

## Just the Right Thickness: A Defense of Second-Wave Virtue Epistemology

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**Abstract:** Do the central aims of epistemology, like those of moral philosophy, require that we designate some important place for those concepts located between the thin-normative and the non-normative? Put another way, does epistemology *need* 'thick' evaluative concepts? There are inveterate traditions in analytic epistemology which, having legitimized a certain way of viewing the nature and scope of epistemology's subject matter, give this question a negative verdict; further, they have carried with them a tacit commitment to what we argue to be an epistemic analogue of the reductionistic *centralist* thesis that Bernard Williams in our view successfully challenged in ethics. In this essay, we challenge these traditional dogmas and in doing so align ourselves with what has been recently called the 'Value Turn' in epistemology. From this perspective, we defend that, contrary to tradition, epistemology *does* need thick evaluative concepts. Further, the sort of theories that will be able to give thick evaluative concepts a deservedly central role in both belief and agent evaluation are those *non-centralist* projects that fall within what we call the *second-wave of virtue epistemology*. We recognize that, in breaking from *centralism*, there is a worry that a resulting *anti-centralist* theory will be reductionistic in the *other* direction—making the thick primary. We contend however that second-wave virtue epistemologies should be thought to provide the wave of the *right* thickness, and as such, constitute the most promising approaches within a field that has become increasingly more normative, diverse and expansive than was the traditional set of problems from which it emerged.

### 1. Introduction

In a paper on norms and rationality, Pascal Engel notes that within the domain of normative concepts, it is common to distinguish between two classes: deontic and evaluative. Deontic concepts, such as 'right', 'ought', 'permissible', and 'forbidden,' are by definition thin concepts. But within the terrain of evaluative concepts, philosophers distinguish between those that are thin—such as 'good', 'bad', 'desirable', etc.—and those thought to be thick, examples of which include trait concepts like 'courageous' and 'open-minded,' and affective concepts like 'rude', 'lewd', etc. A mark of thick concepts is, as Bernard Williams has suggested, that they seem to be simultaneously both evaluative and descriptive. For the purposes of

taxonomy, these concepts must be, as Jonathan Dancy thinks, engrafted distinctly between, rather than within, the non-normative (which he places at the ‘bottom’) and the thin-normative, at the top.

According to Dancy, Bernard Williams, Hilary Putnam and others who are as Putnam describes them, ‘friends of entanglement,’ moral agents and moral philosophy both need the thick, intermediate layer of concepts. After all, moral theory should not be concerned only with what is good and bad, right and wrong, all things considered, but also with how agents ought to be (i.e., ‘brave,’ ‘prudent,’ etc.) in order to best meet, from an ethical point of view, the demands of the world.<sup>1</sup>

If this much is correct, we may ask: does epistemology *need* thick concepts also? Do the central aims of epistemology, like those of moral philosophy, require that we designate some important place for those concepts located between the thin-normative and the non-normative? What would it mean to say that for epistemic as well as moral agents, our conceptual language *is and ought to be* ‘*entangled*’ (Putnam)?

Upon first glance, it isn’t obvious that epistemology actually does need thick concepts. After all, the central tasks of epistemology have in the past half-century typically been thought to lie within the specific project of elucidating the nature and scope of knowledge and justification—a ‘doxastic paradigm’ that doesn’t obviously wear, like the subject matter of moral philosophy does, normativity on its sleeve.

## 2. Epistemic Normativity

### 2.1 *The Nature and Scope Argument*

The most obvious case to be made for the claim that the issues of central concern in epistemology are conceptually non-normative would be to

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<sup>1</sup> Then there are moral agents themselves who these authors argue also require the rich resources of the language of character traits and affective concepts in order to facilitate their own moral reflections, judgments, and decisions. The ‘middle’ layer of evaluative concepts is arguably vital to reflective morality, by bringing to bear conceptual resources for the kinds of reflection and emotional response without which moral character development and integration might indeed be impossible.

reason along the lines of what we call the *Nature and Scope Argument*—an argument that has been implicitly endorsed in epistemology over the past half-century, and despite the waning of the Fact/Value dichotomy, which it presupposes.

