A VIRTUE THEORETIC ETHICS OF INTELLECTUAL AGENCY

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ABSTRACT: There is a well-established literature on the ethics of belief. Our beliefs, however, are just one aspect of our intellectual lives with which epistemology should be concerned. I make the case that epistemologists should be concerned with an ethics of intellectual agency rather than the narrower category of ethics of belief. Various species of normativity, epistemic, moral, and so on, that may be relevant to the ethics of belief are laid out. An account adapted from virtue ethics for an ethics that goes beyond the ethics of belief is defended. The main claim advanced here is that we should act as the virtuous agent would characteristically act in the circumstances. This claim is supported with reference to a number of examples, as well as considerations informing virtue ethics. An acknowledged feature of this account is that it provides limited guidance regarding right action in intellectual agency. While the account draws on virtue responsibilism to offer guidance, the case is made that it's a mistake to think that an account in this area can provide a successful decision procedure.

KEYWORDS: virtue theory, ethics of belief, responsibilism

1. Belief or Intellectual Performance?

Ethics of belief is a recognised area within epistemology. This section makes the case that epistemology should be concerned with the ethics of intellectual agency rather than the overly narrow ethics of belief. The position is defended by observing that the ethics of belief is too narrow to capture various aspects of our intellectual lives which are deserving of the attention of epistemology. On the other hand, the ethics of intellectual agency encompasses these various aspects of our intellectual lives, many of which are exciting new topics of study in epistemology. Having made the case that epistemology should be concerned with an ethics of intellectual agency, in the sections that follow I defend a virtue theoretic account of the ethics of intellectual agency.

The ethics of belief debate is concerned with what, if any, norms govern "our habits of belief-formation, belief-maintenance, and belief-relinquishment."[1,2]

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[1] Andrew Chignell, "The Ethics of Belief," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2013 Edition).

[2] Henceforth, I'll simply write "belief-formation," rather than "belief-formation, belief-

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Although the question is important, "how should we act as intellectual agents?" is a more basic normative question for epistemology. The "should" in the above question should be understood in a performative sense. Examples include how the ice skater should land after a leap, how the golfer should swing his club, and so on. While such performances are not simple matters of will, after all the amateur can't simply so perform, they are the result of practice and self-cultivation, just as we can talk of how an aircraft should perform, say, at a particular altitude in particular weather conditions.[3] Theorist can disagree about the extent to which intellectual performance is voluntary.

We may nevertheless wonder why there is a well developed literature on the ethics of belief-formation in which a variety of evidentialist and non-evidentialist, deontological, consequentialist and virtue epistemological positions have been defended.[4] Perhaps on a very narrow conception of epistemology, whereby epistemology is just concerned with knowledge and the most basic way we have of being in the running for knowledge is believing, the exclusive focus on belief-formation makes sense.[5] This, however, is an overly narrow vision of the concerns of epistemology. Epistemology is plausibly also concerned with epistemic goods other than knowledge, such as intellectual virtue, good judgement, understanding, and wisdom.[6]

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maintenance, and belief-relinquishment." Unless I indicate otherwise, "belief-formation" should be taken to also cover belief-maintenance and belief relinquishment.

[3] For more on a performance approach to epistemic agency based on functioning, see Ernest Sosa, *Judgment and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[4] Of course this restricted focus to belief-formation may in some cases merely be the result of authors' interests, an existing tendency in the literature to restrict focus to belief-formation, and so on. Of course such explanations aren't philosophically well motivated grounds for restricting our focus to belief formation. Indeed, I haven't found an argument for a restricted focus on belief-formation rather than the broader scope or something like the broader scope being proposed here.

[5] Belief as "most basic" here also requires that there is not another epistemic standing that is equally basic. So if acceptance is equally basic but separate from belief, then the exclusive focus on belief remains unexplained.

[6] For Jonathan Kvanvig, epistemology is the study of purely theoretical cognitive success. Such success includes, but is not limited to, making sense of the course of experience, carrying out an intellectually responsible or blameless inquiry, and an empirically adequate theory (Jonathan Kvanvig, "Truth Is Not the Primary Epistemic Goal," in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, eds. Matthias Steup, John Turri, and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 352-353). Linda Zagzebski, writes that epistemology's subject matter goes beyond "the study of knowledge and its components," remarks that she thinks that the broadest way to characterise epistemology is as "the study of right or good ways to cognitively grasp reality" (Linda Zagzebski, *On Epistemology* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2009), 8).

