

Introduction

Why do We Need to Explore the Social Dimension of the Ethics of Knowledge?

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Significant work has been done in social epistemology in the last decades. Looking at the generation and acquisition of knowledge in social contexts, scholars considered not only ontological and epistemological issues, like the ontology of group minds and the epistemology of the many and different in-group epistemic practices, but also the normative dimension that regulates social epistemic activities, such as group learning and revision of beliefs. Virtue theorists have studied the truth-conduciveness of abilities and character traits of epistemic agents, the so-called intellectual virtues, like open-mindedness, scrutiny, and perseverance, in conjunction with the elaboration of an ethics of knowledge. Most recently, epistemic vices, such as hermeneutical injustice, false testimony, and conspiracy, have been analysed in knowledge management. The spread of misinformation and fake news in the age of the internet have also pushed scholars to engage with vice epistemology, very often with key references to feminist epistemology. It is now time for explicitly bridging these research fields together. This will foster further study of the social dimension of the ethics of knowledge that lies at the intersection of these traditions. This is crucial for shedding light on the manifold dangers, power dynamics, prejudices, and censures implied by the social articulation of knowledge processes in the public arena, and for developing new theoretical and pedagogical tools to combat them. Also, it can foster the creation of resources for ameliorative and transformative projects regarding epistemic injustices and willful ignorance, both in theoretical and applied epistemology. This special issue marks an

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attempt to provide some stepping stones for such a crucial and socially relevant issue in philosophical research.

Starting from Ernest Sosa's manifesto about the need to find new criteria for securing knowledge and overcoming the limits of both foundationalism and coherentism (Sosa 1980), virtue epistemology has been developed in analytical philosophy, and it is now recognized as one of the best available theories of knowledge. According to virtue epistemology, the skills, abilities, and character traits of the epistemic subject (both as individual and community) should be taken into account in assessing the truth conditions of beliefs. Challenging a neutral and disembodied epistemology - a view from nowhere that grants validity to the truth values of the propositions only (Code 1993) - virtue epistemology examines the powers of cognitive agents and their efforts to achieve epistemic goods.

The differentiation between "skills," such as having a good memory and being able to make inferences, and "character traits," such as humility and perseverance, has produced two streams of virtue epistemology, virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism, as well as attempt to accommodate or balance their varying orientations (see on this Axtell 2000). For the first stream, epistemic success depends on the reliability of the cognitive agent's skills (Sosa & Greco 2010); for the second, instead, we should look at specific character traits, also in a very personal manner (Battaly 2016), as essential motives for cognitive success (Zagzebski 1996). The ethics of knowledge is one area of research where these different foci can be compared, and perhaps integrated into improved versions of virtue and vice epistemology.

Virtue epistemology has a very long and illustrious intellectual history. Aristotle and Plato have been recognized as the historical sources of this approach, but essential references can be found throughout the history of philosophy. For example, Medieval manuals about intellectual virtues and vices provide many examples of virtue theory and how it illuminates issues at the intersection of knowledge and ethics. Also, looking beyond Western Philosophy, some scholars have recently highlighted Eastern philosophy's relevance, for example, Chinese philosophy (Carter et al. 2020).

The contemporary debate has refreshed the classical approach with new questions and methodologies. In particular, the relevance granted to the normative dimension of the ethics of knowledge in the social aspect of knowledge management seems to be an essential outcome of the contemporary debate. For example, consider the case of trust and intellectual maturity.

According to Robert Roberts and Jay Woods (2004), a competence is mature when the disposition to employ it has been developed correctly; in our case, trusting our capacities can reinforce the process that brings to epistemic maturity. But as argued by Miranda Fricker (2007), intellectual maturity is realized in social interactions. Hence, intellectual maturity should be appropriately cultivated in those contexts in which we are constitutively dependent on the testimony of other subjects, notably collective knowledge processes. However, trust can also be exploited, particularly in the social contexts where we rely on other's testimonies. An ethics of knowledge seems thus to be required for regulating epistemic practices within patterns of virtuous activities.