*Nature and Scope Argument*

1. Epistemology should be concerned with, first and foremost, the nature and scope of knowledge and justification.
2. Knowledge and justification are fundamentally non-normative concepts used to pick out particular epistemic standings.
3. Therefore, epistemology should be concerned with, first and foremost, the nature and scope of what is conceptually non-normative.

If the Nature and Scope argument is sound, it's not hard to see why thick concepts, such as intellectual virtues, which bridge the evaluative and non-evaluative would not be central to epistemological theory. A refusal to recognize any distinctly normative dimension within the subject matter of epistemology pervades several prominent philosophical research programs, including naturalized epistemology, counterfactual epistemology and externalist, reliabilist analyses of knowledge. Subsequently, thick evaluative concepts—for these and other projects premised upon the sort tradition captured by the Nature and Scope Argument—are left without any important theoretical role.

*2.2 Epistemic Scope and Epistemic Practice*

Concerning premise 1, we may ask: are knowledge and justification really more important than other positive epistemic states and standings? We might be inclined to think so if we simply take the attention they have enjoyed as a mark of epistemic importance. But this would be a mistake. There's no good reason to think the good by way of agency is less important for the purposes of inquiry than the good way of belief, and

further, it's not clear why states of theoretical understanding, for example, would not represent some of our highest cognitive achievements, and be at *least* as important as knowledge and justified belief. With this said, the conclusion should be that the privileged role the analysis of propositional knowledge and epistemic justification have enjoyed in post-Gettier thought is simply unmerited. And by claiming this, we need not at the same time think that knowledge and justification aren't valuable epistemic states; the problem is that within the tradition that has artificially inflated their epistemic significance, *only a portion of what is important from the epistemic point of view has been come to presented as the whole*. After all, from what William Alston calls the 'epistemic point of view,'<sup>2</sup> a *variety* of things are important (Compare Battaly, this volume). Given the diversity of cognitive successes and the similar diversity of those traits that lead us to them, we should think that what matters, epistemically, is more broad than is captured by pointing to beliefs in isolation from the agents who, some more appropriately than others, hold them.

These initial considerations are themselves enough to suggest that while (1) may have tradition on its side, it is under closer inspection, implausibly restrictive. But *even if* we were to follow the inveterate precedent of reducing epistemology to a theory of knowledge and justification (and thus charitably side with tradition and accept Premise 1), the Nature and Scope argument is flawed for a separate and more interesting reason. The reason is that Premise (2) of the argument—the dogma that knowledge and justification are non-normative—is also false.

One way in which to criticize (2) is to question a combination of background views that make (2) appear plausible: these are a veritist axiology and an instrumentalist conception of epistemic normativity—a

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<sup>2</sup> What Alston means here is, put generally, that we can think about the value of something not from the point of view in which all considerations are weighed, but rather, from a point of view in which those considerations that are weighed are properly epistemic. In this sense, we can understand an 'epistemic point of view' in the same way we can evaluate a house from an 'aesthetic point of view' only, apart from how we might evaluate the house from a pragmatic point of view, or an all-things-considered point of view.

combinatory position that is strongly shared by internalist and externalists, like Chisholm and Goldman, alike. Let's take instrumentalism first: for an instrumentalist, epistemic normativity is a species of instrumental normativity in the service of an epistemic goal. In Goldman and Olsson (2008) perhaps most explicitly, instrumentalism as an account of epistemic normativity is premised on epistemic value monism, as an adequate account of epistemological axiology. For Goldman and Olsson, veritism is 'a form of epistemic value monism that holds that true belief is the only fundamental epistemic value' (12).

The appeal of veritism's very minimal epistemological axiology is quite strong amongst those who hold themselves heirs to Quine's influential call for the naturalization of epistemology, and for replacement topics for traditionally normative concerns. To Quine our normative concerns can easily be naturalized; epistemic normativity 'is a matter of efficacy for an ulterior end, truth .... The normative here ... becomes descriptive when the terminal parameter is expressed (1986).' Such a view is premised on there being no serious problem about entanglement of fact and value, and no need of sharing an evaluative perspective in order to fix the extensions of epistemic concepts. A result for the veritist-instrumentalist is that the central concepts in epistemology such as knowledge and justification could be thought non-normative just like any other epistemic concept, but this result comes at the cost of meeting the burden of proof that comes with its reductionistic thesis. After all, understanding (a theory, for example) does *not* require that theory be true, and as Riggs and Kvanvig point out, nothing about the idea that truth is valuable undermines the idea that understanding is an independently epistemically valuable.