The question as to how we should act as intellectual agents is broader than the how should we believe question, as it pertains to the norms that govern our intellectual agency, which includes norms governing belief-formation. In other words, the question, by asking how we should act as intellectual agents, also asks how we should form our beliefs. "Intellectual agency" should be broadly construed and is intended as a handle for various aspects of our intellectual lives not covered by the ethics of belief. It includes belief-formation, judgement-formation, acceptance-formation, seeking evidence, seeking understanding, exercising intellectual courage, being epistemically creditworthy, and so on.[7] In fact, what in particular falls into the category of intellectual agency is not very important for my purposes here. What is important is that intellectual agency includes much more than mere belief-formation. An implication of this point is that an account of the ethics of belief formation is then insufficient to be an account of intellectual agency or, in other words, an account of our intellectual lives.

Perhaps one might hold that an ethics of something implies the potential for an agent being responsible for that thing, and belief-formation is the most basic act of intellectual agency for which we can be responsible. But this isn't right either. We can also judge, seek further evidence, exercise intellectual courage, and so on; none of which are reducible to belief, while each is something for which we can have an ethics.[8]

There is another way one might defend the exclusive focus on belief. It might be thought that although there might be acts of intellectual agency as basic as belief-formation, no such acts are basic to an epistemic good. The thought might be that as epistemologists we are concerned with more than knowledge, but for no other epistemic goods with which we are concerned is an act of intellectual agency other than belief-formation most basic. This, however, seems implausible. Blameless inquiry seems to be an epistemic good and perhaps one can have testimonial knowledge based on acceptance rather than belief.[9] Indeed, blameless inquiry seems

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[7] Intellectual agency is also clearly related to the growing work on the topic of epistemic paternalism. For relevant work, see Michel Croce, "Epistemic Paternalism and the Service Conception of Epistemic Authority," *Metaphilosophy* 49, 3 (2018): 305-327 and Shane Ryan, "Paternalism: An Analysis," *Utilitas* 28, 2 (2016): 123-135.

[8] Of course we can expect that the quality of one's judgement and seeking of further evidence will partly depend on one's beliefs. It's simply that their quality depends on more than the quality of my beliefs and that therefore an ethics solely of belief would be overly narrow.

[9] See Hookway for a defence of the view that the primary concern of epistemology is how we can engage in inquiry, deliberation, and other such activities, and that knowledge and justification are subordinate concerns (Christopher Hookway, "Epistemology and Inquiry: The Primacy of Practice," in *Epistemology Futures*, ed. Stephen Hetherington (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

to be precisely the sort of thing that would be part of the subject matter of an ethics of intellectual agency.[10]

An ethics exclusively focused on belief provides limited guidance for our intellectual lives. Any ethics of belief will say that in various circumstances we shouldn't form a belief or that we should only form a very weak belief. But what then? We may be in a situation in which a judgement has to be made one way or another.[11] There may be various epistemic factors bearing on such a judgement. Clearly, faced with such a judgement, our intellectual agency can go beyond believing and not believing. There may be many things we should think, attend to, doubt, accept, investigate further, and so on. An ethics that just deals with belief is an impoverished ethics of intellectual agency and is out of step with recent trends in epistemology. An ethics of intellectual agency is an ethics for our epistemic lives, an ethics for the sort of epistemological situations that we face.[12] An ethics exclusively focused on belief-formation falls short of this.

In fact, while "ethics of belief" is a recognised area of study in philosophy, recognition of "ethics of intellectual agency" as encompassing ethics of belief promises to better identify for scholars closely related topics of discussion that currently risk being examined in isolation. By identifying the topics discussed above as discussions in the ethics of intellectual agency rather than some being discussions in the ethics of belief and others either falling into different demarcated areas of epistemology or not falling into any clearly demarcated area of philosophy, we also stand to better structure philosophical discussion. Of course this approach would

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2006), 95-110).

[10] It also seems like something a virtue theoretic approach to intellectual agency would be particularly well suited to addressing.

[11] One reason to think that judging and its ethics should be accorded greater significance by epistemologists is that often what it is we believe isn't transparent to ourselves or we may simply not have a belief on the relevant matter. Do I believe that doing a PhD would be good for the student? Do I believe the politician who says that the employment situation for young people will improve significantly very soon? Is this bike shop ripping me off by charging me this amount to repair my bike? Saying how one should form one's belief in such situations isn't particularly helpful. Maybe I will believe in the right way, but if it's not clear to me what I believe on such matters or I only have a partial belief, then my believing in the right way may not be very helpful. I'll still need to act in many such cases. What should I advise the student? How should I respond to the bill with which I'm presented? How we should form judgements is plausibly an appropriate concern for epistemology. For more on the epistemological significance of judgement, see Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*.

