

# Problems for virtue theories in epistemology

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**Abstract** This paper identifies and criticizes certain fundamental commitments of virtue theories in epistemology. A basic question for virtues approaches is whether they represent a ‘third force’—a different source of normativity to internalism and externalism. Virtues approaches so-conceived are opposed. It is argued that virtues theories offer us nothing that can unify the internalist and externalist sub-components of their preferred success-state. Claims that character can unify a virtues-based axiology are overturned. Problems with the pluralism of virtues theories are identified—problems with pluralism and the nature of the self; and problems with pluralism and the goals of epistemology. Moral objections to virtue theory are identified—specifically, both the idea that there can be a radical axiological priority to character and the anti-enlightenment tendencies in virtues approaches. Finally, some strengths to virtue theory are conceded, while the role of epistemic luck is identified as an important topic for future work.

**Keywords** Virtue epistemology · Virtue ethics · Internalism · Externalism · Third force · Phronesis · Axiology · Pluralism · Anti-enlightenment · Universalizability · Eudaimonia

## 1 Introduction

In recent years virtue theory has shown a resurgence in ethics—coming to be seen as a ‘third force’ offering an alternative to both deontology and consequentialism. Given the structural similarities between positions in normative ethics and normative epistemology, it is unsurprising that virtue theory has likewise now

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emerged to challenge the dominance of internalism and externalism in epistemology. This paper develops some major criticisms of virtue theories—mostly, though not exclusively, in epistemology. These criticisms apply where the virtue theories in question are conceived as genuine alternatives to internalism and externalism (in ethics: to deontology and consequentialism). Where, however, virtue theories are not conceived as a third force—are not offered as a radical axiological competitor in epistemology or ethics—these critical points will carry less weight; indeed, the paper explicitly details some respects in which virtue theory, so-conceived, offers us important insights.

A note is due about how internalism/externalism is understood in this paper. I follow Plantinga, Chisholm and many others, in taking the relationship between the internalism/externalism distinction in epistemology and the deontology/consequentialism distinction in ethics to be a precise one. With this tradition, I see issues of epistemic justification as axiological issues—issues concerning ‘the ethics of belief’ (Chisholm, 1956; Clifford, 1947). With this tradition I take the internalist conception of justification to be a species of *epistemic deontology*—seeing epistemic justification as consisting in the discharge of one’s *intellectual duty*, as thinking *responsibly*, reasoning as one *ought*. The access restrictions characteristic of internalism I take, with this literature, to be derivative not basic, following after this deontic conception of justification under the assumption that *ought implies can*: that one cannot be *responsible* for things one has no awareness of, control over or access to. With this literature I take externalism to map rather to consequentialism in ethics—deciding questions of epistemic justification on the basis of whether the belief was acquired in a way that maximizes the actual (not expected) probability of its truth in some way: its objective connection with the world, regardless of whether that connection can be foreseen by the believer. I must presuppose familiarity with this conception of the internalism/externalism distinction and cannot devote further space to defending it; others in the literature have done so impressively and at length<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> I would endorse the account found in the first chapter of Plantinga (1993) as representing the best single overview of the internalism/externalism distinction and its connection with deontology/consequentialism; and as glossing the understanding of these terms I am operating with here. With Plantinga and others in this literature, I see a purely access-driven notion of the internalism/externalism distinction as a distracting over-simplification. So, one should see the internalists’ *access* restrictions as following after and deriving from the more basic issue—their conception of justification as responsible (dutiful, diligent) thought (following, that is, from the assumption that we can’t be *responsible* for things we have no *awareness of or control over*). And the externalists’ basic notion of justification in terms of an *objective* relation to the truth (in terms of reliability, etc.) means that they *cannot* restrict our justificatory ground to only things we have access to. This, then, on the assumption (shared by internalists and externalists) that *ought implies can*, means that one cannot have an externalist account of justification in terms of *responsibility* and cognate terms—at least, in anything like an ordinary sense of ‘responsible’, whereby one may only be blamed for things one should (and could) have been *able to do otherwise*. For these reasons, many externalists and internalists alike do not see ‘duty’, ‘obligations’, ‘oughts’ etc. as neutral terms that they will each compete to furnish accounts of, but rather as terms that are intrinsically internalist in their purview—*responsibility* etc., in contrast to *reliability* etc.; just as *internalism* is in contrast to *externalism* and *deontology* is in contrast to *consequentialism*. With many in the literature

## 2 Do virtues approaches give us a different source of normativity?

In deciding whether virtue theories represent a genuine third force in epistemology or ethics, a basic question is whether they offer us a separate kind of epistemic or ethical normativity—one which represents a distinct and undervative source of (here) epistemic value. Many, particularly among the earlier virtues-based accounts, do not appear to offer us a third and distinct justificatory kind; but instead belong squarely inside the externalist theory-family. With these accounts, reliabilism as such is allied to faculty psychology:

Whereas generic reliabilism maintains that justified belief is belief which results from a reliable cognitive process, virtue epistemology puts a restriction on the kind of process which is allowed. Specifically, the cognitive processes which are important for justification are those which have their bases in a cognitive virtue' (Greco, 1993, p. 415)

If such 'faculty reliabilism' were our notion of virtue epistemology this wouldn't lack interest, but it wouldn't be a new *source* of justification. Faculty reliabilism would be distinct only in the sense that, say, process reliabilism is distinct from 'J rules' reliabilism, which in turn is distinct from the counterfactual theory, and so on: each a different and competing explication of an avowedly *externalist* normative property. These are distinct theories all right, but they each belong within the externalist theory family, they offer that *kind* of justification.

However, virtues accounts do not only make appeal to such externalist notions. Many virtues-based theories seem to belong squarely within the internalist fold:

I have offered a teleological, but not a causal, account of the epistemic virtues, in which their suitability to judgments of praise or blame distinguishes these virtues (and their corresponding vices) from an externalist, causal, account [...2 pages..] These virtues are 'internal', first, in the sense that one typically has some kind of access to whether or not one is exemplifying them. ... Second, we can say that these epistemic virtues are 'internal' in their dependence on – or sensitivity to – the will. (Montmarquet, 2000 pp. 139, 141).

Again, if virtues epistemology were merely a new sub-variety of (now) internalist theory, it would not lack interest, but it would not have the fundamental interest that it would possess if it could offer us a separate and distinct *source* to epistemic normativity—if it offered a radically distinct property thereof.

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Footnote 1 continued

(including many in the virtues literature whose work I shall be discussing here) it is in this sense I shall take these notions; but a less compressed account of the distinction could itself take several papers, each longer than this: I must presuppose rather than defend an awareness of this conception of the distinction, and refer the reader to Plantinga for further expansion if desired.

But there are views which, with varying emphasis, combine the two approaches mentioned. In fact, these days, most virtue theorists pay at least lip service to such a ‘mixed’ account, including numbers amongst the strongest of ‘virtue reliabilists’ and numbers amongst the strongest of ‘virtue responsibilists’. Zagzebski—one of the strongest of virtue responsibilists—explains her mixed account thus:

A virtue has two components. The first is a motivational component and the second is a component of success in reaching the end of the motivational component ... When we say a person has a virtue we mean that she has a disposition to be motivated a certain way .. and in addition is reliably successful in bringing about the end of her virtuous motive. (Zagzebski, 1999, p. 106).