Notably, this recognition has invited a more thorough investigation of the epistemic vices, too. Ranging from an inventory of the dispositions and character traits of those who are not "sensitive to reasons" as bullshitters and snobs (Engel 2019) to the study of the complex phenomenon of ignorance (Sullivan and Tuana 2007), new studies have been pursued, offering thick descriptions of vices such as gullibility, dogmatism, prejudice, and negligence. Indeed, a need to recognize 'new' virtues and vices reflecting problems of practice has sometimes been proposed. In this panorama, the investigation of specific epistemic practices embedded in the socio-political context is paramount. For instance, for Cassam (2016), intellectual character vices are intellectual character traits that impede the effective and responsible inquiry. For Sullivan and Tuana (2007), ignorance is sometimes culpable, in which case it can function as a tool for spreading prejudices and racism supporting white privilege.

Finally, the notion of epistemic responsibility, and the conjunct normative dimension of the ethics of knowledge, appears even more necessary in vice epistemology. As it has been recently highlighted by Heather Battaly (2019), vice epistemology needs to deal with the responsibility problem, especially regarding non-voluntarist approaches. And this is even more challenging in the social dimension of knowledge since, as it has been argued by Ian James Kidd (2016), few people enjoy conditions that are required for adequate socialisation as responsible epistemic agents.

This special issue discusses the social dimension of the ethics of knowledge, also exploring some real-life situations from a case-based applied epistemology. It begins with Duncan Pritchard's paper titled "Veritic Desire".

In this paper, Pritchard explores the motivational dimension of intellectual virtues in terms of veritic desire. Arguing for a non-instrumental value of truth, Pritchard offers a conception of veritic desire as a genuine disposition to understanding the fundamental nature of reality. For this reason, veritic desire cannot be a mere strategic move in the acquisition of knowledge, nor a motivation to true beliefs maximization. It does not aim to trivial truths but to weighty truths since it is directed to an understanding of the fundamental nature of reality. Far from psychological reductionism, Pritchard conceptualises veritic desire as a deep and abiding aspiration to get things right and to avoid inaccuracy and deceit. Pritchard claims that veritic desire is an acquired disposition that can be cultivated. This point strongly argues in favour of a responsible disposition towards the ethics of knowledge, although without reducing it to practical utility, since it claims that one needs to learn to value the truth in the first place and then refine this valuing disposition via habituation, emulation of exemplars, and so on. Finally, a virtuous agent has a truth goal precisely because she cares about the truth and recognizes that this is the way to attain the ultimately valuable good that she seeks.

Also tackling the debate around the intrinsic or instrumental value of epistemic goods, Nastastia Müller argues for the instrumental value of responsibilist virtues in a paper titled “The Epistemic Good of Epistemic Responsibilist Virtues”. By claiming that the main reason why people care about intellectual virtues and character traits is that they make them good inquirers, Müller understands epistemic virtues as what help one to generate guidelines for scientific practices and inquiry, in conjunction with other skills, abilities, and faculties. Intellectual virtues are thus not good *per se* but as embedded in inquiry processes, and it is effective and responsible inquiry what is truth-conducive. For grounding this argument, Müller provides an engaging analysis of the evil demon cases that shows that what is called into question is not whether the character trait is truth-conducive but whether the inquiry is truth-conducive.

In exploring what is relevant for knowledge acquisition, Francesco Pisano directs attention to intuitions. In “A Feeling of Evidence: A Neo-Kantian Proposal for an Open-Minded Use of Intuitions”, Pisano argues for the virtue-related aspects of the plasticity of intuitions in social contexts. By challenging the perceptualist and seeming-based model of intuition, Pisano offers a Neo-Kantian model of intuitions inspired by the philosophical work of Christoph Sigwart. This reference is important because it allows the author to challenge the private account of intuitions, and instead show that intuition can confer

justifications to certain beliefs; beliefs are justified insofar as they are caused by the unconscious reaching of a certain configuration between the intuiting agent's network of linguistic commitments in a given situation and a new experience. Pisano finally claims that this model is better suited to understand the virtuous employment of intuitions in knowledge-building processes, especially concerning the virtue of open-mindedness.