[12] See Kvanvig for a similar point (Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind: On the Place of the Virtues in Contemporary Epistemology* (Savage, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992), 187).

encourage scholars to consider whether broader normative accounts might be possible that give us unified answers a host of topics that have up until now been treated separately. The account I defend in the next part of this paper suggests that this is indeed possible in a limited way, although of course plausible bolder accounts may be possible.

Upon consideration of this new area of epistemology, an important question arises as to the nature of the normativity involved. Is the type of norm governing intellectual agency only ever epistemic or might our intellectual agency, including belief-formation, sometimes, be governed by norms other than epistemic norms?[13] I take it that non-epistemic norms include moral norms, filial norms, prudential norms, and all things considered norms.[14] Consider the evidentialist answer to the question as to how should one believe, which claims that one should believe, or form one's belief, in accordance with the evidence. The argument offered in support of William Clifford's particular evidentialism is moral, while other supporters of evidentialism, such as Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, offer an epistemological ground for their evidentialism.[15] While we should want to know which type or types of norm may govern our beliefs and intellectual agency generally, we should also want to know, if it's indeed possible to know, how particular norms of various types

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[13] Susanna Rinard makes the case that the question "What Should I Believe?" is answered by the broader question "What should I do?" (Susanna Rinard, "Equal Treatment for Belief," *Philosophical Studies* 176, 7 (2019): 1923-1950).

[14] Prudential norms and all things considered norms needn't have the same extension. Prudential norms are governed by whatever makes a person's live go best for that person. So, for example, if hedonism is correct, then our prudential norms will reflect that. All things considered norms, however, may differ from such prudential norms. Say, for example, that an action would produce some pleasure for an individual but would lead to severe hardship for that person's community, then the prudential norm and all things considered norm could come apart. One might insist that prudential and all things considered norms always coincide, the point though just is that conceptually they needn't. Similarly, an ethicist who holds that morality requires impartiality may still hold that we have, say, special (non-moral) duties to our friends and family. As such, she may hold that there are also filial norms, "filial" here being broadly construed. Filial norms or moral norms are relevant to our discussion if one holds that it is sometimes permissible or even required to be partial in belief; say, for example it is permissible to believe well of one's friend with respect to some matter in the face of a balance of evidence to the contrary.

[15] William Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," in *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays*, ed. T. Madigan (Amherst, MA: Prometheus, 1877/1999), 70–96 and Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004). See also Feldman's discussion of an alternative, epistemically grounded evidentialist ethics of belief which he contrasts with Clifford's account (Richard Feldman, "The Ethics of Belief," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60, 3 (2000): 667-695).

interact in determining how we should act intellectually.[16] However, whether it's misleading to talk of different types of normativity governing intellectual agency, saying that different norms may sometimes come into conflict, should be considered.[17]

2. An Agent-Centred Ethics of Intellectual Agency

Our goal, based on the previous section, should be to provide an ethics of intellectual agency rather than a mere ethics of belief. In the rest of the paper I defend a particular account of the ethics of intellectual agency. More specifically, I defend a virtue theoretic account of the ethics of intellectual agency.[18] The view is as follows:

> An agent should act intellectually as the virtuous agent would characteristically act in the circumstances.

Before we get to the defence of this view, some relevant background in virtue theory in epistemology and ethics is provided. The prospects of a virtue theoretic ethics of intellectual agency are considered with special attention given to the distinctive issues of action guidance and decision procedure. While the case is made against adopting a particular decision procedure, the action guidance that a virtue theoretic approach can provide is outlined in this section and the next.

For those of us already working in virtue epistemology, exploring the prospects of a virtue theoretic approach seems a natural place to start in developing an ethics of intellectual agency. Work being done in virtue responsibilism looks a good basis for just such an approach.[19] A feature of virtue responsibilism is that some theorists tend to be less concerned with providing an account of knowledge, and so less concerned with good believing, and more concerned with explaining the intellectual virtues.[20] As such, this approach then seems to have the potential to

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[16] Interestingly, one might see William James as not denying evidentialist epistemic norms, but rather holding that sometimes epistemic norms can be trumped by prudential norms (William James, "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, eds. F. Burkhardt et al. (Cambridge: MA, Harvard, 1896/1979), 291–341).

[17] I discuss these issues more later in the paper.

[18] Obviously we could accept the foregoing section while disagreeing with the particular account of intellectual agency provided here.

[19] Prominent virtue responsibilist theorists include Montmarquet, Zagzebski, Baehr. See James Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield. 1993); Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[20] Jason Baehr, "Four Varieties of Character-Based Virtue Epistemology," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46, 4 (2008): 469-502.

inform the broad scope of the ethics of intellectual agency—it has the resources to say more than how we should believe.

