

Nancy E. Snow (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Virtue*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 904 pages. ISBN: 9780199385195. Hardback: \$175.00.

The purpose of a handbook is to get us going and guide us on a topic. In order to be writable, of course, its topic needs to have been going for some time. In the case of a philosophical topic, its debates need to be fairly well-developed, its different positions fairly well staked-out, its more-or-less standard routes run. For that reason, the present seems recently appropriate for a handbook on virtue, a topic which has now been a serious contender in contemporary ethical thinking for around forty years. Cambridge University Press gave us a “companion” to virtue ethics in 2013, Routledge gave us a companion *and* a handbook in 2014 and 2015, respectively – why both is unclear – and now we have *The Oxford Handbook of Virtue* edited by Nancy E. Snow. The amount of overlap with the others (in topics covered and even particular contributors) is not insignificant, but in its almost twice as many pages, it nonetheless offers us *a lot*. It works well both as a reasonably unified study and as a collection of papers which (with few exceptions) can be read – or assigned – independently of each other.

A first important point to make about the Oxford handbook is that it’s a handbook of ‘virtue’, rather than of ‘virtue ethics’ or even of ‘virtue theory’. Whereas the Cambridge version treats only virtue ethics and applied virtue ethics, and Routledge does the same while treating virtue epistemology in a separate handbook, the Oxford handbook gives significant attention to each. Given its virtue epistemological content, ‘virtue’ is clearly more appropriate than ‘virtue ethics’. Calling itself a handbook of virtue rather than of ‘virtue theory’ also enables it to give significant time to both “virtue theory” and “theory of virtue” – a distinction that’s very helpful for fitting figures like Hume and Kant, as well as religious traditions like Buddhism and Islam, into the virtue tradition. Whereas a virtue theory makes the notion of virtue *central* to its ethics or epistemology, a theory of virtue merely gives space to and an account of the notion. Hume, Kant, and certain Buddhist and Islamic thinkers are thus helpfully and fairly uncontroversially included in this handbook on virtue.

After Snow’s introduction, Part I lays out three accounts of virtue: as a character trait, as a sensitivity, and as a skill. At first these might seem like competing accounts, but while the latter two are more controversial, one could in principle hold all three. Snow thus appropriately refers to them as ‘conceptualizations’ of virtue (p. 2). That virtue is a character trait is pretty well assumed by everyone in the book (at least until we get to reliabilist virtue epistemology); and the other two accounts are drawn on by various authors as well. One question that seemed to me underemphasized here – and indeed in the rest of the handbook – is whether virtue is a kind of *knowledge*. In discussing Iris Murdoch and John McDowell’s ideas that virtue is a kind of sensitivity, Bridget Clarke (Chapter 2) plausibly assumes (given that Murdoch and McDowell do) that virtue is a kind of knowledge; and in discussing virtue as a skill, Matt Stichter (Chapter 3) does often imply that virtue either involves or is a kind of practical knowledge; but given how perennial and controversial a question this is, I found myself wishing that there had been more direct engagement with it, either in this part or others.

Part II turns to various historical and religious accounts of virtue. Here, there are chapters on virtue in Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Buddhism, Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, Islam, Aquinas, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, and a variant of Christianity (additional to Aquinas’). Of these, Aristotle has dominated contemporary discussions of virtue (followed by Plato and Hume), and though these and other well-known virtue figures receive good treatment here, the less mainstream ones are likely to draw more interest in a handbook. I’ll just mention a few of the ideas that I enjoyed coming across here; the chapters of course cover much more. Lawrence C. Becker (Chapter 6) continues to emphasize the distinction between Stoicism and stoicism by discussing the importance of *oikeōsis*, the process by which the Stoics believed children come to love things external to themselves as much as they love themselves, an important step