Leaving behind the narrowly-construed veritist-instrumentalist picture of epistemic normativity upon which the non-normative picture of epistemic concepts such as knowledge and justification rests, we are led to two further commitments: *pluralism in our conception of epistemic axiology*, and *non-centralism in our treatment of epistemic normativity*.

To be clear, pluralism becomes the consequence of rejecting the claim that the multiplicity of epistemic values can be reduced to the value of truth (or some other single or 'core' epistemic good).<sup>3</sup> And on the pluralist picture, according to which thick evaluative concepts, and not just truth, *can* be useful in articulating our epistemic aims, there becomes a need to deny epistemic versions of what Bernard Williams calls 'centralism,' the claim of the explanatory priority of thin deontic and evaluative ethical concepts over thick evaluative ethical concepts.

Williams takes centralism to be 'a doctrine about language and linguistic practice,' a doctrine holding 'that very general ethical truths were logically prior to more specific ones' (1995, 184; see also Alan Thomas, this volume). Epistemological non-centralism, if we apply the definition of Susan Hurley as Williams does, would reject the view that the general concepts like 'justified' and 'ought' are logically prior to and independent of specific reason-giving thick epistemic concepts of virtue and vice.

*Centralism* is at least a contested thesis in philosophy, and in our view it is false in respect both to ethical and to epistemic normativity. There are no adequate defenses of epistemic centralism, despite the burden of proof centralists bear for its reductionist thesis, a thesis that loses its footing in the absence of veritism. Without centralism, optimism about the reducibility of the thick epistemic normativity to thin epistemic normativity appears no more warranted than the reducibility of all other epistemic values to the value of truth.

By rejecting the dogmas that (1) epistemology is the theory of knowledge and justification, and (2) that these central epistemic concepts are non-normative in the way we have, we not only have rejected assumptions that undermine the thought that epistemology needs thick evaluative concepts but also offer a presumption in favor of

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to John Greco for pointing out the need to distinguish the thesis of epistemic value monism as a reductionistic thesis, from the somewhat separate question of the monist's ability to acknowledge a multiplicity of epistemically valuable states and value-driven epistemological concerns.

(1) pluralism over monism as a theory of epistemic axiology, and (2) non-centralism over centralism as a theory of epistemic normativity.

Parting ways with the dogmas hostile to the thick evaluative, we in so doing bring ourselves into alignment with what has come to be known as the ‘Value Turn’ in Epistemology—a viewpoint from which thick evaluative concepts are *indispensible* rather than peripheral.

### 2.3. *Dictates of the Value Turn*

The ‘Value Turn’ in epistemology, as Wayne Riggs has called it, is characterized by the thought that epistemology is a normative domain of inquiry the central tasks of which are framed by considerations of epistemic value. The epistemic point of view will accordingly be a point of view from which knowledge and justification are important, but unless we have already assumed veritism, so are understanding, wisdom, responsible believing, as well as whatever goals govern good epistemic practice. For epistemic value pluralists, ‘[E]pistemic goals include knowledge, understanding, wisdom, rationality, justification, sense-making, and empirically adequate theories ....’ (Kvanvig 2005, 287).

It has been a positive implication of the value-of-knowledge debate that we ‘shift the focus on contemporary epistemological theorizing away from the merely minimal conditions for knowledge—a focus that has arisen largely in response to the Gettier problem—and move it towards higher epistemic standings’ (Pritchard 2007, 23). Pressing the case for epistemology’s expansion still further, Kvanvig argues that concepts that should be deemed epistemically central concern not only the nature but also the value of different epistemic standings; correspondingly, we are led to study epistemic goals like understanding, wisdom, rationality, justification, sense-making, and empirically adequate theories. As Kvanvig puts it, ‘[T]he class of epistemic goods is manifold, as wide as the class of cognitive successes’ (2005).