That there is this discourse on the intellectual virtues then provides a ready platform to develop a virtue theoretic ethics of intellectual agency in one regard. We can draw on existing accounts of the intellectual virtues to develop our ethics of intellectual agency. We can, for example, examine accounts of intellectual humility and open-mindedness as a basis for developing a responsibilist virtue ethics of intellectual agency. In particular, we can draw on virtue responsibilism to develop answers as to how we should judge and inquire, as well as evaluate topics such as the epistemic goals of education and the permissibility of epistemic paternalism.

On the other hand, much less work has been done with regard to providing a unified account of the intellectually virtuous agent and there is no existing broad account of the ethics of intellectual agency to build on.[21] In order to find work on which to build, I turn instead to another virtue theoretic approach, virtue ethics. Drawing on virtue ethics marks a departure from typical approaches to virtue by epistemologists; and the Aristotelian approach favoured provides, as we shall see, an elegant way of dealing with seemingly conflicting norms (epistemic, moral, and so on) regarding topics in the ethics of intellectual agency discussed at the end of the first section.

Virtue ethics is famously agent-centred rather than act-centred. This means that the proper focus of ethics according to the virtue ethicist is the agent. In order to assess the moral worth of an action we should first examine the moral character of the agent who performed that action. This is in contrast to rival normative approaches such as consequentialism and deontology, according to which we can provide a moral assessment of an action without first assessing the moral character of the agent whose act it is.

Various forms of consequentialism and deontology provide us with very clear guidance as to how to act. A classical utilitarian—a particular sort of consequentialist, for example, holds that morality requires that we act in such a way so as to bring about the greatest possible balance of happiness. A challenge put to the virtue ethicist is to explain what action guidance her normative approach provides. The thought is that a normative approach in ethics should provide action guidance and that without providing action guidance virtue ethics risks not being a stand alone normative approach, though it might beneficially supplement other normative approaches such as consequentialism or deontology. It might supplement them in so far as filling out details of the character who acts well morally.[22] Taking our cue from

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[21] Sosa would, however, be a natural place to start (Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*).

[22] Rosalind Hursthouse, "Normative Virtue Ethics," in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Russ

critics of virtue ethics, we might also wonder how virtue ethics can provide a basis for a virtue theoretic ethics of intellectual agency if virtue ethics provides no action guidance. In other words, how can virtue ethics help us provide a virtue theoretic answer as to how we should act intellectually if it doesn't say anything about how we should act in the moral realm?

Fortunately, virtue ethicists do have a response to the action guidance challenge. Rosalind Hursthouse defends virtue ethics against the charge that it fails to provide action guidance. According to Hursthouse, an act is right if, and only if, "it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character) do in the circumstances."[23] Of course, it isn't always clear to us how a virtuous agent would act in particular circumstances. Even granting that this is the case, virtue ethics still tells us to act virtuously (honestly, with charity, courageously, and so on) and not viciously (dishonestly, with meanness, cowardly, and so on). Hursthouse acknowledges, however, that there may be situations in which it's not clear what the virtuous thing to do is.[24] It might seem that one virtue requires me to act in one way, but that another virtue requires me to act in another, conflicting way.

While having an account of intellectual agency according to which we should act as the virtuous agent would act intellectually seems like a promising basis for a virtue theoretic account of the ethics of intellectual agency, there is an analogous problem in the epistemic sphere, especially if one's sole focus is the intellectual virtues, to that of the one faced by virtue ethics. It's well and good to say I should act as the virtuous agent would act intellectually but should I be intellectually courageous and express my opinion on a controversial issue, or should I be intellectually conscientious and stay relatively muted on the issue until I have learnt more about that issue? In cases in which there is an apparent conflict between what various virtues require, one response is that we're required to use our practical wisdom (*phronesis*) to determine which virtue we should act upon. Now, however, the charge of lack of action guidance resurfaces. Telling us that we need to use our practical wisdom doesn't give us an answer as how we should act.[25] Should we

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Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 701.

[23] *Ibid.*, 703. Zagzebski provides a very similar account of right action, which forms part of what she calls an exemplarist virtue theory. According to Zagzebski's moral theory, the example provided by the virtuous agent is "primary" or fundamental. Treating the example as primary, however, risks raising a Euthyphro-style dilemma (Linda Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Linda Zagzebski, "Exemplarist Virtue Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 41, 1 (2010): 41-57; Linda Zagzebski, *On Epistemology*).

[24] Hursthouse, "Normative Virtue Ethics," 706.

