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Virtuous arguers: Responsible and reliable

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Abstract: Virtuous arguers are expected to manifest virtues such as intellectual humility and open-mindedness, but from such traits the quality of arguments does not immediately follow. However, it also seems implausible that a virtuous arguer can systematically put forward bad arguments. How could virtue argumentation theory combine both insights? The solution, I argue, lies in an analogy with virtue epistemology: considering both responsibilist and reliabilist virtues gives us a fuller picture of the virtuous arguer.

Keywords: character, education, reliabilism, responsibilism, skills, virtue argumentation, virtue epistemology.

1. Introduction

A great part of the interest in a virtue approach to argumentation comes from the prospects of addressing certain aspects of argumentation for which more traditional, act-based approaches seem to be less apt. Whether the arguer is biased or whether the arguer displays open-mindedness are examples of issues for which virtue argumentation theory seems to be the most appropriate approach. It has been argued, however, that virtue argumentation theory could not be a complete theory, for the question of whether an argument should be considered good or bad still depends on the qualities of the argument itself, not the arguer's traits (Bowell & Kingsbury, 2013; Godden, 2016). I agree with the critics that virtue argumentation theory should *not* be intended to replace the standard notion of *cogency*, or to define it in virtue-theoretic terms. The version of virtue argumentation theory that I advocate, then, is *modest moderate*: "cogency is necessary, albeit not sufficient, for argument quality, and moreover it is an aspect of quality that does not require considerations of character to be established" (Paglieri, 2015, p. 77).

Does that mean that a virtue approach to argumentation has nothing to say about the kinds of arguments that virtuous arguers put forward? Would it be possible, from the perspective of virtue argumentation theory, that a virtuous arguer systematically produced bad arguments? One of the

main purposes of this paper is to rule out this possibility. Even though cogency must be determined by an evaluation of the product—i.e. the argument—I will argue that the skills related to the production of good arguments can be integrated as virtues into virtue argumentation theory. Thus, although virtue argumentation theory will not cover argument evaluation, it will acknowledge and incorporate the skills that make an arguer reliably produce cogent arguments. This will give us a more complete characterisation of the virtuous arguer—and one that acknowledges the importance of informal logic skills.

In the following sections, I will present the two different accounts of epistemic virtues that the two main perspectives in virtue epistemology provide. I agree with Battaly (2008) that these two varieties of virtue epistemology, the *reliabilist* and the *responsibilist*, are not in fact two opposite accounts of the same thing, but two perspectives that shed light on different aspects of epistemic practice. I will argue that, if this is transferred to argumentation theory, we have again two different kinds of virtues that account for two different aspects of argumentative virtue. One of these kinds of argumentative virtues will explain the informal logic skills that the virtuous arguer must have; the other kind of argumentative virtues will account for the character-based, ethical traits that the virtuous arguer must cultivate and display. After outlining the meaning of these terms in virtue epistemology in the following section, in section 3 I will propose a characterisation of two kinds of argumentative virtues on the basis of the two kinds of epistemic virtues.

2. Virtues in virtue epistemology

2.1. Virtue reliabilism

After the rebirth of virtue ethics in the 20th century, the possibility was considered that a virtue approach to epistemology could help solve some of the fundamental problems that challenged other epistemological theories. In 1980, Ernest Sosa published his article *The raft and the pyramid: Coherence versus foundations in the theory of knowledge*, where he criticised coherentist and foundationalist accounts of knowledge and concluded with the proposal of a *reliabilist* account based on *intellectual virtues*. His proposal was agent-based in the sense that justification was grounded primarily in virtues (1980, p. 23):

> Here primary justification would apply to *intellectual* virtues, to stable dispositions for belief acquisition, through their greater contribution toward getting us to the truth. Secondary justification would then attach to particular beliefs in virtue of their source in intellectual virtues or other such justified dispositions.

Since then, Sosa's has developed a theory that follows the tradition of reliabilism in epistemology, but instead of focusing on reliable processes, as traditional reliabilism does, he focuses on reliable *faculties*. He criticises the traditional sort of reliabilism that relies on processes of belief acquisition or retention because such an approach to epistemology must face several problems, for example that of how to individuate processes in a way that does not allow the

consideration of too specific and artificial processes that can only produce one output ever or that necessarily produce true beliefs (2000, pp. 19–20). Instead Sosa's reliabilism is grounded in our faculties—that is, dispositions or competences. Faculties or intellectual virtues[1] are reliable only relative to a field and a set of normal conditions. So we have the following definition of intellectual virtue in Sosa's account (Ibid., p. 25):

> Let us define an intellectual virtue or faculty as a competence in virtue of which one would mostly attain the truth and avoid error in a certain field of propositions F, when in certain conditions C.

What kind of intellectual virtues does Sosa have in mind? He does not restrict them to the Aristotelian sense of virtues as dispositions based on deliberate choices, given that surely many of our beliefs are not deliberate choices. Rather, he says (1991, p. 271): 'there is a broader sense of "virtue," still Greek, in which anything with a function—natural or artificial—does have virtues.' He distinguishes between two broad sorts of faculties that lead to beliefs: *transmission* faculties take other beliefs already formed as input, whereas *generation* faculties do not (1991, p. 225). Among the former he mentions faculties such as deductive reason and memory. Generation faculties, on the other hand, are intuitive reason, perceptual faculties, and introspection, among others. These are all examples of natural faculties, which Sosa calls *fundamental* virtues, but he also takes into account *derived* virtues that are more similar to acquired skills (1991, p. 278): "*Derived* virtues are virtues acquired by use of the more fundamental as when one learns how to read and use an instrument through a friend's teaching or through reading a manual or through empirical trial and error methods." Nevertheless, his early work focused almost exclusively on the natural virtues, and this seems natural given his definition of intellectual virtue in terms of reliability.