The dictates of the Value Turn, we can see, *just are*, more or less, the *denials of the dogmas* that undermine the need for thick evaluative concepts. We might express these dictates as follows:

- (1) An epistemological theory should expand its focus beyond merely knowledge and justification to include other things that are epistemically important, and in particular, it should give a central importance to the matter of how agents themselves ought to be in order to best meet, from an epistemic point of view, the cognitive demands of the world.
- (2) An epistemological theory must specify the nature and sources of epistemic value; in doing so, the theory will have provided an evaluative background against which a given belief will be better than another—for example, ‘known’ as opposed to merely ‘justified.’

Zagzebski’s virtue epistemology is an example of a theory that clearly meets the requirement in (2); against the background of epistemic flourishing, she explains what sort of thing knowledge and justification must be (to note, less robust virtue epistemologies also analyze knowledge only against an antecedent background against which the traits said to give rise to knowledge are evaluated as good—i.e., *virtues*.)

There is a third dogma, however, along with the first two, which the Value Turn should be taken as denying. In an important and slightly different way, this third dogma also has served to marginalize thick evaluative concepts: this is the long-standing dogma that act-based ethics should serve as the structural model for epistemic evaluation, a dogma that has propagated the belief-based paradigm—that conceptually thin properties of beliefs are logically prior to conceptually thick epistemic concepts such as virtues. The rejection of this dogmatic paradigm will be then a third dictate of the Value Turn, a dictate bringing the problem with *centralism* mentioned earlier to the forefront.

- (3) An adequate epistemological theory must be *non-centralist*; that is, it must reject the conceptual priority the belief-based paradigm gives to thin epistemic concepts over the *epistemic* concepts of virtue and vice, and the kinds of agent evaluations that such concepts provide.

In support of the idea captured in (3), the ethicist Peter Railton writes, 'We should probably try more often to work from the inside of agents, from their centers of mass as agents and moral beings. For such an approach, questions of normative guidance become questions about how normative guidance occurs within the agent, what gives norms their life, and how they enter into the shape and meaning of the agent's experience, thought, feeling, and action' (2008, 3). This seems true in respect to epistemic appraisal as well, where thick descriptions of particular virtues like *self-trust*, *conscientiousness*, *intellectual honesty*, *intellectual humility*, *perseverance*, etc., provide insight for agents themselves into how to develop habits that extend their competence and improve their reliability as cognitive agents. On the doxastic paradigm, such appraisals could function in a theory only as tag-alongs to the thin notions traditionally applied to beliefs.

The three dictates of the Value Turn not only capture what a theory must do to avoid what we've taken to be indefensible dogmas, but also stand as independently supportable by some of the diverse and illuminating projects found in the recent literature—projects within in which both thick evaluative concepts and epistemic normativity more generally are central.

We view Greco's agent reliabilist approach as offering further support of our claim in (1). In *Knowledge as Success from Ability* (2009, forthcoming), John Greco states argues that 'If knowledge has an evaluative dimension—if epistemology is a normative discipline—then a central task of epistemology is to provide an account of the normativity involved' (CH1: 2). The kind of 'credit for success' a knower merits on Greco's account indicates a kind of normativity quite ubiquitous: we credit athletic and other forms of achievement to agents, under normal conditions, in much the same way. Both by allowing us to resituate our practices of epistemic appraisal within a broader and more varied set of practices—a more general *normative* phenomena of merit for achievement—virtue reliabilism's ability to account for knowledge as credit for true belief brings virtuous agency of the sort that *known* true

beliefs are creditable to the forefront. Further for Greco, what knowledge is and the normative status that knowledge requires will not be sharply divided, since an account of knowledge as credit for true belief 'is intended as both an account of knowledge and an account of epistemic normativity.'

If (1) is thought of as bolstering the Value Turn through a sort of 'ecumenical' requirement (2) might be thought as a sort of inverse: a requirement that we specify the nature and sources of epistemic value, a task that *itself* will require that our project be ecumenical. In support of the requirement in (2), that 'Determining ... (epistemic) values is itself one of the tasks proper to ... epistemology', Jonathan Kvanvig writes: '... there is a presumption in favor of holding an epistemological theory responsible to two criteria. A correct account of the nature of knowledge must resist counterexample, but it also ought to be amenable to an account of the value of knowledge (2003).' This is translatable into the requirement that in saying what knowledge *is* we must also say what makes it valuable. And so to say what knowledge is, we must first have an antecedent theory of epistemic axiology.