The distinction between ‘virtue reliabilism’ and ‘virtue responsibilism’ is due to Axtell, who seems to number most (all?) virtues theorists as proponents of mixed accounts. However, he concedes that Sosa, Greco, Goldman have their home in virtues *reliabilism*, whereas Zagzebski, Montmarquet and Code have their home in virtues *responsibilism*. He denies this is merely to re-badge the internalism/externalism distinction within virtues epistemology, claiming “the differences that these labels identify should not be exaggerated, since these two hardly represent anything like the extremes of internalism and externalism of the recent past in epistemology” (Axtell, 2001, p. 161)<sup>2</sup>. We shall see if this assertion can be made good; but on the face of it, having a mixed theory

<sup>2</sup> As indicated, I am taking over talk of ‘mixed’ theories from Axtell, Zagzebski and others—talk that has now become standard in the literature. A swift dismissal of mixed theories may be envisaged that is motivated by a conception of the internalist/externalist distinction I have already disavowed—namely that this distinction is all about *access*. On such a view, ‘mixed’ theories would not be entertained as a Third Force on the ground that they should be categorized simply as externalist—this because (in their externalist, ‘virtues-reliabilist’ aspects) they entail *less than complete accessibility* (with ‘externalism’ defined as just the denial of a complete *internalism*). This would be a stipulative rejection of mixed theories and I would not be sympathetic to it. For one thing, neither I, nor most virtue theorists, accept *access* as being the fundamental (rather than derived) core to the internalism/externalism distinction. For another, even were one to accept a purely ‘access’ based conception of the distinction, a similarly swift objection is equally possible in reverse: since the *internalist* (‘virtues-responsibilist’) component of a mixed theory will presumably entail *some* access constraints, we will have a less than complete *externalism*, which by stipulation could equally be defined as ‘internalist’ (with ‘internalism’ as just the denial of a complete *externalism*). The internalism–externalism distinction should rather be seen as existing on a *continuum* from the most strongly internalist theories to the most strongly externalist. Stipulatively converting this continuum into a categorical dichotomy closed under negation is unhelpful: we need to note *how* externalist (/internalist) a position is. As Chisholm noted, merely the requirement that a belief at least be *true* if it is to be knowledge is a *minimal* externalist constraint—but one hardly thereby wants to argue that all positions are externalist, including Chisholm (and Descartes, and Foley, and Locke ...). Zagzebski, for example, is strongly internalist in her general sympathies (far more so than Sosa, Greco, Goldman, etc)—but she nevertheless insists *some* (considerable) externalist requirements must be met. The ‘mixed’ position has it that an internalist component and an externalist component must each be met; where the former component has to do with an epistemic *responsibility* requirement and the latter has to do with a requirement of an *objective relation to the truth* (reliabilism say, or some comparably objective relation).

doesn't establish a new justificatory kind, it offers us a combination of our already established justificatory kinds. The challenge is whether any such conjunction—of two different justificatory kinds—can be a stable one. Does mixed virtue theory have the resources to elide these two tendencies into one property, transcending the bipolar opposition between internalism and externalism?

### 3 Challenge: what unifies the mixed accounts?

Those who hold to a mixed account, insist that we must conjoin the internal and external in appraising epistemic status. We must have *responsible* (dutiful, subjectively truth-conducive) cognition; yet we must also have *successful*, (reliable, objectively truth-conducive) cognition. For the mixed justificatory property to be present, each of what had hitherto been thought of as two separate species of epistemic justification is required.

This, though, threatens to leave the virtue theorist powerless to resist stock attacks from both the internalist and externalist literature. So, internalists will insist that the external component of the virtue theorist's mixed notion of justification is too strong for an acceptable notion of *rationality*, with epistemic (and ethical) agents being denied justification despite having been as rational (dutiful) as they could possibly have made themselves—that is, these internalists will object that reliable cognition is *not necessary* for rationality. And the externalists will claim the internal component of this mixed notion of justification is too strong for an acceptable notion of *knowledge*, with epistemic agents being denied knowledge despite having reliably attained the truth—that is, these externalists will object that responsible cognition is *not necessary* for knowledge. Here Greco makes the latter objection:

.. it seems clear that Zagzebski's account is too strong. ... Consider a case of simple perceptual knowledge: .. It would seem that you know that a large truck is moving quickly towards you independently of any control, either over the ability to perceive such things in general, or this particular exercise of this ability. Neither is it required that one have a motivation to be open minded, careful or the like. On the contrary, it would seem that you know there is a truck coming towards you even if you are motivated *not* to be open minded, careful or the like. (Greco, 2002, p. 296.)

Here Annas makes the former criticism, that the consequentialist (externalist) component of any mixed account will be too strong—in a discussion and criticism of Zagzebski's neo-Aristotelian conception of virtue, in this case as regards ethics:

The Stoic view is much clearer and more defensible than Aristotle's. Of course it is not up to me whether my action achieves the immediate target; but is it up to me whether I succeed or fail in acting virtuously...?

If it is not then it is not up to me whether I can become a moral person; and the Stoics are not alone in finding this an unacceptable position.

It is sometimes urged that we feel more admiration for the act which, as well as being virtuous .. actually does get its target .. but this seems not to be true. Take Socrates' defense speech in the *Apology* ... do we think of him as a pathetic loser because he failed to express the degree of deference to the jury that would have secured his acquittal? .. if anything his knowing refusal to do what was required to secure his immediate target makes us more convinced that he succeeded in achieving his overall aim of living a virtuous life. (Annas, 2003, p. 24).

The ethical view Annas is criticizing is here illustrated in a quotation that shows her specific target, Zagzebski, moving from the ethical to the epistemic case:

a person might be motivated by generosity and act in a way characteristic of generous persons .. say by giving money to a beggar on the street, but if it turns out that the beggar is really rich and is playing the part of a beggar to win a bet, we would think that there is something morally lacking in the act. This is not, of course, to suggest that we would withhold praise of the agent, but her *act* would not merit the degree of praise due it if the beggar really were deserving. The same point applies to intellectual acts. As Thomas Nagel has remarked, the Nobel prize is not given to people who are wrong (Zagzebski, 1999, p. 107).

The parallel to Annas's ethical criticism in the epistemic case, is that the Nobel prize is surely given to people who are wrong, as long as they are not *known* to be wrong, and they have produced a signal advance in their scientific field—or put another way, that objective success is *not necessary* for rationality. So, Newton was probably the greatest scientist who ever lived (the one whose *intellectual acts* merited the greatest *degree of praise*) still, he was wrong wholesale—as we now know.