Sosa is mainly interested in traditional epistemological issues such as the definition of knowledge, the Gettier problem, and the sceptical challenge. And, indeed, his virtue reliabilist theory contains the resources to provide a plausible definition of knowledge. Instead of simply defining knowledge as justified true belief, Sosa distinguishes between animal and reflective knowledge. Apt belief, that is, belief that is acquired "*correctly* (with truth) through the exercise of a competence in its proper conditions" (2007, p. 33), constitutes animal knowledge if true. If the belief is produced by intellectual virtues or faculties—here, competences—then that is enough for animal knowledge. The more demanding reflective knowledge, however, requires "apt belief that the subject aptly believes to be apt, and whose aptness the subject can therefore defend against relevant skeptical doubts" (Ibid., p. 24).[2]

Another proponent of this variety of virtue epistemology is John Greco (1999). He calls his theory *agent reliabilism* because, instead of considering reliable processes, as traditional reliabilism does, he holds that "knowledge and justified belief are grounded in stable and reliable cognitive

1 Sosa seems to use both terms interchangeably, at least in his early articles.

2 It is Sosa's characterisation of intellectual virtues that most interests me here. The details of his theory of knowledge can be mentioned only briefly.

character" (p. 287). That is, he makes the same move as Sosa. Furthermore, just as Sosa does, Greco takes into account both natural faculties, such as accurate vision, and acquired habits, such as methods of inquiry. However, Greco also allows for proper motivations in his account, or what he calls "conscientious thinking" (p. 290).

As in the case of Sosa, Greco's main concern is providing a definition of knowledge and addressing the problem of scepticism, among others. He argues that a reliabilist approach that relies on cognitive dispositions can solve many of those problems. Thus, he offers the following definition of subjective justification, that could be the basis of a definition of knowledge (p. 289):

> A belief p is subjectively justified for a person S (in the sense relevant for having knowledge) if and only if S's believing p is grounded in the cognitive dispositions that S manifests when S is thinking conscientiously.

2.2. Virtue responsibilism

On the other hand, a few years after Sosa published his foundational article, Lorraine Code presented the *responsibilist* variety of virtue epistemology. Although she supported Sosa's overall project of focusing on the epistemic agent and intellectual virtues, she nevertheless proposed a slightly different perspective (1984, p. 39):

> I call mine a 'responsibilist' position in contradistinction to Sosa's proposed 'reliabilism', at least where it is *human* knowledge that is under discussion. This is because the concept 'responsibility' can allow emphasis upon the active nature of the knower/believer that the concept 'reliability' cannot.

Indeed, even though Code does not deny that the epistemically virtuous person must be reliable, she sets reliability aside and chooses to focus instead on other important aspects of epistemic virtue. She claims (1984, p. 41):

> To be intellectually virtuous is not just to have a good score in terms of cognitive endeavours that come out right. It is much more a matter of orientation toward the world, and toward one's knowledge-seeking self, and other such selves as part of the world.

Moreover, Code is not as interested as Sosa and Greco are in providing a definition of knowledge or in solving problems like those of Gettier and of scepticism.[3] Intellectual virtue, she argues, is of central relevance to judging a knowledge claim, but the fact that a person is intellectually virtuous does not automatically make her belief an instance of knowledge (p. 29). Intellectual virtues bear on our attitudes and our ways of relating to the world more than on the content of our knowledge claims (pp. 52-53).

Instead, she takes the characterisation of the epistemically virtuous character as her central concern. In her essay *Epistemic Responsibility*, where she develops her epistemological approach,

3 "A theory of intellectual virtue cannot offer an easy calculus for assessing knowledge and belief claims." (Code, 1984, p. 47)

she provides a broad picture of what being intellectually virtuous means. In order to do that, she uses examples and narratives, rather than abstract definitions. She emphasises the role of responsibility, which is, according to her, "a central virtue from which other virtues radiate" (1987, p. 44). She also discusses epistemological issues in relation to ethics, understanding, and especially the role of epistemic communities. Knowledge, she argues (p. 167), is a common achievement, and her epistemological theory stresses the importance of interdependency, testimony, and trust. Her approach, then, is not so much focused on isolated beliefs and instances of knowledge as it is in cognitive practice (p. 8):

> My emphasis upon cognitive *activity* is intentional and important. The major contrast between the line of approach to be developed here and the predominant tradition is in the way this new position moves away from a concentration upon products, end-states of cognition. It turns, instead, to an examination of process, of efforts to achieve these end-states.

Thus, the kind of virtues that Code considers are not natural faculties that make us reliable knowers, but those that influence the choices we make and the habits we develop, such as intellectual honesty, integrity, wisdom, and prudence. One of the reasons why she emphasises this kind of intellectual virtues, rather than natural faculties such as accurate vision, is that according to her, traditional approaches to epistemology have focused on excessively simple and rare instances of knowledge—like seeing a hand or doorknob (p. 7)—and have neglected the complexity of most of our actual knowledge, which *requires* responsibilist virtues.