Wayne Riggs takes the Value Turn to imply that when we 'put the need to find the bearers of epistemic value at the fore of ... epistemological theorizing' (Riggs 2007), we firstly render the study of the nature and sources of epistemic value across *all* of our positive epistemic standings a more central and *continuous* endeavor. Doing this will, in no small way, require that we evaluate the wide scope of character traits and cognitive faculties from the epistemic point of view *made up by*, as Riggs says, the fundamental values 'at the fore of epistemological theorizing.'

(1) and (2) reflect a conception of an expanded field of epistemology, a conception informed by our understanding of the Value Turn, which its proponents argue 'present[s] a theoretical foundation for greater diversity of interest in epistemology' (Kvanvig 2003, 188) and supports quite directly the view that 'epistemological inquiry deserves at least some enlargement in the direction of concepts other than knowledge' (2005, xvi).

Our third requirement the Value Turn demands of an adequate epistemology brings us back in the most direct way to the challenge of epistemological ‘thickies’ to the predominance of ‘thin-focused’ epistemology during the post-Gettier era. We might begin supporting (3) by noting that Bernard Williams held that thick moral concepts are ‘characteristically related to reasons for action’ (ELP). But Williams never implied that the two aspects of thick concepts—world-guidedness and action-guidingness—are necessarily found together in an individual’s psychology: a person may be perfectly able to apply the concept accurately to features of the world, without its application being action-guiding. As he puts it, ‘An insightful observer can indeed come to understand and anticipate the use of the concept without actually sharing the values of the people who use it’ (1985, 141-2). In this way, thick moral concepts being ‘characteristically’ related to reasons means they are so related for the agent who fully embraces, or is ‘fully engaged’ with the thick affective or aretaic concept, and this is likely to be seen as an achievement and as a manifestation of integrated moral character (Moore; Goldie). Analogously, we suggest this analogy applies to epistemology: thick epistemic concepts like ‘open-mindedness,’ ‘conscientiousness,’ etc., when held in the engaged way such that one shares its evaluative valence (or perspective), can characteristically be associated with reasons to pursue inquiry, or to pursue it through one particular method/strategy rather than another. Likewise, decision-oriented virtues such as prudence, as Adam Morton notes, perhaps even more directly have epistemic relevance: ‘in planning and carrying out a belief-acquisition strategy one has to look forward as carefully as in any other activity’ (Morton, 117).

Christopher Hookway has still more explicitly stressed the importance of these conceptually thick features of inquiry in a way consonant with the American pragmatist tradition, in which (in Dewey’s view) the identification of all virtues and vices are derived from concerns with inquiry and there is no very sharp separation between moral and epistemic virtues (see also Axtell 2008b). The ‘doxastic paradigm’ he

identifies with post-Gettier epistemology essentially characterizes what we have called epistemology undertaken on analogy with act-based ethics. The alternative conception of epistemology as a theory of ‘how we are able to carry out our inquiries and theoretical deliberations in a well-regulated manner’ (2006) fulfills (3)’s demand for a model that gives agents their due place as objects of epistemic evaluation, and provides a comfortable home for both the thick *reflective* virtue concepts as well as the thick *faculty*-based concepts, such as those at the fore of Greco’s view.

So epistemological ‘thickies’ ask: ‘How it is possible to be good at inquiry rather than, more simply, what it is to have justified beliefs or knowledge’ (Hookway 2006, 101). It should be noted that, on these *non-centralist* approaches, epistemic inquiry is best construed as inquiry extending over time. To believe truly has no diachronic component, but inquiry is intimately connected with the diachronic goal of maintaining a stable stock of belief. On this view, the concepts we use for the purposes of epistemic evaluation—knowledge, justification and the like—serve to evaluate epistemic standings against the background of some commitment to such extra-synchronic goals, goals that our intellectual virtues allow us to recognize *as* goals, as well as to promote. Morton argues, ‘Most intellectual virtues have essential connections to capacities to search in some particular manner, and capacities to know *when that kind of search is a good idea*. These are the capacities we makes names for, because they are the ones we need names for ... multi-purpose virtues of intelligent activity’ (2006). Whatever else inquiry is, it is a problem-solving activity, governed by norms. But while our ability to reason rests upon a system of capacities and subdoxastic processes that the special sciences of cognition study, it also rests on skills and attitudes, acquired habits, emotional, moral, and intellectual dispositions which serve as enabling conditions for reflection (103). Inquiry methods and strategies which systematically underwrite success-conducive theses deserve to be credited with a significant measure of rational warrant. Here’s Morton: ‘Nearly all the intellectual virtues that we have everyday names for are virtues of intelligent activity generally [making and carrying out plans], and not specifically of belief formation,