In fact, despite being one of the strongest of 'virtue responsibilists' Zagzebski builds so strong an externalist criterion into her conception of 'virtue' that she then insists that acts of virtue entail truth. On that basis, she puts forward the definition that "Knowledge is a state of *belief* arising from acts of intellectual virtue" (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 271). (A state of belief arising from acts of intellectual virtue must already be true, mark you—and so to preface 'truth' to 'belief' in this definition would be pleonastic). Thus, presumably, we must conclude that Newton had no beliefs about physics that arose out of acts of intellectual virtue.

In this, Zagzebski only gives especially plain expression to a problem which will re-surface should even considerably milder externalist requirements than *entailment of truth* be built into the notion of an act of virtue. The older internalist/externalist literature identified two major points of normative assessment: a person's internal (practical, subjective) justification

and their external (theoretical, objective) justification. Zagzebski—and all of her fellow virtue theorists, whether more ‘responsibilist’ or more ‘reliabilist’—clearly discern these two species of justification, and discern them as possessing distinct properties<sup>3</sup>. Yet she, and they, insist that in our epistemology we elide these properties into one, all or nothing, metric of appraisal. Why? After we’ve finished paying lip service to this superlative term of epistemic excellence—after we’ve stipulated that the *virtuous* believer cannot be in error—we’ll just need to retrieve our former internalist/externalist distinctions to identify different normative properties of agents: the *rational yet blamelessly wrong* (but not, you understand, ‘virtuous’) cognizer; and the wholly, objectively, truth conducive (but irrational and blameworthy) cognizer. Our erstwhile separate (internal and external) species of justification are clearly still conceptually, and often actually, distinct; and it is hard to see how there is anything more it would be to be to be a distinct normative property. We can pour all that is good, epistemically or ethically, into a single term, but how little point there is to that, when we only then have to disjoin the component parts of this success term after the fact.

Moreover, familiar arguments establish that this success term is more disjunctive even than indicated—in fact, that there is a double dissociation here. So, another stock objection of externalists against internalists is that a cognizer may have dutifully, responsibly, done all she is able to make herself justified, yet still be wildly in error—that responsible cognition is *not sufficient* for knowledge<sup>4</sup>. And another stock objection of internalists against externalists is that a cognizer may be entirely reliable and truth conducive, yet still she may have been a thoroughly, lamentably, irresponsible cognizer—that reliable cognition is *not sufficient* for rationality<sup>5</sup>. A comparably vast literature argues to the parallel position in ethics: the stock examples of the agent who flouts his moral duty yet brings about the good; and the agent who dutifully discharges her moral obligations, yet brings disastrous consequences in train.

That is, from the older internalist/externalist literature we encounter two quite separate questions: Internally justified? (Yes/No). And externally justified? (Yes/No). This gives us two points of assessment, mapping a grid of four positions in logical space. (Or, if, as is preferable, these contrast-pairs be

<sup>3</sup> In Zagzebski’s theory we see the two distinct component properties marked thus: “an act is an act of virtue A, if and only if the agent is praiseworthy for doing the act and the act is successful in bringing about the end of the A motivation...” (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 248). So, for cases like the Newton example she will acknowledge the praiseworthy component (Newton’s *acting virtuously*) yet deny the success component (Newton’s performing an *act of virtue*).

<sup>4</sup> Few philosophers since Descartes have seriously maintained the contrary. The stock externalist objection is that perspectival limitations on cognizers renders inevitable that some will lack access to the resources to be objectively justified—despite having done all they can to discharge their intellectual duties.

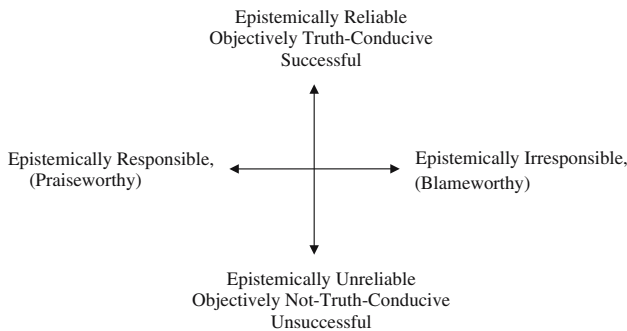
<sup>5</sup> Bonjour’s reliable clairvoyant is just one among very many stock examples here (Bonjour, 1985, p. 45).

thought of as continuous rather than discrete, a space marked out by two bipolar dimensions<sup>6</sup>) (Fig. 1).

Keeping these two axes of epistemic appraisal as just that: two, yields a richer form of epistemic appraisal (far richer) than the form forced on us if we elide these issues into one categorical distinction. We can still mark the success term employed by the virtue theorists, it is one of the positions available in logical space (the top left quadrant above, whether conceived of as a directional tendency in a coordinate space, or as one category out of four). We can even represent the domestic disputes between virtue theorists—in the preferred emphasis of the particular mixed account they favor. Thus, one can sail more ‘NNW’ or more ‘W by NW’ as one’s approach would have it (Fig. 2).

Certainly in argument and exposition one sees virtues theorists separate out the internalist/externalist justificatory properties in epistemology (or, for the case of deontology/consequentialism: in ethics); but they do so illicitly—they have collapsed the more sensitive measures into the cruder, and (crucially) claim a conceptual, axiological, priority to the cruder. To employ some psychological terminology: they have a *type* not a *trait* theory. Since the more sensitive, two dimensional measure can always be collapsed down to the less sensitive single categorical measure, but not vice versa, there can be no priority to virtue ethics—quite the reverse. There are no advantages to such an asymmetrical loss of clearly important information, and there is a clear lack of theoretical unity to the ‘virtuous’ success term and the justificatory property it stands for. Appraisal of the epistemic (or ethical) status of agents requires taking a *separate* register to situate them on *both* the orthogonal dimensions identified above—for, in categorical terms, there is the possibility of them occupying any of the four positions identified.

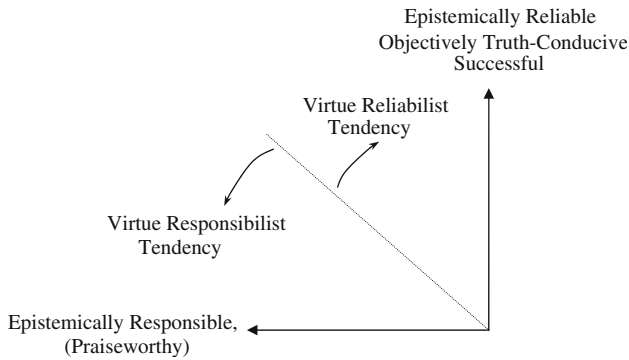
In this section we have seen Greco argue against Zagzebski on the grounds that the sort of epistemic normativity involved in knowledge attributions (the sort of evaluative status that knowledge requires) does not require success on



**Fig. 1** Two axes of appraisal for epistemic agents

<sup>6</sup> Internalism and externalism are not best seen as categorical positions but as tendencies, ranged on a continuum, from the most strongly internalist theories to the most strongly externalist. In particular, internalism cannot simply be defined as the complement of externalism—or vice versa.