Reconstructing the philosophical work of Heather Battaly, Quassim Cassam, and Alessandra Tanesini in developing the new-emergent research field of vice epistemology, Ian James Kidd, in the paper titled "A Case for an Historical Vice Epistemology", suggests employing the work of intellectual and social historians for studying epistemic vices. Focusing on the influential work of Steven Shapin, a distinguished historian and sociologist of science, Kidd highlights the socially and historically situated normative ideas of ideal character traits of the men of science. In line with the criticism of vice epistemologists toward the ideal character of the virtuous epistemic agent, Kidd explains the fundamental role of social and intellectual contextual factors in modelling and acquiring virtues and vices. In this way, the historical vice epistemology Kidd advocates for appears to be an important hermeneutical tool for overcoming the ideal character of virtue epistemology.

In "Cultivating Doxastic Responsibility: Ameliorative Epistemological Projects and the Ethics of Knowledge", Guy Axtell addresses some of the contours of an ethics of knowledge as it aligns with the more specific projects of ameliorative epistemology. After a very helpful and engaging discussion of the debate between virtue and vice epistemology on vice attributions, and then on epistemic paternalism, Axtell elaborates different aspects of the relationship between epistemic risk and doxastic responsibility. Finally, Axtell argues for the need to foster critical reflection and cooperation among epistemic agents. The *zetetic* or inquiry-focused responsibility he develops also provides a fundamental role to emotions and affective scaffoldings as affective habits.

With a key reference to the Aristotelian heritage, Maria Silvia Vaccarezza and Michel Croce present a novel account of civic friendship. In "Civility in the Post-Truth Age: An Aristotelian Account", Vaccarezza and Croce illustrate how the spread of misinformation typical of the digital environments obstructs one's capacity to cultivate the virtue of civility by impairing every component of civil deliberation. Civility is defined as the virtue of fellow citizens who treat each other as civic friends – that is, citizens who display civic benevolence and exercise civil deliberation. Joining the aim of

ameliorative epistemology, Vaccarezza and Croce aim to direct attention to the need to foster civic virtues in the digital polis to counteract the negative aspects of the post-truth age.

Finally, epistemic injustice is tackled by two papers. In “LGBTQ Identities and Hermeneutical Injustice at the Border”, Anna Boncompagni understands the asylum process against the framework of hermeneutical injustice, especially analysing the case of LGBTQ asylum claims. By a skilful and legally-informed analysis of the different ways in which stereotypes, prejudices, and implicit assumptions, understood as culture-specific hinges, hinder the asylum process, such as the “bogus asylum claimant” and implicit biases against asylum seekers’ social identity, Boncompagni sheds light into a contemporary hot issue that is underexplored by epistemologists. In doing so, she builds the ground for new lines of investigation that deserve to be studied in relation to the social dimension of the ethics of knowledge. Boncompagni also discusses the conditions under which hermeneutical justice can be restored in this context, claiming that the interventions should be directed primarily at the institutional level. She brings the example of the training manuals for officers that teach them how they should listen to claimants. For Boncompagni, the implementation of manuals, guidelines, and training procedures are explicit institutional efforts in the direction of hermeneutical justice since they aim at changing and improving norms of evidence that people normally take for granted regulating social perception and self-perception.

In “Epistemic Oppression, an Analysis”, Taylor Rogers analyses epistemic oppression as exclusion from epistemic processes of knowledge production. Through a critical engagement with Kristie Dotson’s *Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression*, Rogers claims that in addition to hermeneutical and testimonial injustice, epistemic resilience is a prominent case of epistemic oppression. Epistemic resilience is described as the phenomenon whereby an epistemological system resists modification despite counter-evidence or attempts to alter it. Rogers argues that dealing with these three types of epistemic oppression (i.e., hermeneutical injustice, testimonial injustice, and epistemic resilience) is not a matter of social and political distribution, but it is an epistemic task. For Rogers, this epistemic task involves altering the inadequate epistemic resources, often through combatting contributory injustices perpetrated by dominant knowers and actively seeking out alternative epistemic resources. In Rogers’ account, then, the epistemic dimension is a pervasive concern for resisting epistemic oppression of all kinds.

For better grounding this argument, she reflects on the presidency of Barack Obama, showing that resistance cannot be reduced to a re-distribution of political/social power. Rather, effective efforts to overcome epistemic resilience need to be accompanied by a critical interrogation of our epistemic resources.

These eight contributions—each representative in its own way of the special issue’s theme—collectively signal the fruitfulness of studying the social dimension of the ethics of knowledge both in terms of virtues and of vices. I hope that these papers will serve as a basis for future work and interventions.

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