in Stoic social-ethical development. Justin Tiwald (Chapter 8) describes the importance of ritual practice across Confucian and Neo-Confucian conceptions of virtue while also explaining their break: Neo-Confucianism developed in response to the rising popularity of the more metaphysically intriguing Buddhism in the 11th century CE and was, at least in part, if Tiwald is correct, needed in order to compete. And Elizabeth M. Bucar (Chapter 10) discusses Islam's first systematic treatment of virtue – Miskawayh's *The Refinement of Character* (10th century CE) – and explains its central idea of internal unity with God and external harmony with the world as a development of ideas in Plato and Aristotle. Not all of the chapters in Part II would serve as excellent introductions to their topics, and some are not especially clear about the fact that they are treating merely an aspect of a tradition; but many are excellent introductions and are clear about their scope as well. As a whole, they present a treatment of the history of thinking about virtue that's about as complete as could be asked for in a single edited volume.

Parts III – V turn to contemporary approaches to ethical virtue – beginning with an account of virtue theory's resurgence in the 20th century (Chapter 15) – as well as some central issues in contemporary debates, and criticisms of the virtue ethical project. I skip to the criticisms. The central criticism discussed – indeed, discussed at some length in numerous chapters of the book – is situationism, the view that the notion of virtue has been undermined by psychological research into how situations, rather than character, influence human behavior. Situationism aims to show that “character” is a folk psychological concept lacking a basis in real psychology. Despite all the attention paid to it, however, no one here seems genuinely worried. The handbook's authors offer numerous and varied responses to situationism. Some are appropriately handbook summaries of standard responses; but some seem to be original contributions that may deserve wider attention. Tom Bates and Pauline Kleingeld (Chapter 27), for instance, argue that situationism is empirically ill-supported on the basis that situationists have failed to consider the possibility that global vices like selfishness, cowardice, and laziness explain the way humans behave in the relevant experiments. Since vices are themselves (bad) character traits, they contend that the experiments rather support the notion of character and, at least in principle, of virtue.

Part VI contains seven chapters on issues in applied virtue ethics – in medical ethics, business ethics, jurisprudence, education, environmental ethics, sexual ethics, and communication ethics. The most natural fit, of course, is education; and David Carr (Chapter 32) makes a good case for thinking of Aristotelian ethics as suited to bringing together the three main approaches in recent ethics education debates (namely, cognitive developmental, care ethical, and character training approaches). Of the discussions here, Chapin Cimino's (Chapter 31) discussion of virtue jurisprudence requires the greatest amount of non-philosophical (and in particular, American jurisprudential) knowledge. I also found myself wishing that Jason Kawall's (Chapter 33) discussion of environmental virtue ethics included the possibility of valuing the environment for its own sake, rather than for the sake of distinct human ends – this (to my mind better) alternative is mentioned by Cimino (p. 626) and in Christine Swanton's (Chapter 12) list of virtues in Nietzsche (p. 247). The issue here is whether non-“moral” virtues aren't also necessary for overall ethical virtue.

The final part of the handbook, Part VII, takes up the topic of virtue epistemology, a topic which aims to model itself on virtue ethics but in regard to epistemic notions, such as knowledge or belief, which it understands, in one respect or another, by reference to specifically intellectual virtues, such as curiosity, receptivity, or (for some) mere vision. Most interesting here was a chapter not especially suited to a current handbook of virtue but perhaps to a future handbook of virtue: Michael Slote and Heather Battaly's (Chapter 38) proposal of a “sentimentalist” virtue epistemology to compete with or else complement the more standard reliabilist and responsibilist approaches. The sentimentalist approach (as they admit, not

entirely aptly named – so also called “personalism”) is only very recently being developed (by the same authors in some of the aforementioned companions, as well as in a forthcoming monograph by Slote), but it seems likely to garner more attention in the future.

This is of course all too brief to do justice to such a large collection of papers. In my opinion, some of the papers here are very good, the vast majority are at least good, and only a few, not especially good. If I’m right, the chances of picking up *The Oxford Handbook of Virtue* and reading a helpful, reasonably introductory paper on virtue-topic *X* are high.

Matt Dougherty
University of Cambridge