Roberts and Wood (2007) present an approach to intellectual virtue that is similar to Code's in these respects: they call their approach *regulative* epistemology, for their purpose is to provide guidance for epistemic conduct, as contrasted with *analytic* epistemology, whose aim is to produce theories of justification, knowledge, and the like (pp. 20-21). They develop an account of intellectual virtue that emphasises the role of human *will* and *motivations*, and consequently the kind of virtues that they discuss is similar to Code's: intellectual courage and caution, humility, firmness, practical wisdom, but also love of knowledge, autonomy and generosity.

2.3. Theories, anti-theories, and the value problem

The explanation of reliabilist and responsibilist virtue epistemology in the previous subsections suggests that the two branches of virtue epistemology have in fact two different purposes. Sosa's and Greco's accounts aim at providing a definition of knowledge, whereas Code, Roberts and Wood explicitly refuse to do so. Heather Battaly (2008) has made a distinction between virtue *theories* and virtue *anti-theories* that captures this difference.[4] According to her, then, there are two kinds of virtue theorists (p. 640):

4 It seems to me that Battaly's terminology is biased in that it implies that an epistemological theory *must* include a definition of knowledge. But, in my view, a theory that focuses in the analysis of epistemic virtues *is* a theory, even if it is not a *definition of knowledge*. Nevertheless, Roberts and Wood seem to be

- Some construct *theories* which define or otherwise ground knowledge and justified belief in terms of the intellectual virtues.
- Others, *anti-theorists*, shun formulaic connections between the virtues and knowledge, but argue that the intellectual virtues are the central concepts and properties in epistemology and warrant exploration in their own right.

Some proponents of virtue responsibilism have argued that one of the merits of this variety of virtue epistemology is precisely that it allows us to address epistemological issues that more traditional theories usually overlook. Roberts and Wood argue that (2007, p. 20): "The concept of an intellectual virtue invites us to a new way of thinking about epistemology, but one that has, up to now, not been far pursued." In a similar vein, Christopher Hookway (2003) holds that virtue epistemology has the potential to draw our attention to important and previously neglected aspects of our epistemic activity, such as those related to "well-regulated inquiries and theoretical deliberations" (p. 194), thus showing that the analysis of knowledge and true belief may not be *the* fundamental concern of epistemology after all.

That is not always the case, however. One of the most prominent responsibilist virtue theorists, Linda Zagzebski (1996), aims to provide a proper definition of knowledge and to solve Gettier problems. Following Code—and Aristotle—Zagzebski regards virtues as acquired traits of the epistemic agent, and she therefore excludes natural faculties (pp. 102-103). She is interested in those qualities of people for which they are responsible (p. 104): "A virtue is a deep quality of a person, closely identified with her selfhood, whereas natural faculties are only the raw materials for the self." Even though she includes a component of reliability in the intellectual virtues, a certain *motivation* is also required (p. 166): "the individual intellectual virtues can be defined in terms of motivations arising from the general motivation for knowledge and reliability in attaining the aims of these motives." Now, from that conception of the virtues, she presents a simple definition of knowledge as "a state of belief arising out of acts of intellectual virtue" (p. 271), where "act of intellectual virtue is defined as follows (p. 270):

> *An act of intellectual virtue A* is an act that arises from the motivational component of *A*, is something a person with virtue *A* would (probably) do in the circumstances, is successful in achieving the end of the *A* motivation, and is such that the agent acquires a true belief (cognitive contact with reality) through these features of the act.

Zagzebski's attempt to define knowledge from a responsibilist perspective raises two issues that are relevant to the purposes of this article. The first one has to do with a particular merit that, according to her, the definition has: it explains the value of knowledge. The second issue involves the fact that, according to her critics, the definition does not capture very straightforward cases of knowledge. I will explain both issues in turn.

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comfortable with the assumption that they are not strictly speaking offering a theory (2007, p. 26): "In light of what mostly counts as theory among philosophers today, we prefer to say that we are offering no theory."

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Defining knowledge on the basis of intellectual virtues as acquired excellences solves, according to Zagzebski, a problem that affects virtue reliabilism: the *value* problem. It is widely agreed that knowledge has more value than mere true belief. However, Zagzebski holds that reliabilism cannot explain why this is so. She explains this with an analogy (2000, p. 113):

> A reliable process is good only because of the good of the product of the process. A reliable expresso-maker is good because expresso is good. A reliable water-dripping faucet is not good because dripping watter is not good. Reliability per se has no value or disvalue. Its value or disvalue derives solely from the value or disvalue of that which it reliably produces. […] Similarly, a reliable truth-producing process is good because truth is good.

The conclusion is that a belief acquired through a reliable process, if true, is no better than a true belief acquired otherwise. The same happens, she says, with reliable faculties (p. 115). Processes and faculties are good to the extent that their products are good. Zagzebski admits that reliability is no doubt important, but she adds that by itself reliability cannot explain why knowledge is better than accidentally true belief. "Non-accidentality is not valuable enough to give us the value we think knowledge has" (p. 117). Reliabilism seems to focus on truth and does not allow for further value. Her definition of intellectual virtues, however, contains a reliability component *and a motivation component*. The motive to get the truth, in her conception of intellectual virtues, is intrinsically good and this goodness transfers from the agents to their beliefs. Thus, this explains why knowledge is better than mere true belief.