[25] For big picture accounts of how the wise act, see Stephen Grimm, "Wisdom," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 93, 1 (2015): 139-154 and Shane Ryan, "Wisdom: Understanding and the

express our opinion or should we keep stumm about what we think until we're better informed?

But why think that a normative theory can give us correct guidance as to what to do in every moral or epistemic situation?[26] While it would be useful to have a decision procedure that we could apply in every situation that would correctly tell us what the morally or epistemically right thing to do is in those various situations, no such plausible decision procedure has been found.[27] Furthermore, there doesn't seem to be any reason to think that we could discover such a decision procedure.[28] If we accept this, then the criticism that virtue theory fails to be action guiding in the way being considered here is a moot point. It's not a weakness of virtue theory that it fails to be action guiding in the way described, if no normative approach can provide us such action guidance.

If one holds that no correct decision procedure is available, then a normative approach in epistemology centred on action seems problematic. Simply to accept this and leave matters there would result in an unsatisfyingly fragmentary normative approach in epistemology.[29] If, however, we think that aetiology matters in epistemology, that it bears significantly on the epistemic status of an action, then a natural locus for our theoretical focus is the source of the action, the agent. By

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Good Life," *Acta Analytica* 31, 3 (2016): 235-251.

[26] In fact, some utilitarians and deontologists hold that they too must require that agents in some cases employ practical wisdom in order for their respective rules to be applied correctly (Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2013b Edition)).

[27] Of course this is unlikely to satisfy theorists who believe that there is such a decision procedure. To go beyond pointing out that there's no plausible candidate in the literature and make the case against various proposed decision procedures, however, would take us too far afield. Furthermore, note that a decision procedure purports to tell us how to act morally in a situation but, depending on the precise moral theory, it may not tell us whether a particular situation calls for moral action or not. To put the point differently, such a decision procedure may not help adjudicate between, say, conflicting moral and prudential norms in a given situation; we'll get an answer as to what the moral thing to do in the particular situation is, not necessarily whether we should do the moral thing rather than the prudential thing. I'll return to this later in the paper.

[28] While this is the position of various virtue ethicists, moral particularists are natural allies on this point. According to the strongest version of moral particularism, developed by Jonathan Dancy, there are no moral principles that hold irrespective of situation (Jonathan Dancy, *Ethics without Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

[29] Such a deficiency of unity worry is reminiscent of the charge made against ethical intuitionism and is discussed in David McNaughton, "An Unconnected Heap of Duties?" *Philosophical Quarterly* 46, 185 (1996): 433.

shifting our theoretical focus back from actions to the agent, we are better placed to develop a normative approach in epistemology that enjoys theoretical unity.[30]

3. Guidance for Good Intellectual Agency

By adopting this approach for our account of the ethics of intellectual agency, we are able to provide some guidance as to how we should form our beliefs. More significantly, however, is that the basic normative approach outlined provides guidance for good intellectual agency generally. This is an important theoretical advantage. As discussed, the proper scope of concern for an epistemologist is not merely how we should believe but rather concerns our epistemic agency more generally. Having a theory that accounts for both belief and epistemic agency more generally is important in so far as it facilitates a more unified approach to the ethics of intellectual agency. A theoretical approach that only concerned doxastic responses wouldn't be helpful in cases in which non-doxastic responses are also relevant.

The cases that follow, however, underscore the challenges facing a unified theoretical approach to the ethics of intellectual agency. The subsequent discussion develops an approach that attempts to meet these challenges without rejecting anti-theory. In these cases the epistemic agents described should respond differently doxastically to the same case.[31] The first two cases show this. In the first case, epistemic norms support differing intellectual responses. In the second case, differing intellectual responses are supported by differing norms but those differing responses are both all things considered appropriate. The final case shows that sometimes an appropriate intellectual response goes beyond merely forming beliefs in certain ways.

> Case 1
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> An eyewitness provides testimony that pertains to a crime. The eyewitness appears sincere and competent in the relevant respects, and is in fact sincere and competent in the relevant respects. The testimony is heard by both a layperson and a police investigator. It's permissible, perhaps required, of a layperson in normal circumstances to believe the testimony. For a police investigator, who is just beginning to investigate the case, intuitively it is impermissible for him to believe

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[30] It should be noted, however, that the return to virtue based approaches in both the epistemic and moral domains is relatively recent and those approaches are still being developed. In epistemology, even though virtue theoretic approaches are highly influential in the area of accounts of the nature of knowledge, they are much less influential in the ethics of belief debate.
[31] This is one aspect of the approach that goes beyond the adaption of Hursthouse's virtue ethics.

the testimony, rather he should withhold belief.[32]

