying that with skills, and not with knacks, there are accounts there *to be given*, where those accounts exist independently (metaphysically) of anyone's *giving* them. The rational account, the *logos*, is a part of the skill, and thus it is there to be used in the articulation of the justification of a belief or an act. But the presence of the justification, due to the *logos*, does not by itself entail that an expert in the skill can actually articulate the justification. Given this externalist reading of "to give an account" in terms of "an account being there to give", an expert can be justified without being able to give a justification.

We should not be overly concerned with Platonic exegesis here. Indeed, most likely it is simply too anachronistic to pursue the question of whether Plato, or any other ancient philosopher, was a latent internalist or externalist.[13] What is important is that we can see how the debate between the inter-

[13] I would not be willing to push the ambiguity of the antecedent of "it" just discussed too far, and I am all but convinced by Annas (1995) that Plato was in fact an internalist

nalists and externalists evolves smoothly out of the adoption of the thesis that virtues are skills. The thesis itself can be interestingly and informatively read as supporting both internalist and externalist interpretations.

Broadly, the question at hand is whether the ability to give an account of the *logos* of an intellectual skill in its application to actual cases is necessary for the possession of an intellectual virtue. All should agree that such an ability is sufficient for such possession, just as all agree that open-mindedness, impartiality, etc. are fit to be considered intellectual virtues. The debate, then, narrowly centers on the status of the cognitive faculties that are the results of natural selection, for it is these to which we typically lack introspective access. The question is whether or not cognitive faculties like sight or memory should be deemed "virtues" or "skills". To deem these as such seems like opting for an externalist understanding of skills and justification, where this means that the mere presence of a *logos*, underlying the cognitive faculty, in which a justifying account may be had, is sufficient to consider that faculty an intellectual virtue and the beliefs it produces justified.

Now, the presence of such *logoi* underlying these natural cognitive faculties is undeniable, for uncovering them is the business of neurophysiologists, cognitive psychologists, philosophical cognitive scientists, philosophers of mind, and natural epistemologists alike. Noting that these pursuits are clearly (at least) largely "scientific" in character should be enough to convince one that there are principles underlying the workings of these cognitive faculties, and that these are deserving of being called *logoi*. And noting that much of these *logoi* are still yet to be discovered should be enough to demonstrate that while these faculties have *logoi*, when we, as epistemic agents, employ these faculties we are not thereby in a position to give an account of them. The *logoi* are there to be articulated, yet we may not be able to do so.

It might, at this point, seem as if we have reached the same sort of stalemate we find in the general literature on internalism and externalism. The internalist maintains that the presence of these *logoi* are not, by themselves sufficient to confer the status of "skill" or "intellectual virtue" on these cognitive faculties. The externalist maintains that the presence of these *logoi* are sufficient to confer this status on these faculties. And there seems to be no adjudicating information to decide the issue. There are, however, further considerations to bring forward.

These center on a set of curious facts about experts that has been uncovered by modern psychological research (Chi, et al (1981), Larkin et al

(biting the anachronistic bullet, and ignoring the fact that Annas is not involved there in an explicitly epistemological dialectic).

(1980), Chase and Simon (1973)). Very often, when experts make diagnoses and act based on them, they do so in a way that they describe as having the phenomenological flavor of an intuition.[14] For an example from morality, recall the case where we do not trust someone, though we cannot say why this is so. The psychological research has centered on how master chess players often just "see" what the right move is and how medical doctors make their diagnoses automatically. If one then asks the expert chess player how she knew what the right move was, she can then go and give an explanation or justification in terms of the rules of chess and actual positions of the pieces on the board. It would incorrect to infer from this, however, that the chess player makes decision she does using the process which she may articulate *post facto* as the justification of her move. Research shows that the process she articulates is very often not the one actually used; experts are often less able to give an account of the justification of the decision making process they actually use than are beginners. Those who know best sometimes know least how they know.

Some detail concerning the differing ways that beginners and experts use rules will prove helpful. Note that we cannot tell the story about using intuitions when we are talking about beginners. When beginners are trying to figure out what to do, they very well might have to run serially through the rules of chess and various outcomes of a variety of possible moves in order to make a decision. It is easy to imagine beginners learning by "thinking out loud", literally talking through their justification for the move they will finally choose, as part of the process by which they make the choice. The beginner learns by being able to give, have access to exactly the kind of account that many internalists would recognize as being necessary for justification. But the expert intuitively excludes many of the possibilities that the beginner must explicitly rule out. And it is the expert that cannot give the account of the actual process used, in the spirit of externalists who say that actively giving such accounts are not necessary for justification. Interestingly, the expert can reconstruct a literal account of why a possible move was ruled out, and it might be identical to the account that beginners give as they reach the same decision, but the epistemic processes by which novice and expert decisions are actually reached may be importantly different.