I do not know to what extent this criticism of reliabilism succeeds. Sosa has provided an answer that might help reliabilism avoid the value problem.[5] In any case, I am drawing attention to Zagzebski's criticism because, interestingly, it could be an important insight if applied to argumentative virtues. For, in fact, it seems plausible that an accidentally produced *argument* is no less valuable than a reliably produced *argument*. In the next section, I will apply this idea in order to characterise a certain kind of argumentative virtues.

On the other hand, several critics have pointed out that Zagzebski's definition does not rule out Gettier-type counterexamples, as she intends it to do (Battaly, 2008, p. 654; Roberts & Wood, 2007, pp. 12–13). What is worse, even though one of the merits of the definition is that it takes into account complex and interesting instances of knowledge, including scientific knowledge, it seems to leave out very simple cases. Consider the following (Roberts & Wood, 2007, p. 10):

> I am sitting in a room at night with the lights blazing, and suddenly all the lights go out. Automatically, without reflection or any other kind of effort, I form the belief that the lights have gone out. Clearly, I *know* that the lights went out, and it didn't take any act of intellectual courage, humility, attentiveness, perseverance, or any other virtue to do so.

5 Sosa argues that "the value of apt belief is no less epistemically fundamental than that of true belief" (2007, pp. 87–88). He contrasts the example of the coffee maker with examples of a ballerina and of an archer, where it seems that we would value the performance less were it not a manifestation of skill.

Hence, it seems that, whatever the merits of the responsibilist variety of virtue epistemology, offering an adequate definition of knowledge does not seem to be one of them. As Roberts and Woods write (Ibid.): "the kind of virtue that Zagzebski makes central has potential for deepening and humanizing epistemology, but little potential for the routine epistemological goal of e-defining [that is, giving sufficient and necessary conditions for] knowledge."

In conclusion, the main points that I would like to emphasise in order to make sense of argumentative virtues in the next section are the following:

1. The value problem identified by Zagzebski suggests that, in the case of reliabilist virtues, primary value is attached to the quality of the products (beliefs), and secondarily to the virtues only to the extent that they lead to valuable products.

2. Responsibilist virtues, on the other hand, do not seem to provide a firm and broad enough basis for a definition of knowledge—in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. It does not fare well in very simple cases of low-grade knowledge.

3. However, responsibilist virtues are most adequate for more complex cases of knowledge that involve epistemic *activity* rather than perceptual *passivity*, and that have been neglected in the past. Virtue responsibilism broadens our understanding of our overall epistemic life and draws our attention to issues that have been ignored by traditional epistemology—which was focused on rather simple beliefs such as "this is a hand" and "that is red."

3. Two kinds of argumentative virtues

3.1. Reliability and motivation

In the previous section, I have provided a picture of the strengths and weaknesses of both varieties of virtue epistemology—reliabilist and responsibilist virtue epistemology. I am not claiming that it is an accurate picture of the respective merits of each theory—I hope it is, at least to a significant extent, but that is not crucial for the purposes of this article. Rather, my claim is that *that picture* provides us with a way to understand the argumentative virtues by analogy with *that depiction* of the differences between reliabilist and responsibilist virtue epistemology. In this section, I will argue that such an analogy may be useful for virtue argumentation theory.

In considering whether virtue reliabilism or virtue reponsibilism is correct, Battaly (2008, 2015) argues that both are, since both identify intellectual virtues that are relevant to knowledge. Virtue reliabilism, she proposes, can account for low-grade knowledge, where the epistemic agent needs little more than reliable faculties in order to passively receive inputs, while virtue responsibilism is more adequate for high-grade knowledge, where active inquiry is necessary (2008, p. 661). This seems to be a reasonable and fruitful proposal, and I suggest that, similarly, considering two kinds of virtues in argumentation may help us solve some problems of virtue argumentation theory and would give us a rich and interesting picture of argumentative practice. On the one hand, we want to

say that the virtuous arguer is someone who *reliably* produces good arguments; on the other hand, the virtuous arguer should also display a virtuous argumentative *character*, which includes manifestations of open-mindedness, humility, firmness, and so on. Let us see all this in detail.

As was explained in the introduction, the proponent of a virtue approach to argumentation faces a problem. Either (a) one takes argumentative virtues as the basis from which the quality of arguments derives, or (b) one admits that cogency is not to be defined in terms of qualities of the arguer. Option (a) clashes with a widespread and well-established intuition that arguments should be evaluated on their own merits, regardless of who puts them forward. On the other hand, option (b) leads to a gap in virtue argumentation theory regarding argument quality—a crucial part of argumentation—so that seemingly a virtuous arguer could systematically produce bad arguments or assess arguments incorrectly. Aberdein (2014) opts for option (a) and his solution to the corresponding problem is to deny that characteristics of the arguers are not relevant to the evaluation of their arguments. He presents several examples in which arguments can be evaluated in terms of traits of the arguer. Here, however, I am following the second option, so I will have to address the issue of the incompleteness of virtue argumentation. I will argue that such a problem is not unavoidable. The conclusion that a virtuous arguer may be *unreliable* in argument assessment and argument production can be avoided, precisely, if we allow for a special kind of virtues whose value derives from the quality of the product: *reliabilist* virtues.