Case 2

Suppose a person is diagnosed with a life threatening illness. She is told that the survival rate for people with the illness is 20%. If, however, a person believes that they will survive, then the survival rate improves to 40%. In this case it is clearly permissible, perhaps even required, that the patient believe that she will survive. This is regardless of whether she forms her beliefs on the basis of, say, wishful thinking, or not. For a doctor aware of the details of the sick patient's case, the illness and survival odds and so forth, and supposing there's no significant extra evidence that the doctor has, a belief that the patient will survive is not permissible.[33]

Case 3

Suppose a child cries inconsolably. The reason for his crying is completely unclear. In such a case it is not enough for a primary care-giver to believe in accordance with the evidence as to why the child is crying inconsolably. It's appropriate, rather, to try to understand why he is crying inconsolably.[34]

The first two cases show that how one should form one's beliefs may differ depending on one's situation. In the first case, the police investigator's position is such that intuitively it is inappropriate for him to simply believe the testifier, while it is appropriate for a layperson to believe the eyewitness. The case is interesting in that *norms direct the agents' belief-formations differently on epistemic grounds*.[35]

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[32] One might claim that it doesn't matter what the police investigator believes, it only matters what he does. But given the plausibility that believing would have a psychological impact on the police investigator and, in turn, on the investigation of the case, it's preferable that the investigator withhold belief. If the police investigator already believes that a particular person is the perpetrator of a crime, then we expect that the way he questions other witnesses and his following of leads would be affected. The police investigator withholding belief is preferable in such circumstances.

[33] The case becomes more complicated if we think that the patient's belief in her survival might be influenced by what the doctor believes, say by cues from the doctor's behaviour. Let's assume that the doctor is practised at not behaving in ways that influences patients to believe that they won't survive.

[34] Here is an alternative example: An advanced alien civilisation is discovered on some far away moon and various facts about these aliens are relayed to the general public. Given the significance of the discovery, assuming the testifiers are trustworthy and so on, generally it is appropriate for people not just to believe the facts relayed, but, in normal circumstances, it is appropriate for them to try to gain an understanding of the alien civilization based on the available facts.

[35] That there is an epistemic norm in play in the case of the police investigator might be contested. An alternative claim would be that the police investigator's intellectual agency is governed by a prudential or moral norm. Notice, however, that the reasons provided in footnote 25 as to why it is appropriate that the police investigator withhold belief are precisely epistemic reasons, albeit

The layperson should form her belief based on the eyewitness's testimony, while the police investigator should withhold belief. The police investigator is required to do much more intellectually before intuitively it is permissible for him to believe.

In fact, a virtue theoretic approach provides a fruitful way to explain why norms direct different belief-formations. Aside from being in a position to deny that there's a relevant decision procedure, the virtue theorist can account for those differences by reference to virtues. For the police investigator simply to believe the eyewitness's testimony when the investigation is just under way, isn't what a virtuous agent who is a police investigator undertaking an inquiry would do. What's required of him given his role in investigating the crime, rather, is open-mindedness and intellectual thoroughness. He should be very careful to avoid taking a position, such as belief, that might blind him to modally nearby possibilities. A corollary of this is that he should be intellectually thorough before he does take positions on matters that are subject to his investigation. In this case, this means doing plenty more investigating before believing the eyewitness testimony.[36]

For the layperson, however, matters are different. While it would divert us from the purposes of this paper to focus in a lot of detail on the testimony literature, it's plausible that the layperson should be counterfactually sensitive to certain factors in her reception of the eyewitness testimony. This involves being sensitive to the delivery and content of the testimony such that, had the delivery, say, been provided with suppressed sniggers and the content amounted to a very outlandish claim, then the testimonial recipient wouldn't simply believe the testimony.[37] If this condition is satisfied and the recipient is in a normal epistemic environment, then it is plausibly virtuous for her to trust the testifier. Trusting in such conditions will allow her to avoid missing out on plenty of epistemic goods and to play a part in the circulation

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with a diachronic aspect.

[36] For a related discussion of how roles can influence the ethics of belief, see Sandford Goldberg, "Should Have Known," *Synthese* 194, 8 (2017): 2863-2894.

