ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN EPISTEMIC AND MORAL VIRTUES

I. *Introduction*

- *Virtue ethics* as a model for *virtue epistemology* – *virtue - based* ethics opposed to *principle* or *rule – based* ethics of a *deontological* or *consequentialist* orientation

- The classical sources (Aristotle and the Stoics)

- The quest for stable dispositions /habitual tendencies of the soul (ἕξεις) to act in an appropriate way/ traits of character / "thick" evaluative properties supposedly superior to the "thin" principles and concepts of traditional modern moral philosophy

II. *Conceptions and forms of virtue epistemology*

A. Basic forms

1. *Reliabilism- faculty-based epistemology* : (capacities helping increase the balance of truths over falsehoods)

2. *Responsibilism- character-based epistemology* : (motivational, reasons-responsive dispositions to act and react in characteristic ways aiming at the attainment of epistemic ends)

3. *The mixed form* : a combination of the two approaches

- *externalism* vs *internalism*   / *explanation* vs *justification* (Alfano 2012)

B. Alternative conceptions with an emphasis on character-based virtue epistemology

1. The classical/conservative conception - *strong* and *weak* versions

2. The autonomous conception – *strong* and *weak* versions   (Baehr 2011)

 - *Inquiry epistemology* (Hookway 2003, Alfano 2012)

The ambitions and the limits of virtue-epistemology (especially of the strong conservative versions) – can we aspire to a complete overcoming or transformation of traditional epistemological concerns?

III. *Alternative positions concerning the relations between epistemic and moral virtues*

- According to Jason Baehr (2011) we could distinguish among the following:

1. The *reductive* thesis

2. The *subset* thesis

3. The *independence* thesis

- We should recognize an asymetry between the formal conception of moral virtues which do not aim at particular moral goods, provided these ends are other-regarding, and the substantial specification of epistemic virtues as aiming at particular epistemic ends, such as truth, knowledge and understanding. (Baehr 2011)

- Compare Susan Haack (2001) on the relations between epistemic and moral appraisal

(1) epistemic appraisal is a subspecies of ethical appraisal – henceforth, for short, the *special-case thesis*

(2) positive/negative epistemic appraisal is distinct from, but invariably associated with, positive/negative ethical appraisal – the *correlation thesis*

(3) there is, not invariable correlation, but partial overlap, where positive/negative epistemic appraisal is associated with positive/negative ethical appraisal – the *overlap thesis*

(4) ethical appraisal is inapplicable where epistemological appraisal is relevant – the *independence thesis*

(5) epistemic appraisal is distinct from, but analogous to ethical appraisal – *the analogy thesis*

 If we accept a form of mutual dependence, we could endorse what might be expressed as

- A *strong analogy* thesis (in an *ontological* version or in a *descriptive* version)

If we opt for a form of independence, we might still recognize the truth of

- A *weak analogy* thesis (a simple analogy of two different forms of evaluation)

The descriptive variant of the strong analogy thesis supports what we could call:

- *The Principle of the Unity of Moral and Epistemic Virtues*

When it seems that someone must be evaluated positively from an epistemic point of view and negatively from a moral point of view, or vice versa, the *description* of her epistemic or her moral standing must be faulty. (Pouivet 2010)

The importance of differences between epistemic and moral ends/ epistemic and moral duties – construed as complementary components of the flourishing – the realisation of the good of a cognitive subject who is also a moral agent – we may thus be looking for a unity/ or harmony and coherence between epistemic and moral evaluations – Is there a unitary character of a person aiming at the *Good* (and not just at a variety of miscellaneous *goods* the independent pursuit of which may lead to conflicts)? – If not, should we rather give up not just the reductive thesis but also any form of the strong analogy – mutual dependence thesis?

IV. ***The complexity of the axiological domain – Attempts at a unification of the main dimensions of norms and values – including virtues (?) – Could we distinguish between ethical and moral virtues?***

Duties (and virtues ?) concerning oneself – Duties (and virtues ?) involving others – a distinction between ethical ends aiming at the flourishing of oneself and moral ends regarding our behavior towards others – Ronald Dworkin draws attention to the importance of the distinction, but argues that the two kinds of ends should be regarded as interdependent and as connected in the ideal of *living well* which, according to his analysis is not the same as simply *having a good life* – He draws on an elaborate interpretationist account of basic concepts of ethical, moral and to a certain extent aesthetic values, pursuing a reflective equilibrium of beliefs and principles which is supposed to point to their integration in a coherent whole (Dworkin 2011)

V. *Objections to virtue ethics (both at the metaethical and at the normative level) – compared to analogous objections to virtue epistemology (regarding the ontological status and the explanatory and normative functions of the virtues in question)*

a) *Problems of interpretation and application* at the normative level (- a circularity involving principles and traits of character ?) (Copp and Soble 2004)

b) What *metaphysical basis* – what *anthropology* for norms, values and virtues making possible the realization of epistemic, ethical and moral ends? Which ends? (Fairweather and Flanagan 2014)

c) *The situationist challenge* threatening virtue ethics as well as virtue epistemology of a responsibilist kind, mostly in the form of an epistemology of virtues of inquiry based on character (Alfano 2012 – Blumenthal–Barby 2015)

d) The *lack of determinacy* of ends and of virtues – ("Indeterminate things require indeterminate rules" NE 1137b27-9) - virtues specified through theire relations to particular practices and social roles (Wright 2014) – the dangers of *relativism* and *contextualism*

VI. *Conclusions – The philosophical significance and the practical implications of a convergence of combination of epistemic and moral virtues*

The possibility of a reinterpretation and reintegration of the components of the axiological domain (highlighting the interconnectedness and strong analogies among ethical, moral and other norms and values) – Could we aspire to discern a clear structure and establish a hierarchy of epistemic virtues?   Should we limit ourselves to a phenomenology of virtues (and vices), giving up the ambition for a systematic theory? – the need for a concept of *phronesis* especially suited for virtue epistemology

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