As we saw, the distinction between both kinds of virtues in virtue epistemology, according to Battaly, could be interpreted as a distinction between two kinds of knowledge: low-grade knowledge in the case of reliabilist virtues and high-grade knowledge in the case of responsibilist virtues. This is not a distinction that can be straightforwardly applied to virtue argumentation. Moreover, in virtue argumentation we cannot say, as we said in the case of virtue epistemology, that virtues of one kind are more passive while virtues of the other kind are more active.[6] Both the production and evaluation of arguments and the overall behaviour during the course of a discussion are active enterprises. What, then, would the distinction between reliabilist and responsibilist virtues correspond to in argumentation? A crucial point of difference could be the kind of issues that those virtues are intended to address. Aberdein (2016) shows how the distinction between *classical* epistemology, which focuses on problems such as the definition of knowledge, and *inquiry* epistemology, could be applied to argumentation. Thus, we have, on the one hand, more *classical* projects, such as the determination of the cogency of arguments, and on the other hand projects that address less familiar and often neglected issues, which Aberdein calls *activity* approaches. The difference between the two kinds of virtues, then, could be understood on the basis of the kind of issues that the theory that endorses them is intended to address.

Is it possible to say something more about the distinction between reliabilist and responsibilist virtues in argumentation? In virtue epistemology, as we saw, the core component of reliabilist virtues is reliability, whereas the core component of responsibilist virtues is motivation. Surely, a

6 Tracy Bowell drew my attention to this important difference.

certain reliability is necessary even for responsibilist virtues, but, as Code and Zagzebski argue, reliability cannot be the central element in those virtues. Similarly, in the case of argumentative virtues, I believe that what characterises the virtues related to the production and evaluation of arguments is precisely that they make the arguer *reliable* in grasping cogency, and what mainly characterises responsibilist virtues is the *motivation* that prompts the arguer to act in a certain way. Here, again, the arguer must not only have the relevant motivation but also reliably bring about the desired result, but what ultimately defines a given responsibilist virtue is its intrinsic motivation.

Battaly's (2015) pluralist account of virtues recognises the existence of both kinds of virtues as well. She contrasts virtues as qualities that involve reliable success in attaining good ends or effects with virtues in which such a success is not required, but that rather involve good motives (p. 9):[7]

> One way that qualities can make us better people is by enabling us to attain good ends or effects—like true beliefs, or the welfare of others. But this isn't the only way for qualities to make us better people. Qualities that involve good motives—like caring about truths, or about the welfare of others—also make us better people, and do so even if they don't reliably attain good ends or effects.

Such a distinction seems to fit well with our present purposes in virtue argumentation theory. The kind of virtues that I am introducing here, reliabilist virtues, get their value and meaning from their final products—cogent arguments or proper appraisal of arguments. Responsibilist virtues, on the other hand, are valued and differentiated mainly on the basis of their intrinsic motives, and they are mostly displayed not in the dealings with arguments as products but rather in the larger activity of arguing. The distinction, then, is first and foremost based on whether the focus is on motivation or the final products.

In the following two subsections, I will characterise both reliabilist and responsibilist virtues. Then, in subsection 3.4, I will conclude with a brief remark about what the psychological research can tell us regarding the relationship between these virtues.

3.2. Reliabilist virtues

Whatever the importance of the relation between a belief and the believer for the notion of justification, such a relation between the product and the producer is admittedly much weaker in argumentation. As Bowell and Kingsbury argue (2013, p. 26), traits of the person may provide reasons to doubt the truth of a *claim*, but—in general—they do not allow us to reject her *arguments*. As a consequence, we must admit that the quality of arguments should be explained and determined by an act-based approach to argumentation that focuses on the intrinsic merits of the argument. As I have already pointed out, however, this does not mean that virtue argumentation theory has nothing to say regarding argument quality. The solution lies in allowing for a certain kind of virtues whose value or goodness derives from the value or goodness of their outcomes. If Zagzebski's criticism is correct, that is precisely the case with reliabilist virtues.

7 I thank Andrew Aberdein for pointing out Battaly's distinction to me.

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This solution allows virtue argumentation theory to recognise that the appropriate approach to argument quality is an act-based approach—such as informal logic—while at the same time including a reference to argument quality in its conception of the virtuous arguer. It is possible, for example, to include in the characterisation of the virtuous arguer a component that Harvey Siegel includes in his characterisation of the critical thinker: that she is "appropriately moved by reasons" (1997, p. 49). It is also possible to discuss the different ways an arguer could put forward or appreciate good reasons—and this is a substantial matter. Whether, for example, the production and appreciation of good reasons and good arguments always require conscious reasoning or rather the strength of some reasons is "felt" (Ibid., p. 52). These are significant issues that a virtue approach to argumentation could address, through the notion of reliabilist virtues, without denying that what ultimately makes reasons and arguments good is their intrinsic characteristics.