decision, or some other category of thought .... So the epistemic virtues, in particular, are pointless unless they coincide with or cooperate with virtues of epistemic strategy ....' (117-118). Epistemology as a theory of inquiry will be, therefore, at the same time a theory of epistemic values toward which inquiry should be thought to aim, *as well as* a theory about what intellectual practices and traits best achieve this aim or aims.

Having outlined a way of thinking about the Value Turn that issues 'thick-friendly' theoretical requirements on an adequate epistemology, we have gone some distance towards identifying the sorts of theories that will best meet the requirements that we have tried to establish. But we are still left with lingering questions: do the three 'thick-friendly' theoretical requirements implied by the Value Turn count in favor of any particular type of epistemological theory? From what has been implied, they will count in clear favor of some variety of virtue epistemology. However, some virtue epistemologies conceive of virtues quite differently than others. The virtue-responsibilist/virtue-reliabilist divide, for example, is clear evidence. This invites us to ask just what role thick evaluative concepts should be thought to play within the sort of theory that does justice to them.

### **3. The Second Wave of Virtue Epistemology**

Our aim in this section shall be first to maintain that the epistemological projects most comfortably at home within the bounds of the theoretical requirements implied by the Value Turn will include those pursued by what we call 'second-wave' virtue epistemologists. Secondly, we make the case that second-wave virtue epistemologists not only locate thick evaluative concepts within the core of their theories, but also that, by doing so, simultaneously serve to expand epistemology in a way that unites two areas previously disconnected: that about which epistemology's central tasks are concerned, and that which is epistemically important.

In order to best understand the context within which the 'second wave' of virtue epistemology has emerged, it will be helpful to draw

attention to some parallels between successive ‘waves’ of interest in virtue-theoretic perspectives in ethics and epistemology. The resurgent interest in ethical virtue is often dated to a half-century ago, 1958, when influential papers in ethics by G.E.M. Anscombe and Philippa Foot were published and served to, in different ways, promote the idea that ethics would benefit by turning focus from the thin to the thick. Over the past half-century, frustration with act-based ethics and its preoccupation either with thin deontological concepts like ‘right’ and ‘ought’ or with thin axiological concepts like ‘good,’ has given rise to extensive studies of ethical character traits, their relationship to emotional dispositions, and their role in explanation and evaluation of agents.

In its first wave, virtue ethics remained focused on general, largely metaethical questions, especially with the defense of cognitivism against non-cognitivism. Only in the second wave of virtue ethics, as it turned to more constructive projects in the ‘70s and ‘80s, did virtue theorists and other friends of the descriptive-evaluative entanglement have those consequences that Putnam, in *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*, associates with them: consequences of inspiring a more pluralistic account of the good, the resurgence of first-order ethics as a subject, and a parallel resurrection of political philosophy. For virtue ethics, the move from thin to thick was clearly also a call to expand.

In *its* first wave—consisting in the virtue epistemologies offered in the 80s until roughly the mid-90s—the debate within virtue *epistemology* still revolved around traditional issues like scepticism and the nature of justification. Although intellectual virtues were imbedded in these theories, interest in intellectual virtue took a back seat to the traditional preoccupations. It’s not clear then that the first wave of virtue epistemology was expansive enough in its theoretical aims to meet Requirement (1), nor *non-centralist* enough in its theoretical methodology to meet Requirement (3).