**Fig. 2** Two tendencies in mixed virtue theories (expanded top left quadrant, above)

two dimensions—or at least does not to anything like the extent Zagzebski thinks. Greco’s ‘Truck’ example is used against Zagzebski to maintain that a subject may have perceptual knowledge on largely or entirely objective (reliabilist) grounds alone. And Annas’s ‘Socrates’ objection (and my expansion of it) is the obverse of this: the claim that *rationality* in epistemology (and the *subjective* discharge of obligations in ethics—the Right as opposed to the Good) does not require (in the ethical case) an *objective* attainment of the Good—or in the epistemic case, an *objective* connection to the Truth. It is defining for a genuinely ‘mixed’ virtue theorist that they hold *both* of these components must be satisfied for us to be virtuous, and it is defining of a genuine ‘third force’ virtue theorist that their axiology be *primitive* and not derived from two *prior* species of normativity. But then it looks as if the virtue theorist’s preferred success state can and must be represented in our two (*prior*) dimensions, whereas the converse is not the case: these two dimensions cannot be fractioned out of the virtue theorists singular, purportedly basic, success term.

#### 4 Can character unify the virtues account?

A claim found throughout the virtue literature is that somehow the priority of *character*, of the *agent* in this theory, serves to unify and motivate the elision of internal and external justification into one success term—and in this way, somehow permits the virtue theorist to finesse the extended literature and debates surrounding externalism and internalism. It is not at all clear how. A *person*-based theory precisely takes the resources of the person as its starting point. It precisely considers the first-person epistemic perspective and says: given only this, *what should one do in the meantime?* An agent-based, person-based, character-based approach, unless stipulatively and extrinsically augmented with unmotivated add-on requirements, will only itself underpin an account which addresses the regulative, practical, desideratum for epistemic theory. Unless, that is, an ambiguity in the sense of ‘character’ or ‘agent’ being

put forward here is used merely to reprise the very problem it was put forward to solve. ('Agent' as *agent* proper? Or as more-or-less reliable information-processor?)

Unless the ambiguity found formerly in the sense of 'justification', is thus regressively reintroduced into just that notion of 'agent' which had been advanced for the purpose of unifying these senses of justification, a *Person/Agent/Character*-based virtue theory will be intrinsically 'responsibilist' (deontic, internalist)—as indeed, the ordinary resonance and normative connotations of calling someone a 'virtuous' character suggest:

men everywhere give the name of virtue to those actions, which amongst them are judged praiseworthy; and call that vice which they account blamable... (Locke, 1975, II:28; in Goldman, 2001, p. 30.)

*Person/Agent/Character* based virtue theory precisely doesn't *unify*, much less *finesse* the internalism/externalism distinction, it comes down heavily on one side of that distinction. One can stipulatively elide the two species of justification into one; but *nothing* in the notion of a character-based axiology as such motivates or justifies a coalescing of the internal and external—marketing statements not to the contrary.

## 5 Deontology and the agent

One should also dispute the extent to which virtue theorists can make good the recurrent claim that they have more title than deontologists to take the *person*, the *agent*, as their unit of normative assessment—as, say, when Battal [/Battaly] asserts that

Cartesian systems focus on the evaluation of beliefs or propositions believed. [As opposed to virtue epistemologists, who] .. [I]ntend to oust the basic Cartesian framework, and shift the focus of evaluation to the intellectual character traits of the agent (Battal, 1998. p. 1.)

The deontologist however, appraises (more severely than any other ethics) the moral agent for good or evil; and likewise the internalist epistemologist for epistemic justification. This was found in internalism/deontology from the first, and it would be a travesty to represent it as extrinsic to the view in question. So, try to eliminate the agent from the actual Descartes' account, as Battal/Battaly's mythical Cartesian is supposed to do:

if *I abstain* from giving *my judgment* on any thing when *I do not perceive it* with sufficient clearness and distinctness, it is plain that *I act rightly*. . . But if *I determine* to deny or affirm, *I* no longer make use as *I should* of *my free will*, and if *I affirm* what is not true, it is evident that *I deceive myself*; even though *I judge* according to truth, this comes about only by chance, and *I do not escape the blame* of misusing my freedom; for the light of nature teaches us that the knowledge of the understanding

should always precede the determination of the will. And *it is in the misuse of the free will* that the privation which constitutes the characteristic nature of error is met with. (Descartes, 1911, p. 176, my emphases.)

Deontologists certainly appraise the person via their acts, just as internalists appraise the agent via the ways they acted to acquire or maintain their beliefs—but this, as will later be argued, is precisely as it should be.

## 6 Pluralism and the nature of the self

It indeed starts to look a potential criticism of the *virtues* based account that it has lesser resources than the internalist/deontologist has in bringing about that the agent should be the axiological terminus, the locus of value-ascription—whether positive or negative. For the virtues epistemologist will have a plurality of particular virtues and vices, with the problem (often strangely celebrated as ‘virtue’) of such neo-Aristotelian views being that no generalist, uninomic assessment of value drops out of an epistemically problematic situation<sup>7</sup>. There are just a plurality of equally basic and incommensurable virtues on the balance sheet and that’s it: these cannot be summed (even in principle) to a bottom line. How does the *agent* then become the primary source of epistemic value? *The* virtuous character isn’t primary if there are many *sui generis* virtues at war within such. These virtues threaten to be quite as fragmentary as the propositions the supposed (straw man) opponent of Battal [/Battaly] focus upon. The Aristotelian will wave his hands at this point and make noises about *phronesis*—‘practical wisdom’—but this is patently a cipher for the work left undone by his account rather than any resource showing how it may be done<sup>8</sup>.

Note that something close to this issue emerges in the long history of faculty psychology within the empirical, psychological domain. If faculties are all there is (the Gall/Thurstone/Binet ‘patchwork quilt’ approach) then an issue arises which does not obviously arise for the Fodor/Spearman/Flourens approach—whereby specialized, dedicated modules feed unidirectionally into, and in the service of, a CPU. This issue concerns the unity and executive

<sup>7</sup> That many ‘hard cases’ in epistemology (or ethics) might defy reduction to a decision procedure of impersonal generalist rules one can and should concede. This would indeed tell against any conception of internalism/deontology conceived as a *system of rules*. This is not, though, the most defensible conception of internalism/deontology—which is best seen not as a system of rules, but as any axiology committed to a fundamental, *sui generis* ‘ought’ (c.f. footnote 9 below). Notice also that it is quite possible to reject the idea of an epistemic decision procedure without thereby claiming that there is an axiological priority to *character*.

<sup>8</sup> As Simpson caustically comments: “This is where Aristotle appeals to the virtue of prudence (*phronesis*). The mean is what prudence determines to be the mean. This doctrine has struck many readers as singularly unhelpful. What we want is not a discussion of the faculty which does the deciding but of the criterion by reference to which it does so.” Quite. (Simpson, 1992, p. 510).