Reliabilist virtues so understood are analogous to *skills* in an Aristotelian sense. Aristotle points out that one difference between virtues and skills is that "the products of the skills have their worth within themselves," whereas actions that are virtuous are so "not merely by having some quality of their own, but rather if the agent acts in a certain state" (*Nicomachean Ethics* II.4.1105a). Hence, it is important for a virtuous arguer to possess reliabilist virtues, but just as happens with skills, the outcomes of these virtues—arguments, evaluations, and the like—will be assessed (to a great extent[8]) on their own merits, regardless of how or by whom they where produced.[9]

Acknowledging a conception of reliabilist virtues in this sense has consequences in the way such virtues can be taught and learnt. If the focus of reliabilist virtues is on the arguments, it seems plausible that education in reliabilist virtues should foster such things as understanding, correct appraisal, construction and appreciation of good arguments. Consider, for instance, the following set of skills in an argument curriculum that Deanna Kuhn (2005, pp. 153–154) designed:

- Generating reasons.
- Elaborating reasons.
- Supporting reasons with evidence.
- Evaluating reasons.
- Developing reasons into an argument.

8 I am making an effort to qualify claims such as this because I do not believe that considerations of character are *never* relevant to the quality of the argument. I am merely claiming that *in general* they are not relevant. They may be relevant in specific cases, such as defeasible arguments, although only to a limited extent.

9 Are all argumentative skills reliabilist virtues? In his commentary to my paper, Aberdein points out that, rather than regarding all skills as a special sort of virtue, I should also consider skills that are necessary for the proper exercise of a virtue—a prerequisite. He is right that I have not considered this issue and I am certainly describing reliabilist virtues as if they were simply argument skills. His comment raises an interesting issue that unfortunately I cannot fruitfully address here.

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- Examining and evaluating opposing side's reasons.
- Generating counterarguments to others' reasons.
- Generating rebuttals to others' counterarguments.
- Contemplating mixed evidence.
- Conducting and evaluating two-sided arguments.

The goal of these activities that Kuhn includes in her curriculum is to develop skills that are obviously focused on dealing with reasons, evidence, arguments and couterarguments. All of them are arguably important skills that a virtuous arguer must have, and here I am proposing that they could be conceived of as reliabilist virtues.

Moreover, curricula such as Kuhn's, which aim at teaching how to produce good reasons and how to evaluate others' reasons and produce counterarguments, may have to be complemented with teaching activities specifically intended to counteract certain biases. For example, Zenker (2013) proposes a teaching and learning activity (TLA) with the purpose of addressing group polarisation, the tendency of groups to see their differences of opinion as greater than they actually are. The activity consists in a discussion about the arguments that support a position that is different from that of the group, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of that position. The authors explain (p. 8):

> In simple terms, the immediate purpose of the TLA is for learners to become more familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of their own positions, by becoming aware of positions they do not endorse personally. This is here called "engaging with the other side." Through such engaging, one's own biases may be better discerned than without such engaging, or so is the central assumption.

Experimental evidence suggests that this activity may reliably decrease biases such as group polarisation and therefore contribute to a more objective appraisal of the different points of view. If that is the case, then the activity can be said to help in the acquisition of reliabilist virtues.

And, of course, the practice of argumentation itself under certain conditions may improve reliabilist virtues. According to the interactionist approach to reason proposed by Mercier and Sperber (2017), the production of arguments is inherently biased in one's favour—what they call *myside bias* (p. 218)—and solitary reasoning, where one does not have to face counterarguments, only makes things worse. In the absence of any (actual or foreseen) objections, we tend to rest content with the weakest arguments that support our position. On the other hand, the evaluation of others' arguments tends to be unbiased, so we can objectively assess the strength of counterarguments and be convinced by them. Hence, the way to improve our reasoning skills is by actually arguing with different-minded people. The authors claim (p. 297):

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> If learning to reason is, to a large extent, learning to anticipate counterarguments, then the best solution might be to expose people to more counterarguments—to make people argue more.

By having to face actual counterarguments, the skill of anticipating them in future occasions can be developed (p. 298):

> Arguing, it seems, makes one a better reasoner across the board. By being confronted with counterarguments on a specific topic, one learns to anticipate their presence in other contexts.

Clearly, more research will show the best ways towards the acquisition of reliabilist virtues. What I have shown in this subsection is how the value of reliabilist virtues derives from the quality of the production and evaluation of arguments, and how the acquisition of reliabilist virtues is not a straightforward matter.

3.3. Responsibilist virtues

On the other hand, there are what, following the trends in virtue epistemology, we could call *responsibilist* virtues. These virtues have to do with the arguer's attitude, with her character and motivation, rather than her faculties or skills. One of the differences between responsibilist virtues and reliabilist virtues—or skills—in argumentation lies in the fact that their significance and their meaning derive from the arguer itself, from the attitude, the behaviour, and the habits that the arguer cultivates. The value of responsibilist virtues does not stem from the value of their outputs—although, of course, the arguer must reliably *display* those virtues, and hence there is also a reliability component in them. In the case of virtue epistemology, we saw that responsibilist virtues could not account for basic instances of knowledge, such as knowing that the lights have gone out when that is the case. Similarly, in my view, the relation between responsibilist argumentative virtues and the products of this activity—reasons, arguments—is at best weak. One can be a very open-minded person but lack the skills necessary to properly assess an argument. One can be an intellectually humble arguer but rely on a hasty generalisation during a discussion—even if, as it is to be expected, during the course of the discussion one will listen to criticisms of that argument and will recognise that mistake. In short, as it has often been pointed out: a virtuous arguer can put forward a bad argument, and a vicious arguer can put forward a cogent argument.