[37] For further discussion, see Jennifer Lackey, "Why We Don't Deserve Credit for Everything We Know," *Synthese* 158 (2007): 345–361; Duncan Pritchard, "Knowledge and Understanding," in Duncan Pritchard, Alan Millar, and Adrian Haddock, *The Nature and Value of Knowledge: Three Investigations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 41; Shane Ryan, "A Humean Account of Testimonial Justification," *Logos & Episteme* 5, 2 (2014): 209-219; Shane Ryan, "Virtuous Testimonial Belief in Young Children," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 38, 3 (2019): 263-272; Shane Ryan, Chienkuo Mi, and Masaharu Mizumoto, "Testimony, Credit, and Blame: A Cross-Cultural Study of the Chicago Visitor Case," in *Ethno-Epistemology: New Directions for Global Epistemology*, eds. Masaharu Mizumoto, Jonardon Ganeri, and Cliff Goddard (New York: Routledge, 2020), 94-113.

of epistemic goods within her epistemic environment. In her case then, being attentive and trusting is virtuous.[38]

More complicated cases are possible. While, say, the police investigator's role as an investigator is what is salient in judging the appropriateness of his intellectual response, we typically occupy numerous roles. This means that more complicated cases are possible in which it's less clear that his role as investigator is what is salient. The point here is not to adjudicate between such cases in advance, rather the point is that such roles will have a bearing on how agent's should respond intellectually.[39]

In the second case we again have two agents, and again there is the intuition that how the two agent's should form their beliefs is different. This time though *it's not epistemic norms that seem to be pulling in different directions, rather it's a prudential norm on the one hand and an epistemic norm on the other hand*. The patient has a very good prudential reason to form her belief in such a way as to make it more likely that she will believe that she will survive, even if epistemically it seems she shouldn't.[40] Indeed, the self-concern reflected in a belief-forming process that leads her to significantly improves her chances of survival at the potential cost of false belief seems virtuous. The doctor on the other hand shouldn't form her belief in the same sort of way. Epistemic norms governing experts mean that it wouldn't be virtuous if she believed, contrary to the evidence available, that the patient would survive.[41]

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[38] John Greco makes a very similar point to the one made with reference to this case, though not through a virtue responsibilist framework (John Greco, "Knowledge, Testimony and Action," in *Knowledge, Virtue, and Action: Putting Epistemic Virtues to Work*, eds. Tim Henning and David P. Schweikard (London: Routledge, 2013), 15-29).

[39] Of course, this is in line with Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, whereby what the mean is will precisely depend on the situation of the of the agent, which allows for the possibility that two different virtuous agents will respond intellectually in two different ways.

[40] One could try to make the case that if epistemic normativity is governed by the goal of maximising true beliefs and minimising false beliefs, then, presuming she is generally a good epistemic agent, even epistemic normativity might demand that she believe she will survive. The reason being that if she survives, then she'll do better vis-a-vis this goal. Again, this is assuming a diachronic dimension to epistemic normativity. For more on such a type of move, see Roderick Firth, "Epistemic Merit, Intrinsic and Instrumental," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 55, 1 (1981): 5-23 and Selim Berker, "Epistemic Teleology and the Separateness of Propositions," *Philosophical Review* 122, 3 (2013): 337-393.

[41] There is a question, as in the other cases, as to exactly which virtues are in play in the case, which I won't go into here to avoid distraction from the main points that the case is intended to illustrate. To do otherwise would require a significant amount of argumentation given that particular accounts of the virtues are absent or only just being developed in the contemporary literature.

The final case shows that *how we should respond intellectually can't be reduced to how we should form our beliefs*. Intuitively, what is required of our intellectual agency goes beyond forming our beliefs in appropriate ways. As the case illustrates, sometimes we are required to seek understanding. In the particular case described, it is plausible that we are required to do so from a moral or all things considered norm, but there may be cases in which we should seek understanding for epistemic reasons that we should seek out understanding. In any case, a primary care-giver who learnt that their child cried inconsolably but did nothing to understand why that would be criticisable for lacking virtue.[42]

Even if one accepts the individual morals taken from the three cases, one may still object to the broader claim that such morals taken together support the view that no decision procedure can be identified. It is helpful to be explicit about what the cases taken together show. If one accepts the response intuitions to these cases, they show that there is no agent-neutral decision procedure. How one should act intellectually precisely depends on specifics relevant to that person, such as their social role. Still, one might wonder whether there might be a decision procedure that takes social roles and other relevant features into account. While this isn't in principle ruled out, it looks an unlikely prospect given the diversity of the features that bear on the ethics of intellectual agency.

Consideration of various epistemic cases undermines the claim that some decision procedure can be found that will tell us what the intellectually right thing to do is in any given situation. There is, however, more to say than this. Just as is the case in virtue ethics with regard to right action, in virtue epistemology with regard to intellectual agency, we can also make the move that although no correct decision procedure is to be found, agents should act intellectually as the virtuous agent would characteristically act in the circumstances. This involves acting intellectually virtuously and not intellectually viciously. In other words, we should act intellectually from intellectual courage, intellectual thoroughness, open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, and so on.