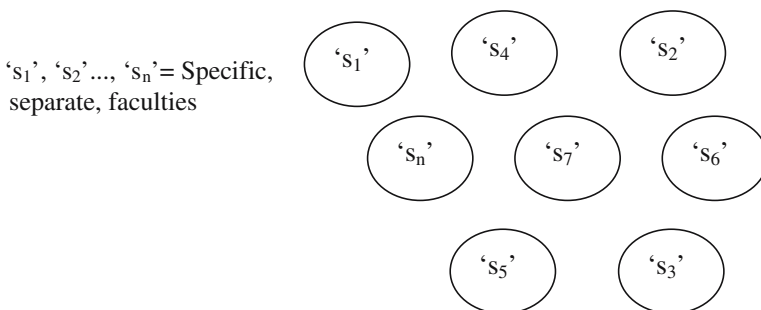
coordination of the self. How are the parts which comprise the self coordinated into one? (Fig. 3).

If *phronesis* were the magic word that solved the problem of the unity and coordination of the self, then one would, as noted, want a pretty substantial account of it. If ‘*phronesis*’ is what unifies the virtues into a self, apt for axiological appraisal—epistemic or moral—then in doing our normative epistemology investigation of the separate modules becomes of greatly lesser importance than investigating the nature and status of this *phronesis* (a point sometimes carelessly conceded). So, where, in which ‘faculty’ does *phronesis* occur? In no faculty? Or all? Or in the dialectic (how, where, by which rules, or no rules) between them all? Aristotle, unfortunately, appears to be all things at once here. One wants to know how *phronesis* adjudicates between competing claims to intellectual goods or ills; how it decides judgment under uncertainty; how it coordinates the components of a life well lived. If nothing substantial can be said about this—nothing that is not bland, gestural and platitudinous—then why not stick ‘*phronesis*’ in a box (labeled ‘CPU’, or *action commune* say) and, with Fodor, honestly shrug one’s shoulders to say the epistemic equivalent of that therein lies ‘semanto-magic’?

In many respects Binet embraced this gestural and unexplicated approach to *phronesis*—speaking vaguely of a ‘faculty of the common sense’ which loosely links up all the otherwise disparate faculties. However, this line becomes altogether more problematic for one who, with Binet, remains a faculty psychologist ‘all the way in’

intelligence is not a single indivisible function with its own particular essence,.. it is formed by the harmonious combination of all the minor functions of discrimination, observation, retention etc. to which we have attributed plasticity and the capacity for growth.. (Binet, in Fancher, 1985, p. 78.)

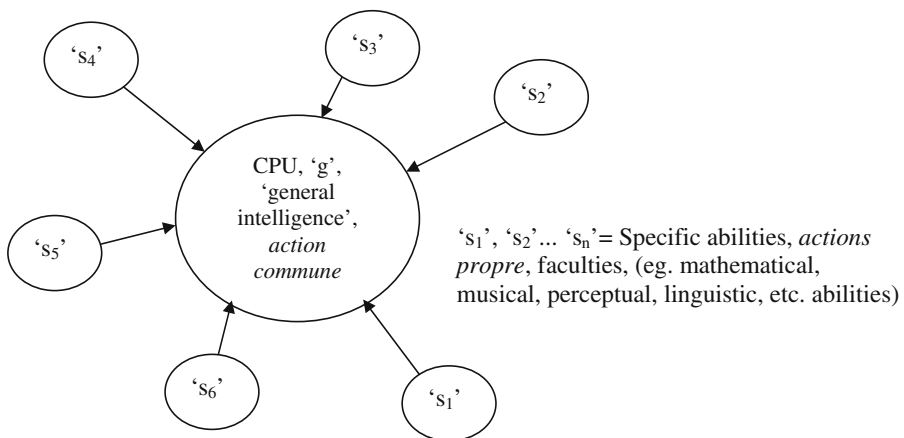
And how do we get this ‘harmonious combination’? Binet talked loosely of a faculty he simply called ‘judgment’ or ‘good sense’ (Fancher, 1996, p. 419). A *real* faculty? To be placed on all fours with the others it had been supposed



**Fig. 3** The Thurstone, Gall, Binet, conception of faculties (note: the nature of ‘arrows’ [connections] between specific faculties is precisely the point of controversy)

rather to knit together? Hardly, one supposes, on pain of regress; but if not, what? Surely not a dedicated, central, executive, ‘faculty’—for that becomes precisely the position of Fodor, Flourens and Spearman that is opposed (Fig. 4).

Or put it this way, how would any such gestural emphasis on an unexplained and irreducible ‘phronesis’ differ from the position of one who adhered to an extreme internalism (like Foley, say): holding that the nature of ego-centric rationality defies reduction (in particular *rule based reduction*<sup>9</sup>) despite the fact that the peripheral—e.g. perceptual—processes may very well be specified say, computationally, or otherwise externalistically? Call *phronesis* responsible, dutiful meta-reflection on all the first-order calls of duty that face us—all the competing demands of the first order virtue-reliabilist modules. Suppose that not much more that is general across all agents can then be said, bar hand-waving and platitudes. How is this different from any internalism worthy of the name? All the work of the regulative, action-guiding, *practical desideratum* is precisely done by ‘practical wisdom’—by *phronesis*. Where are the pluralist virtues in this scheme of things? *Axiologically* they will be of decidedly secondary importance—if, indeed, they have any normative epistemic importance at all. *Axiologically*, all the work is being done by one, central, ‘faculty’: *phronesis*. This is then precisely not a faculty psychology in any *epistemically significant* sense.



**Fig. 4** The Fodor, Spearman, Flourens conception of faculties (note direction of arrows)

<sup>9</sup> Some virtues epistemologists try to deal with this challenge by attributing to their deontic/internalist opponents a necessary commitment to a *rule based* approach—as when (Greco, 2001, p. 139) claims: “in contrast, [to deontology] ... virtue theories need not require that knowledge be governed by rules”. He then acknowledges, in a footnote that appears to entirely vitiate his argument, “deontological theories are commonly characterized as duty-based or obligations-based, rather than as rule-based..”. Quite. Some externalisms/consequentialisms are themselves rule based (Goldman’s ‘J rules’/rules-utilitarianism). And some deontological/internalist positions *aren’t* rule based. What matters is the *source* of the normativity, not its surface form.

Any sensible internalist will disavow the peculiar early 20th century commitment to first person introspective access to the processes of perception, memory, etc. So any sensible internalist will admit solely as *output* the information given him by his more-or-less reliable perceptions, memories etc. and then take his task to be how he moves on from all these outputs—not yet knowing which are reliable which not—to work out *what he should do in the meantime*. This task answers to the practical, regulative desideratum. One who satisfies it may perhaps be said to have ‘phronesis’ if you must. But any satisfactory knitting-together of the virtues looks to require the supreme ‘virtue’ of internalist justification—of responsible thought.