Chess, however, is only one skill with one *logos*. Beginners and experts employ this same *logos*, but do so differently (though both may give identical accounts of the *logos*). Plus, and most importantly, both beginners and experts can have knowledge (or at least justified beliefs) about chess. (They may, for example, know or justifiably believe why a certain move will lead

[14] Perhaps a caveat is in order about these "intuitive" processes. The sense of "intuition" here is quite different from the *a priori* intuitions posited by moral intuitionists like Sidgwick, Moore, Ross, and Prichard. The relevant intuitions for virtue epistemology and moral epistemology are *a posteriori*.

to checkmate.) Both beginners and experts may have beliefs that are equally justified, and what allows for their justification is that both are practicing the same skill; but importantly, they do so in different ways and at different levels of proficiency. The justification issues from the skill itself; whether or not we have access to, or can give an account of, the justification is irrelevant.

Epistemology is the study of justification *per se*, and if we are pursuing the question of the general conditions under which a belief is justified, then we should be looking toward the nature of skills themselves, and leaving behind the question of accesses and accounts. It so happens that we, as *Homo Sapiens*, have turned out to have the skills we do and the accesses to them we do as a result of natural selection. These are contingent matters, independent of the nature of justification itself. A single belief may be justified in a number of ways (some accessible and accountable, others not), but what confers the justification upon a belief is that it issues from the practicing of a skill. Of course, there would remain a subfield of epistemology that concerns itself with a particularly human form of knowledge, shaped by our contingent cognitive abilities as well as our ability to give accounts of, or have access to them. But we can leave the internalist/ externalist debate either to those interested in this particularly human epistemology, where our contingent abilities are divvied up as fit for either "internalist" or "externalist" stories, or we may leave it aside all together.[15]

One may balk at this result by saying that this would entail that even the least introspectible of our cognitive faculties, like sight, merit the title of "skills" or "intellectual virtues". But when sight is looked at in conjunction with the considerations adduced above, noting that the underlying *logos* of sight comprises a sub-discipline of cognitive science (and other empirical pursuits), the argument against sight being a skill has less force. The argument for thinking that it is a skill becomes stronger when we realize that in many ways we must learn how to see. We must learn that objects may appear small to us for two different reasons; they may in fact be small, or they may be large objects at a distance. The same can be said for hearing noises loud and soft. We must learn to balance ourselves standing and to use our proprioceptic or kinesthetic sense, that is, the sense that allows us to touch our fingers together with our eyes closed. Perhaps most importantly, we learn how to understand language, and part of how we do this is through our non-

[15] It might seem as if the debate has not been shown moot but resolved in favor of externalism, due to the fact that the faculties lacking introspective access are found to be skills. But this, I think, is a dialectical mistake. Historically, externalism arose as a denial of internalism, and thus the debate was cast in terms of the relation between access and justification. Claiming that justification issues solely from the nature of a skill, makes the relation between justification and access, the debate between externalist and internalists, besides the issue. Were the present resolution to take the form of externalism, it would have ended up looking much like Sosa's (see note 12).

introspectible language acquiring device, which has a *logos* of its own. (Assuming Chomsky is pushing linguistics in the right direction.) Sight may not appear to be a skill to us, for we (as human beings) normally learn it by a very different method than we learn other skills like chess. But just because there are different methods for obtaining different skills (or perhaps even the same skills across species), we cannot conclude that only methods of a certain kind can lead to the possession of a skill. If these cognitive faculties must be learned, and if they have an underlying *logos*, which confers justification of beliefs generated by them, then the fact that these accounts cannot be given does not, by itself, rule them out as being skills. Learning how to ϕ, in accordance with an underlying *logos* of ϕ-ing, is sufficient to call "ϕ-ing" a skill, and skillfully formed beliefs are justified.

In conclusion, some of the results of adopting the thesis that the virtues are skills have been sketched here. There is much work left to do. For instance, there is a debate among virtue epistemologists, relating to general concerns about skepticism, and concerning whether or not the intellectual virtues must succeed in being truth conducive (Sosa (1991, chapter 13), Montmarquet (1993, 1987)). And there is a debate among the Greeks that closely mirrors this modern epistemic debate. Assuming that the virtues are skills, the Greeks argued about whether they are stochastic skills or whether they guarantee success. (For the modern account of this ancient debate see Annas (manuscript) and Striker (1986).) It should be clear by now that modern debates in virtue epistemology may be helpfully illuminated by attending to the ancients. For the present, the ancient thesis that virtues are skills has served us in (at least) two important ways. It allows us to see that moral knowledge is not problematic due to any *sui generis* reasons; a moral agent's knowledge is on as firm a footing as a doctor's, navigator's, or chess player's knowledge. Being moral is a skill, and so morality is apt for the same epistemology that works for other skills, calling for *phronesis* (including both diagnosis and problem solving), an understanding of the appropriate *logoi*, and experience. Taking virtues to be skills also allows us to see how debates develop among virtue epistemologists about what the intellectual virtues are, e.g. whether perseverance or sight is a better model of an intellectual virtue. If virtues are skills, then we also can see how the more traditional internalist/externalist debate has infected virtue epistemology and how the matter may be resolved. And finally, and non-negligibly, it affords us a deep understanding of intellectual virtues *per se* and a way to move epistemology, as the study of the nature of justification *per se* much further along.

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