Where, then, lies the value of responsibilist virtues? As we have seen, in virtue epistemology, several responsibilist virtue theorists suggest that one of the merits of a virtue approach is precisely the change in focus in epistemology. Just as, according to those authors, a virtue approach helps us see that knowledge and justified belief are not the only legitimate concerns in epistemology, so too a virtue approach to argumentation may make us see that the quality of arguments is not all there is to argumentative discussions—as important as it is. Virtuous arguers should not only present cogent arguments, but also be open to different points of view, willing to subject their own beliefs to rational criticism, respectful to other arguers, and the like. Those behaviours are best explained in

terms of the kind of character that the arguer manifests, rather than in terms of the arguments she produces.

In the critical thinking community it is already widely agreed that a characterisation of the critical thinker must include a component of character. Richard Paul (1993) warned against assuming a "weak sense" of critical thinking, which is limited to skills, and argued for a "strong sense" of critical thinking that includes also intellectual virtues. Similarly, Siegel (1988, 1997) conceives of the critical thinker as possessing not only skills, but also what he calls "critical spirit." Actually, it seems plausible to assume that there will be few differences between the critical thinker and the virtuous arguer, so virtue argumentation theorists would do well to pay attention to the insights that the critical thinking movement can offer.

The list of argumentative virtues that Andrew Aberdein (2010, p. 175) has proposed seems, to my mind, to focus precisely on responsibilist argumentative virtues.[10] Most virtues in Aberdein's list are character traits in which the motivation of the arguer seems to play an important role. They offer a conceptual framework in which *argumentation* as a social practice—rather than the *argument* as a static product—becomes important, thus drawing attention to new aspects of argumentation. And, to my mind at least, most of them do not bear a direct relation to argument quality—that is, not as direct as in the case of reliabilist virtues. Let us see the list in detail:

- *Willingness to engage in argumentation*
  - Being communicative
  - Faith in reason
  - Intellectual courage
    - Sense of duty
- *Willingness to listen to others*
  - Intellectual empathy
    - Insight into persons
    - Insight into problems
    - Insight into theories
  - Fair-mindedness
    - Justice
    - Fairness in evaluating the arguments of others
    - Open-mindedness in collecting and appraising evidence
  - Recognition of reliable authority
  - Recognition of salient facts

10 Interestingly, however, Aberdein argues for a virtue approach *to argument appraisal*. In his commentary to the present paper, he suggests that the virtue of *common sense*, which he understands as analogous to Aristotle's *phronesis*, is associated with the recognition and formulation of good arguments. I must confess this is an intriguing idea. However, as it stands, it still strikes me as a kind of virtue that must be explained in act-based terms.

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Sensitivity to detail

Willingness to modify one's own position

Common sense

Intellectual candour

Intellectual humility

Intellectual integrity

Honour

Responsibility

Sincerity

Willingness to question the obvious

Appropriate respect for public opinion

Autonomy

Intellectual perseverance

Diligence

Care

Thoroughness

Arguably, some of these virtues, such as *recognition of reliable authority* or *recognition of salient facts*, can be regarded as reliabilist virtues as I have described them above. However, most of the other virtues—such as *intellectual courage, intellectual empathy, fair-mindedness,* or *intellectual integrity*—seem to be responsibilist virtues, for they are character traits and they are more relevant to argumentative practice and habits than to arguments as products.

As I did with reliabilist virtues, I will include a comment about the consequences that this notion of responsibilist virtues could have on education. The core of these virtues is, we have said, proper motivations—as well as on reliability in attaining the proper end of those motivations, as Zagzebski points out. Hence, the goal of education in responsibilist virtues will not be the development of an understanding of arguments and reliable production of good arguments, as in the case of reliabilist virtues. How are proper motivations to be cultivated? Some virtue theorists have emphasised the importance of *exemplars* (Code, 1987, p. 141), of virtuous individuals or stories of manifestation of virtue. Roberts and Wood's (2007) approach is explicitly based on this idea, and they use numerous examples of intellectual virtue as part of their explanation of each intellectual virtue—from characters of novels to scientists like Jane Goodall and even Jesus Christ. The important role of teachers themselves in modelling behaviour should be evident as well. Consider, as an example, the following story:[11]

> Albert Einstein was giving a conference on physics and in the question and answer session, a young man stood up at the back of the room and in a very rough German suggested that the equations Einstein had written on the blackboard were incorrect. There was silence in the room and all eyes stared

11 http://www.en.globaltalentnews.com/current_news/reports/3609/As-a-student-Landau-dared-to-correct-Einstein-in-a-lecture.html

> at the bold complainant. But Einstein turned and looked at the blackboard, stroked his mustache with his hand and acknowledged that the young man was right, asking the audience to forget everything the had explained earlier. That intrepid young man was Lev Davidovich Landau.

The point of this story has nothing to do with the strength of the arguments. There is not even a reference to the specific details of Einstein's equations and of Landau's criticism. Nevertheless, I believe that we learn something when we read it. We can see in Einstein's reaction an exemplary case of intellectual humility, and seeing this may (hopefully) motivate us to cultivate the same kind of humility in us. This is, I believe, an important lesson, and one that we can come to appreciate within the framework of a virtue approach to argumentation.