## 7 Pluralism and the goals of epistemology

We saw problems in the previous sub-section concerning pluralism and the nature of the self. But there is a problem for those who are inclined towards ‘mixed’ accounts, which surfaces not at the level of the self, but at the level of the self’s goals. There is an intrinsic tension between the radical, irreducible pluralism of goals in virtues-based accounts (which can lead to ‘particularism’ in ethics) and the monism and generalism of most consequentialist accounts. Consequentialism/externalism in ethics and epistemology has in each case one ‘thin’ goal: the Good/Truth. Notwithstanding Aristotle’s dubiously consistent remarks about *eudaimonia*, it is extremely hard to see how this can be simply compatible with a radically virtues-based account. So, Goldman, a virtue-epistemologist only in the early ‘faculty reliabilist’ sense, takes issue with what he sees as the essentially pluralist nature of the newer, Aristotelian, ethics-influenced virtue epistemologists; reaffirming the idea that his ‘virtue’ epistemology is a species of externalism:

The principle relation that epistemic virtues bear to the core epistemic value will be a .. consequentialist one. A process, trait or action is an epistemic virtue to the extent that it tends to produce, generate or promote (roughly) true belief. ... Some proponents of ‘high church’ virtue epistemology might find elements of consequentialism or deontology anathema to their hopes for a distinctive, virtue-based epistemology. By ‘high church’ virtue epistemology, I mean a form of virtue epistemology that models itself closely after virtue ethics, which many theorists view as a rival to ethical consequentialism and deontologism. ... In this I depart from some virtue epistemologists such as Linda Zagzebski .. (Goldman, 2001, p. 31).

Goldman clearly is merely a ‘virtual’ virtue theorist. That is, he is a surface, (first order) virtue theorist, where each intellectual virtue is in the service of *truth*—the ultimate, higher-order goal, the *source* of his virtue’s epistemic normativity. Goldman’s virtues are no more axiologically ultimate than his ‘J rules’ were. In the latter case we had a surface, first-order deontology,

ultimately of instrumental value; in the former, a surface, first-order virtues theory, but in each case the ultimate value is actual, objective, truth maximization.

Goldman, as indicated, contrasts his position here with Zagzebski. However, Zagzebski herself approaches this anti-pluralist sentiment—but from the standpoint of taking a *deontic* rather than consequentialist monism as the ultimate, higher-order axiological source. Despite emphasis on the *separate* virtues, she says

Ultimately, it is the behavior of persons with *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, that determines right acting and justified believing, as well as one's moral and intellectual duty and the other evaluative properties of acts and beliefs. For the sake of the unity of the self, it is important that there be forms of these concepts that apply to what a person *ought or ought not to do all things considered*. The virtue of practical wisdom is, among other things, the virtue that permits a person to mediate between and among all the particular considerations of value in any given situation, and to act in a way that gives each its proper weight. Another set of definitions .. can be given that replaces 'a virtuous person' with 'person with *phronesis*' in each of the above definitions. .. an act is *right all things considered* just in case it is an act a person with *phronesis* might do in the circumstances. Parallel definitions can be given for a belief that is *justified all things considered*, and for the definitions of a praiseworthy act. The definition of an act of virtue can be amended to include what a person with *phronesis* would do... (Zagzebski, 2000, p. 175.)<sup>10</sup>

'Phronesis' is now in the driving seat: it is the sole axiological source, the higher-order normative kind. For Zagzebski, the ultimate source of normativity is internalist: "what a person *ought or ought not to do all things considered*". For Goldman, the ultimate source of normativity is externalist. No serious 'third way' is distinguished as to the source or 'kind' of epistemic justification: either an *actual* or an *intentional* truth-directedness. We have internalism or externalism, not a third, genuinely alternative source of justification.

## 8 Morality and the claimed priority of character

If virtues approaches are to offer us a radically distinct source to normativity, these approaches must accord a metaphysical priority to character in their axiology—something the more recent, neo-Aristotelian virtue theorists have been right glad to do. Value (ethical or epistemic) is not specified

<sup>10</sup> *Phronesis* appears now to be all good things at once—both one virtue among a plurality of others, and queen of all the virtues: a uninomic value concept which, if we grant it, would seem to do all the work you like. In this, Zagzebski is following squarely in the footsteps of Aristotle, in whose work such notions as 'phronesis' and 'justice' seem to broaden or narrow in scope quite wildly, as the demands of argument would have it: sometimes appearing to explicitly replace his pluralism with a uninomic account, and sometimes quite definitely not.

independently of character. Specifically, it is not specified by *actual* or *expected* acts, beliefs, rules, or processes. Character comes first—metaphysically, not just epistemologically.

Actions, then, are called just and temperate when they are such as the just and temperate person would do. (Aristotle, 2000 II, iv, 105b).

What then is this person? By which marks shall we find him? The answer follows immediately:

But the just and temperate person is not the one who does them merely, but the one who does them as just and temperate people do. (*Op.Cit.*)

Rightly, few modern readers will be satisfied by such circularity. The challenge to this position is to ask what is it to be a good person, if not to be set up right to *do good things* regularly, and for the right reasons. Prior must be the idea of good acts, of doing the right thing: the character which is setup correctly to do these things (whether *actually* or *intentionally*) is thereby good (*/right*)<sup>11</sup>. We get internalism or externalism as an account of the *source* of normativity; we do not have any ‘third way’ that is *sui generis*—that can radically, fundamentally, surpass this distinction.

Notice that to deny thus, a fundamental axiological priority of character over act, does not require any anti-realist dispositionalisation of what it is to be a good character (à la behaviorism). So it remains correct to say that character is *cause*, as to its good or bad *effects*, (it is *causally* prior, and a real, verification-transcendent thing). However, the virtuousness or viciousness of a character requires us to accord a *conceptual* priority to at least the *intentional* object of that character’s acts: with doing (or trying to do) right or wrong. The intentional object of action must be specifiable prior to character. I become virtuous for trying to do the right, as best I can apprehend this. If my character is set up to do the right as best I can apprehend this (plus, for the externalist component of the mixed account, the additional requirement that I can reliably apprehend and capture the good successfully) then I am virtuous. But the right must be *specifiable* prior to my character. The nature of my character isn’t criterial for what is right; what is right must be specifiable as *intentional object* (responsibilist virtue theory), just as what is good must be specified as *actual object* (reliabilist virtue theory) prior to fixing the moral nature of my character or success of my actions.

Nothing in these remarks need deny that, developmentally, we often learn about how to conduct ourselves by adopting role models, prototypes, exemplars—we doubtless do that, to a greater or lesser extent. The issue is

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle is typically difficult to pin down here. On the one hand, he says much that accords with what the ‘character rather than actions first’ modern virtue theorists defend. So he seems to oppose granting an axiological priority to the object of one’s actions when he says: “while production has an end distinct from itself, this could not be so with action, since the end here is acting well itself” [Nichomachean Ethics 1140b]. But this surely requires at least a *conceptual* priority to the *intentional* object of action—a point he concedes: “the first principle of what is done consists in the goal it seeks” [*Op. Cit.*].



whether, metaphysically not epistemologically, the virtuous character can be axiologically prior—in ethics or epistemology. What moral sense can be made of the claim that the virtuous character is and ought to be metaphysically prior? What of the *moral* appraisal of this view?