A further dynamic, and one that goes beyond what we find in the analogue account of virtue ethics provided by Hursthouse, however, is that being an intellectually virtuous agent involves not only acting from intellectual virtue generally, but doing so when appropriate. After all, the patient's behaviour in believing that she will survive is intuitively appropriate. The fully virtuous agent is an agent who responds appropriately in cases in which, say, the moral or prudential trumps the epistemic and likewise in cases in which the epistemic trumps the

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[42] Understanding is also perhaps required of the police investigator.

moral.[43] I take it that cases of the former are more obvious than cases of the latter. For a case of the latter we can imagine some low level wrong being done, say being late by 15 minutes for a meeting with a friend because one is close to understanding how to solve an important problem in philosophy.[44]

The lesson here is that just as the good moral agent doesn't moralise everything, in that she doesn't act from morality in situations that don't call for a moral response, the good intellectual agent doesn't intellectualise everything, in that she doesn't act from the intellectual in situations that don't call for intellectual response. Again though, it's doubtful that any decision procedure can be drawn up as to when a situation calls for intellectual action and when it doesn't. The result then is that action guidance provided by the virtue theoretic account of intellectual agency offered is limited both as to how exactly one should act intellectually in terms of what virtue should be applied, and as to when one should act intellectually in terms of whether one should act from an intellectual virtue or not.[45]

The guidance offered by the account of the ethics of intellectual agency doesn't stop at the instruction to act as the virtuous agent would act, it extends to instructing us to be open-minded, intellectually courageous, and so on. In other words, we're instructed to act intellectually virtuously. What intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness and intellectual courage involve, however, is something that requires articulation, which is not something that is addressed by this paper. That the role one occupies can bear on what is virtuous in a given situation is also highlighted without being systematically detailed. The account that has been set out here, therefore, isn't intended to be the final word, but rather one of the first words in a virtue theoretical approach to the ethics of intellectual agency—a domain argued to be more appropriate for an ethics in epistemology than the ethics of belief. While the account articulated stakes out a virtue theoretic position, the task of

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[43] If there are cases of incommensurability, then it is plausible that virtuous agents may permissibly respond in different ways.

[44] For more on the moral not always trumping the non-moral, see Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *Journal of Philosophy* 79, 8 (1982): 419-439; Rinard, "Equal Treatment"; Shane Ryan and Fei Song, "Famine, Action, and the Normative," *Journal of Value Inquiry*, forthcoming.

[45] The reader may have noticed that in both the moral and epistemic domains, the guidance provided by both Hursthouse's virtue ethics and the proposed virtue theoretic ethics of intellectual agency respectively is to act as the virtuous agent would characteristically act. The guidance in the respective domains is not to act as the morally virtuous agent would characteristically act and not to act as the intellectually virtuous agent would characteristically act, as this would be misleading as the above indicates.

providing accounts of the individual intellectual virtues and how virtues and roles interact remains.[46]

4. Conclusion

This paper makes the case that we need an ethics of intellectual agency rather than a mere ethics of belief. It's pointed out that there are aspects of intellectual life that go beyond or are not reducible to doxastic attitudes. What follows is a proposal for just such an ethics of intellectual agency. The claim advanced is that we should act as the virtuous agent would characteristically act in the circumstances. It's acknowledged that such an approach might be criticised for failing to provide action-guidance. The response is that it can provide a degree of action guidance with reference to the virtues but also that it's a mistake to think that any approach can provide a formula that gives accurate guidance in every circumstances.[47]

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[46] In fact several recent papers in the literature attempt to do just this. For example, Wayne Riggs and Jason Baehr have provided accounts of open-mindedness as an intellectual virtue, while Nathan King has done the same for perseverance, as have Chienkuo Mi and Shane Ryan for skilful reflection (Wayne Riggs, "Open-Mindedness," *Metaphilosophy* 41, 1 (2010): 172-188; Jason Baehr, "The Structure of Open-Mindedness," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 41, 2 (2011): 191-213; Nathan King, "Perseverance as an Intellectual Virtue," *Synthese* 191, 15 (2014): 3501-3523; Chienkuo Mi and Shane Ryan, "Skilful Reflection as a Master Virtue," *Synthese* 197, 6 (2020): 2295-2308). Also, for an account of the intellectual vice of epistemic malevolence, the existence of which maintains a symmetry between virtue theory in ethics and virtue theory in epistemology, see Jason Baehr, "Epistemic Malevolence," *Metaphilosophy* 41, 1 (2010): 189-213.

[47] Thanks to Andrea Robitzsch and several blind reviewers for their feedback on this work.