While the first wave is responsible for making thick evaluative concepts at least something we should think of knowledge and justification *in terms of*, it is the second-wave of virtue epistemology, and

especially the sort of projects that have arisen after Zagzebski's (1996) landmark work, that have more clearly rebelled against the dogmas we've denied—the dogmas suggestive of taking the narrow set of traditional problems to be as important as the first-wave took them to be. The first-wave of virtue epistemology, having pre-dated much of the literature on epistemic normativity, gave us little reason to worry about the connections between epistemic virtue and epistemic value that have been a standard theme within the past decade; after all, the first wave of projects would lead us to think the epistemically thick concepts used within analyses of knowledge are epistemically important just because *knowledge* is important, which is perhaps why it has only been the more recent 'thickie' or *non-centralist* projects that have taken these concepts to be a subject for research in their own right, apart from whatever role they might have in explaining knowledge.

Focusing on these thick concepts rather than or in addition to concern with the paradigmatically thin concepts of knowledge and justification, the second wave, moreso than the first, has thus put the need to find the bearers of epistemic value at the fore of epistemological theorizing. Recently, thick epistemic concepts have figured centrally in the *zetetic* context, the first-personal or deliberator's context of active inquiry as a means to settle a doubt or improve his/her epistemic circumstances. The *zetetic* context informs us not primarily about evidence in the internalists' sense—synchronic rationality—but about diachronic rationality in regard to actions-in-inquiry. The necessary inclusion of thick concepts in practices of agent appraisal and epistemic credit follows from value considerations in credit-for-achievement, but also from the necessity of evaluating the agent's *zetetic* activity, and therefore diachronic, as opposed to merely synchronic rationality.

Unlike the first wave, then, the present wave in virtue epistemology finds the study of the reflective virtues expanding well beyond the bounds of those projects framed by thin concepts. And by proceeding in this way, in the absence of the dogmas that determined what was important in the previous two decades, the second-wave of virtue

epistemology has legitimized the importance of analyzing *specific* evaluatively thick virtue concepts that we think are important to inquiry, regardless of whether they are important for knowledge. Recent examples of thick descriptions of intellectual virtue might begin with Bernard Williams' seminal book *Truth and Truthfulness* (2002), and extend to work on particular intellectual virtues such as intellectual curiosity (Miscevic), trustworthiness (Elgin), self-trust (Lehrer; Foley), conscientiousness (Montmarquet), open-mindedness (W. Hare; Riggs; Baehr; Arpaly; Kvanvig); insight (Riggs), and humility (Roberts and Wood). Correspondingly, thick descriptions of intellectual virtue have led to an investigation of epistemic vices such as epistemic *akrasia* (Hookway), malevolence (Battaly) and self-indulgence (Baehr).

It should be clear that the contrast between those philosophers Simon Blackburn calls 'thinies' and 'thickies' is not one that is limited to ethics, where the distinction was first thought relevant. The present second-wave in virtue epistemology is indeed increasingly a wave ridden by epistemological 'thickies,' and we have endeavored to add philosophical weight to the interests behind it. Sometimes the thickening agent is an interest in epistemic standings other than knowledge and justified belief; at other times it is concern with the epistemic, practical, and sometimes even ethical value or disvalue of inquiry, and with methods and strategies to go about it.

Extended case studies and even fiction literature help us to see the profound impact in our intellectual lives of the diachronic acquisition and development of intellectual virtue and vice. Social epistemic perspectives also expand upon the primarily synchronic focus on propositional knowledge and justification, and second wavers have concerned themselves with what epistemological projects may lie at the intersection of collective and character epistemology. As Lahroodi puts it, 'Character epistemology teaches that the cognitive character traits of individuals are proper subjects of epistemological inquiry. Collective epistemology ... teaches that collectives can be genuine cognizers like individuals. Combined together, they suggest the *possibility* that some

collectives too may have cognitive character traits and be worthy of epistemic assessment as virtuous or vicious' (2007b, 282; compare Fricker). At still other times this thickening gets expressed as understanding our moral and intellectual competencies in the light of the special sciences of human cognition. Virtue epistemologists have begun to explore how to evaluate the psychological literature on need on 'metacognition' and on 'need for cognition' from the standpoint of virtue theory (Lahroodi, 2007a; Morton; Lepock). Thicker descriptions of agents' activities at inquiry are clearly required where strategy-selection is a feature of the study.