## 9 Moral objections to virtue theory

To invert the ‘actions first’ order of priority, and maintain a genuine conceptual, metaphysical priority of character over the actual or intentional object of action is *morally* wrong. It is morally wrong to maintain that *sui generis* what this person or class of persons do is good, and after that prior fact, fix what it is that is good on the basis of what these people do or say. To make the obvious challenge: suppose they did something actually or intentionally horrible? (To which challenge one can regrettably already see the no-true-Scotsman response looming<sup>12</sup>).

To maintain a genuine, *sui generis*, axiological priority of character is a strong form of moral essentialism. Such an intrinsically authoritarian outlook has been adopted at various times in history by many highly stratified societies—and notably by many religious cultures. It was a hallmark of enlightenment thought that it gave us the anti-essentialist resources to overturn such an approach, and with it, an overwhelming pressure towards generalism in ethics and epistemology. This was a signal advance in human moral and intellectual history—it wasn’t called the *enlightenment* for nothing. We first specify what it is to be good or bad—thus what it is to intentionally aim for these things and thereby do *right or wrong*—then we *look and see* who maximizes and who minimizes these moral properties: goodness, badness, rightness, wrongness. (Or, for the latter distinction, who *intentionally aims* to maximize them).

*Who* then maximizes these prior moral or epistemic properties becomes something we have to discover—by their acts do we judge them. It may *turn out* that our rulers, our religious authorities, the power elite—or alternatively, the slaves, the lower orders, the women, these other races, these other sexualities—do good or bad, right or wrong, as the case may be. We have to look and see. We quantify openly into the domain—we do not restrict our moral or epistemic properties to applying to this restricted sub-class of objects in the domain. If you have a prior, independent specification of moral or epistemic properties (acts, or processes of reasoning) then look to see which objects in the domain possess them, you have an ineluctable pressure towards the enfranchisement of those ‘objects’ in the domain (here, the domain of people) which possess these properties, yet have hitherto been denied their agency, rationality, knowledge, their status as free moral agents, their rights. If, instead, you have what the logicians counterintuitively call a ‘free logic’—of essentialist constraint on which objects can be even appraised for possession

<sup>12</sup> This dismal response is found throughout the *moral* [not epistemic] internalist literature—a literature which makes close connections with modern neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. For references and a comprehensive criticism see Lockie (1998)

of these moral or epistemic properties (that is, if the moral or epistemic properties are not specifiable independently of, and prior to, the objects to which they may apply)—then you have no such pressure to see these oppressed groups as free moral or epistemic agents. They cannot be appraised for these moral or epistemic properties, since these properties are intrinsically applicable to only this restricted sub-domain (the *free men* of *Athens*, say—albeit that even Athenian democracy was an advance for its time, quantifying more completely into the domain than its alternatives during that era<sup>13</sup>).

If a society is to have a ‘slave ethics’ (precisely *not* in the Nietzschean sense—that is, rather, an ethics that can stably coexist with slavery for whole eras of history and not threaten, or at least not *intrinsically* undermine this institution) what would its characteristics have to be? Clearly it could not provide a prior, independent, general specification of moral properties, then for us to appraise all objects in the domain for possession of these properties (free men of the state, of other states, slaves, other classes, women etc.) Over time this would be to inevitably and irresistibly undermine the institutional inequality in question: we would be quantifying openly over all the objects in the domain, and with no essentialist constraints on the applicability of these axiological predicates, we would come to *discover* that these objects—these people—possessed the value properties in question, and thereby be forced to encounter the idea of the systematic enfranchisement of them.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Note, in his virtue ethics Aristotle was writing of and for an elite, not even restricted only to male freemen—to include the *demos*—but specifically for the nobility. Simpson (1992) persuasively argues that Aristotle felt that in his society this small class of essentially virtuous (‘noble’) characters could be specified first, and the virtues fixed after this fact—relative to this subject group.

<sup>14</sup> Read the Nichomachean Ethics and ask seriously why anyone would seek to resurrect this philosophy, whereby “what is just must be a mean, and equal, and *relative*, namely, just for *certain people*” 1131a—with an example of injustice being “enticing away slaves” 1130b (compare Mark Twain) and the claim that “..if the persons are not equal they will not receive equal shares; in fact quarrels and complaints arise either when equals receive unequal shares, or unequals receive equal shares” 1131a. [Political justice] “is found among people who associate in life to achieve self-sufficiency, people who are free and either proportionately [c.f. the foregoing] or arithmetically equal. So, between people who are not like this there is nothing politically just, but only something that is just by approximation” 1134a. “[T]here is no unqualified justice in relation to what is one’s own and a man’s property, as well as his child .. [these] are as it were, a part of him .. so nothing politically just or unjust is possible here ... There is more of what is just in relation to one’s wife than one’s children or possessions, since this is what is just in households, but this too is distinct from what is politically just” 1134b. “By transference of meaning and resemblance there is a kind of justice not between a person [free man] and himself but between certain parts of him. This is not full blooded justice though, but the sort one finds between a master and slave, or in the management of a household” 1138b. Russell’s grasp of philosophical history is widely scorned by professional historians of philosophy, yet I broadly agree in his judgment: “The Stoic-Christian view requires a conception of virtue very different from Aristotle’s, since it must hold that virtue is as possible for the slave as for his master”. (Russell, 1996, p. 172 and c.f. also Annas (2003) on the greater defensibility of Stoic views of virtue, as quoted above). “There is in Aristotle an almost complete absence of what may be called benevolence or philanthropy. The sufferings of mankind, in so far as he is aware of them, do not move him emotionally; he holds them, intellectually, to be an evil, but there is no evidence that they cause him unhappiness except when the sufferers happen to be his friends” (Russell, 1996, p. 177.) Finally, “to a man with any depth of feeling it [Aristotle’s ethics] is likely to be repulsive.” (Russell, 1996, p. 168).

If one is to have a slave system, a system of institutional inequality and injustice, then in the service of such a community one will still need an ethics (all societies need ethics); but one will need an essentialist ethics, one which prioritizes certain individuals or groups of individuals, not the *properties* (acts, consequences of acts) of *any arbitrary individual*.<sup>15</sup> With such an essentialist system there isn't, even in principle, either a consequentialist 'bottom line' of utilitarian calculus; nor yet a deontology of 'universal rules': the enlightenment universalization in whichever form is simply not a pressure on such a view. One has, at best, a nominal type of measurement—of loose general 'virtues' and 'vices'—and an intuitive appraisal of how these should square with each other's competing demands in a vague 'practical judgment' that is deferential to the prior axiological excellence of a particular privileged subgroup and their 'special perspective'. As was dryly remarked to the present author during a conference on moral philosophy at the height of the Yugoslav civil war: "when you look at the world around you, you don't exactly see a surfeit of people languishing under the yoke of excessive generalism do you?" Virtue ethics is an atavistic and immoral species of anti-enlightenment essentialism. Virtue epistemology likewise. An enlightenment epistemology (and ethics) can point proudly to its spectacular achievements.