Furthermore, it is likely the case that social pressures also foster a motivation to make an effort to argue well. Correia (2017) holds that critical thinking programs should be complemented with strategies of *contextual debiasing* that "rely instead on extra-psychic devices, environmental constraints and social structures" (p. 130). Specifically, he defends *accountability* as an effective way of motivating arguers to correct their biases. Accountability is understood as "the expectation that one will have to justify one's judgment or action to others" (p. 132), and research suggests that it mitigates several biases, especially when arguers do not know exactly to whom they will be accountable. Correia explains (pp. 133-134):

> Unlike traditional critical thinking methods, accountability strategies make use of the individual's desire to achieve certain goals (seek the audience's approval, publish a work, maintain the newspaper's credibility, avoid social embarrassment, etc.) as an indirect means to boost his or her willingness to reason in fair and impartial terms, rather than merely relying on well-intended efforts to think critically.

Importantly, when arguers systematically have to submit their arguments to this sort of scrutiny, they may end up internalising methods of impartial and rigorous reasoning, thus acquiring a motivation to "think fairly and rationally *even when they are no longer accountable to someone else*" (p. 134, his emphasis). Hence, accountability also seems to be an effective method of instilling responsibilist virtues, which leads to less biased argumentation.

3.4. The relationship between both kinds of virtues

Finally, I would like to conclude with an insight from psychological research that could shed light on the two kinds of virtues that have been proposed here, reliabilist and responsibilist, and on their relationship. Are they two different sets of virtues that have a bearing on two clearly separated sets of issues? Are reliabilist virtues relevant to the arguments as products only and responsibilist virtues relevant only to the activity of arguing?

At the end of the last section it was already shown that fostering a motivation to argue well (i.e. responsibilist virtues) may lead to the production of arguments that are less biased (i.e. a manifestation of reliabilist virtues). In fact, there are strong reasons to believe that the possession of

responsibilist virtues, associated with motivations, has an influence on the manifestation of reliabilist virtues.

The social psychologist Ziva Kunda (1990) defended the notion of "motivated reasoning," according to which motivation affects the cognitive processes that lead us to a given conclusion. There is a distinction between two kinds of motivations: "those in which the motive is to arrive at an accurate conclusion, whatever it may be, and those in which the motive is to arrive at a particular, directional conclusion" (p. 480). Kunda called them *accuracy* goals and *directional* goals respectively. According to her, "directional goals bias the selection and construction of beliefs, as well as the selection of inferential rules" (p. 489). Thus, biases are explained, not on the basis of flawed beliefs or inferences, but on the basis of the prior selection of the beliefs and inferential rules that will be used in the subsequent reasoning—which may be correctly applied. She reviewed several studies that showed the plausibility of that explanation (p. 493):

> Directional goals have been shown to affect people's attitudes, beliefs, and inferential strategies in a variety of domains and in studies conducted by numerous researchers in many paradigms.

Motives, then, would be "an initial trigger for the operation of cognitive processes that lead to the desired conclusions" (Ibid.). Therefore, in the explanation of biases, both motivation and cognitive processes play a role. People cannot simply come to believe whatever they desire, but only that for which they are able to provide a proper justification (p. 483):

> The biasing role of goals is thus constrained by one's ability to construct a justification for the desired conclusion: People will come to believe what they want to believe only to the extent that reason permits.

On the other hand, it has been shown that the presence of accuracy goals weakens several kinds of bias. When the main goal is to arrive at the right answer to an issue, people expend more cognitive effort and process relevant information more carefully and deeply. In conclusion, she wrote (p. 481):

> […] accuracy goals lead to the use of those beliefs and strategies that are considered most appropriate, whereas directional goals lead to the use of those that are considered most likely to yield the desired conclusion.

How could these results be interpreted in our framework? In the present virtue approach to argumentation, motivation has clearly been related to responsibilist virtues. Cognitive processes, on the other hand, are responsible for the production and evaluation of arguments, and therefore they are arguably the field of reliabilist virtues. What this means, in my view, is that possessing responsibilist virtues may naturally help the accomplishment of a better exercise of reliabilist virtues—that is, to a less biased production and evaluation of arguments. If one takes accuracy goals to be akin to a motivation to argue virtuously—to the possession of the proper motivations that characterise responsibilist virtues—then Kunda's theory seems to support the idea that responsibilist virtues influence the display of reliabilist virtues. These two kinds of virtues can be fruitfully separated for the purposes of definition and analysis, but it seems likely that in practice

they are not two clearly separated sets that make a difference on two independent and unrelated activities only.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to reconcile the view that the quality of arguments should be assessed on their own merits with the view that a virtue approach could offer important insights on argumentation. I have drawn an analogy between virtue argumentation theory and virtue epistemology, considering two kinds of virtues in argumentation, analogous to the respective virtues of the two main varieties of virtues epistemology. Whereas, arguably, the main interest in a virtue approach to argumentation lies in the consideration of responsibilist virtues, the acknowledgement of reliabilist virtues—here, akin to skills—helps us integrate the concern with the quality of arguments into the theory. Of course, the quality of arguments will ultimately have to be determined by an act-based approach—such as informal logic—so I am not claiming that what I have proposed here makes virtue argumentation theory a *complete* theory of argumentation. My goal was merely to show how reliability in the correct assessment of arguments and the production of good arguments can and should be included in the characterisation of the virtuous arguer. Having done that, my suggestion is that the responsibilist aspect of virtue argumentation theory is much more promising, and that we should focus on that, rather than on reliabilist virtues.

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