#### 4. Conclusion

The 'second-wave' of virtue epistemology is, we have shown, inseparable from a movement towards the 'thickening' of epistemology; its proponents are all of them 'friends of entanglement' in some sense that puts them at odds both with pure internalism as traditional armchair epistemology, and with pure reliabilism, causal theories of knowing or other radical attempts to naturalize epistemology. A maturing second-wave in virtue epistemology seeks to understand the rich interconnections between thick and thin epistemic concepts in permitting the performance of the tasks that we have argued should be taken as central from the epistemic point of view.

Unless our language and linguistic practice related to epistemic credit attributions run quite contrary to the language and practice of ethical evaluation, the collapse of the fact/value dichotomy goes quite some distance against the 'centralism' in epistemology as well as in ethics. So we reject that non-symmetrical relation between the thick and the thin that centralists or 'thinnies' assert, and with it, we would add, many key shared assumptions in the old internalist/externalist debate that often go un-noticed as such. We have described epistemological thickies as pluralists and *non*-centralists, but some might characterize themselves as *anti*-centralist. There may be different views about the proper import of the Value Turn, but it is important not to overlook

important asymmetries between the results of ethical reflection and judgment, and epistemic judgment and reflection. As Alan Thomas (this volume) well notes, Williams himself held a rather more 'vindictory' account of epistemic concepts and virtues than of ethical concepts and virtues, and this is not without import for those who would carry the comparisons between epistemic and ethical concepts too far.

It has explicitly not been our position that we should maintain an asymmetry between the thin and the thick, only reverse it. We acknowledge that a 'thickening' of epistemology could go so far as to constitute a re-conceptualization rather than the expansion of epistemology we envision continuous with the analytic tradition. There is the possibility of radically constructivist versions of ethno-epistemology, or of an analogue of ethical particularism and its anti-theory, attaching itself to 'thick' epistemology. To ride the wave of appropriate thickness, however, we must not follow these, nor pursue what have rightly been called the 'imperialist ambitions' of some over-strong reliabilist and neo-Aristotelian versions of virtue theory. At times during the resurgence of interest in virtue ethics, some of its proponents appear demand a shift 'from' thin to thick philosophic concerns, and to identify this with the wholesale shift of focus from the rightness of actions to the appraisal of agents. This is a contentious matter that arguably leads to virtue ethics as a misleading category. But these are questions that needn't concern us in arguing as we have for the epistemic centrality of the concepts of intellectual virtues and vice that occupy the 'middle-thick' level of discourse. We maintain that epistemology is not exhausted by the tasks of elucidating the nature and scope of knowledge and justification, and this is consistent with holding *both* beliefs and agents as central foci for epistemic evaluation.

So while our approach has been one we hold consistent with various accounts of philosophic normativity that are 'virtue-focused' (and perhaps even 'virtue-based' Miscevic, 2008), the strength of the second wave of virtue epistemology as we take it here comes in part from rejecting not only the dogmas of the past, but also any need to move

'from' thin to thick concepts in epistemology; the thick/thin distinction is one of degree, and we need concepts at various levels of abstraction for the different resources and different normative and explanatory interests that they bring with them. An *anti-centralist* stance in epistemology, in other words, would be quite a sea-change, but may not produce the 'wave of the right thickness,' which is the one we want to carve. We here take the moderate stance of de-motivating reductionist projects of both kinds, and set aside these questions about the difference between centralism, non-centralism and anti-centralism for the focused and extended discussion they deserve.

We are content, then, if we have motivated a particular way to think about the value-turn in epistemology, and through it to have made epistemology safe for any plurality of research programs into the 'thick' of intellectual/epistemic responsibility. Such a set of research interests gets the comfortable home it deserves in our expanded but still naturalistic conception of epistemology—and whether or not individuals most interested in pursuing the study of intellectual character and value-driven epistemology consider *themselves* to be strongly naturalistic in their philosophic orientation. The manner in which our prescribed approach might unite concerns about the quality of inquiry with concerns about the role of thick concepts in epistemology is challenging, but still we think quite inviting for epistemologists—a wave of just the right thickness!<sup>4</sup>

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