## 10 Summary of criticisms of virtue theory

Versions of virtue theory see themselves as simply a sub-species of externalism/consequentialism; while others appear to be strongly internalist/deontic in emphasis; and others still (in fact many of the two foregoing *in addition* to their first point of emphasis) pay at least lip service to the idea that they are 'mixed' accounts. In respect of what are these all 'virtues' based accounts, and thereby different from, and an advance on, all the plethora of accounts already found arguing with each other across the entire internalist/externalist spectrum in epistemology?

Of the 'mixed' virtues accounts, many, despite very considerable differences of emphasis, claim that the *agent* unifies the two otherwise disparate and distinct species of epistemic normativity—dissolving the disputes of internalism and externalism in epistemology. Yet we saw that the title of 'agent-based' approach is only dubiously appropriated solely or chiefly by the virtues theorist; and so withheld from the internalist/deontologist. And the conception of 'agent' at play looks substantially to recapitulate precisely the disputes

<sup>15</sup> Thus, it is no satisfactory response to the objections here given, that a modern neo-Aristotelian position will reject any axiological priority to Aristotle's *specific* elite, so distancing itself from his specifically embarrassing views—accordingly to permit the enfranchisement of slaves, women, other social classes, etc. The point is, the systemic errors of Aristotle's pre-enlightenment views (his essentialism, his axiological priority of character over act) permits, systemically facilitates, and symbiotically coexists with one such authoritarian wrongness or other. (An analogy: a Marxist cannot distance himself from the *systemic* wrongness of his philosophy on grounds that his preferred dictatorship of the proletariat would be a benign one rather than that of Stalin, Mao, Kim Il Sung). The problem is not one of detail, it is one of structure and facilitating principle.

between internalist and externalist which it was supposed to surpass (agent as evolved, largely unconscious information-processor? Or conscious, free self choosing its cognitive conduct?)

To reduce two dimensions of epistemic appraisal to one categorical label is an intrinsically impoverishing and asymmetrical reduction of information. The internalist/externalist deontological/consequentialist distinction offers an intrinsically richer and more fundamental way of appraising and understanding epistemic and ethical value theory than virtue based (mixed) accounts, inasmuch as the latter can be represented by the former but not vice versa. Mixed accounts conjoin fundamentally distinct axiological properties. Attempts to combine these two distinct properties—internalist and externalist—are ad hoc and produce a mere label (the ‘virtuous character’) that lacks theoretical unity due to its lacking any unity as a property: one species or kind of justification rather than two.

There is a basic dispute between pluralist versus singularist virtues based accounts—one which in Aristotle and elsewhere is then joined by an entirely inconsistent ‘pluralist yet thereby singularist’ approach. When we see what actually divides such figures as Goldman and Zagzebski on the ultimate axiological underpinning of the virtues, we see a recapitulation of just the dispute between internalism and externalism: Goldman sees the virtues as of instrumental value—all in the service of *reliably* obtaining truth, to be assessed according to the ‘theoretical’ desideratum for their *objective* efficacy in doing so. And Zagzebski sees them as all needing their competing demands to be squared up by *phronesis* (‘practical wisdom’—the *practical* or ‘regulative’ desideratum) which, we finally learn, *alone* deserves the title of virtue.

Finally, any radically ‘character first’ axiology is iniquitous and morally wrong: the normative appraisal of character must come after a prior specification of actual or expected acts or reasoning processes.

## 11 What’s right about virtue theories

Although this has been predominantly a critical paper, it has defended three things that are importantly right about virtue theories—whilst denying that these things should be seen as exclusive or proprietary to virtues based approaches.

1. The ineliminability of *phronesis*. (i.e. Rules are not normally sufficient to decide justificatory status—are not a ‘decision procedure’).
2. The *agent* is the locus of normative assessment.
3. Pluralism of intermediate goals

Both of the first two may be embraced by internalist/deontic approaches. The first isn’t always embraced by internalist/deontic approaches but should be (the idea of deontology as a system of rules isn’t *only* a straw man, but plenty of deontologists/internalists wisely reject it to stress as definitive of their position the idea of a *sui generis* notion of obligation). The second of

these is embraced by deontologists/internalists—the contrast with virtue theories being that deontologists/internalists rightly insist the agent should be assessed via her acts or processes of reasoning. And the third of these may be found in either externalist or internalist (consequentialist or deontic) approaches: a first-order pluralism ultimately in the service of an actual or intentional goal.

There is however, a fourth feature of many virtues based approaches which needs mentioning, though it is too major and difficult an issue for exhaustive treatment here.

#### 4. Justification as well as knowledge requires some luck.

In the teeth of the stock externalist objections to their position any sensible modern internalist draws back from a naïve Cartesian optimism and concedes that agents will lack control over much that concerns epistemic (or ethical) success. For the internalist/deontologist, luck may affect one's ability to attain one's epistemic or ethical end—whether knowledge or the good. One may be born or brought up into a situation that luckily or unluckily decides *success*.

Nevertheless, for the internalist/deontologist there is another sense of epistemic or ethical justification in which one's justificatory status is *not* subject to luck. I can unluckily lack knowledge, I cannot unluckily be irrational; I can unluckily bring about a bad outcome, I cannot unluckily bring about an intentionally wrong act. As a matter of objective fact I can unluckily be dealt a bad hand by fate, but there is a sense of epistemic or ethical justification that concerns how well I attempt play the hand I am dealt—and that concerns my subjective perspective, my efforts, my intentions, the discharge of what I take to be my duties. In the teeth of objections to their position from moral or epistemic luck, deontologists/internalists concede 'success luck' concerning knowledge or the good; but defend the idea of a luck-free core axiology of justification.

Virtues based approaches threaten to encroach on this tidy little division—between *objective success* (knowledge, the good) that is subject to luck and must thereby have an inescapably externalist/consequentialist component; and justification as such, which is not subject to luck: one's subjective efforts to discharge one's moral or epistemic obligations as best one is able to perceive them. For, just as one can unluckily lack success because one is brought up with inaccurate moral or empirical beliefs, so surely one can also be born or brought up so that one has degraded, depraved, vicious appetites; or corrupted, ineluctably askew, irrational reasoning procedures. Luck looks to be able to penetrate some distance into the inner, justificatory core—to have some role in deciding justification itself and as such. Whatever may be said negatively against virtue theories (and this paper has said a lot); this is the challenge they have in turn for their internalist/deontological critics. If there is to be a chance of developing the piecemeal insights of virtue theorists into a genuinely viable approach, whether in ethics or epistemology, it will turn on whether one can hold that the framework development of a human being's nature is wholly a matter

facts outside of their control, as the externalist/consequentialist tradition would have it; yet still *praise, blame, hold them responsible*, for what they do as a result of that nature—as the internalist/deontological tradition would have it. Nothing we have seen in this paper suggests such a position will be an easy one to defend.<sup>16,17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The issue of epistemic luck is more vexed than there is space for here, a point emphasized by Duncan Pritchard who has written widely on this subject – e.g. Pritchard (2005).

<sup>17</sup> A version of this paper was delivered at the University of Stirling Virtue Epistemology Conference in November 2004. My thanks to the participants and organizers; especially Duncan Pritchard and Michael Brady for comments on written versions, and to an anonymous referee for this journal.

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