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Socializing Virtue Epistemology

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Abstract
In recent years, virtue epistemology has been criticized for its individualism. Correspondingly, some attempts have been made to make it more social. However, there is some confusion about what it means for virtue epistemology to be individualistic, and how it should be socialized in the face of this. The current paper proposes a systematic answer to these questions. We distinguish elements of theories of virtue that might give rise to different forms of individualism: "subject individualism," "faculty/trait individualism," and "value individualism." Then we show what specific challenges these elements might pose for virtue reliabilism and responsibilism. We focus on two challenges: the epistemic value of other-regarding intellectual virtues, and the problem of "epistemic outsourcing." In both cases, we identify and evaluate possible strategies for socializing these elements of virtue epistemology.

Keywords: Virtue epistemology; epistemic values; social epistemology; other-regarding virtues; epistemic individualism

1. Introduction

In the last 30 years, two new approaches in epistemology – virtue epistemology and social epistemology – have led to tremendous developments in the field.[1] The former has shifted the normative focus from knowledge as a product of an agent's cognitive apparatus to the essential properties of the epistemic agent herself. The latter has drawn attention to the deeply social nature of the acquisition, maintenance, and transmission of knowledge. Unfortunately, a general lack of convergence between the two has often led, on the one hand, to virtue epistemology reinforcing epistemic individualism (Kallestrup & Pritchard, 2012), and on the other, social epistemology focusing primarily on structural and institutional approaches at the cost of personal ones. Interestingly, it has been vice epistemology which turned out to be a particularly fruitful space of collaboration between these approaches (Kidd, Battaly, & Cassam, 2021).

We believe that virtue epistemology also has deep potential for fruitful collaboration with a social approach to epistemology. Indeed, many interesting attempts have already been made to socialize virtue epistemology (Alfano, Klein, & de Ridder, 2022). Some of

[1]Both these developments have roots in rich literature that go back further than this, but as identifiable reasonably unified movements their provenance is more recent.

them focus on redefining basic virtue theoretic concepts, such as the epistemic subject (H. Battaly, 2022; Kallestrup, 2020), credit (Green, 2016; Kawall, 2020), and agency (Carter, 2022), so that they correspond to the social nature of knowledge acquisition, maintenance, and transmission. Others, building on the social nature of knowledge, have identified new kinds of virtues corresponding to tasks hitherto overlooked in an individualistic framework (Braaten, 1990; Byerly, 2021; de Ridder, 2022). This latter task may require the development of specialized virtues that would help agents in keeping track of the quality of the information in social-epistemic network, calibrating one's trust to different social sources, and ameliorating the very structure of the network (Alfano, Klein, & de Ridder, 2022, pp. 7–8).

Yet despite all this fascinating and boundary-pushing new work in social virtue epistemology, there has been considerably less effort to understand and clarify the fundamental project of socialization in light of the background theories of the nature and value of the virtues themselves. The structure of virtue epistemology was largely borrowed from that of virtue ethics, which has a long and well-established history. But the legitimacy of extensions of that work into the area of social epistemology depends upon either (a) those extensions being consistent with whatever background theory is being presumed, or (b) the provision of a new background theory of virtue. The underlying problem is that traditional accounts of virtue are deeply individualistic in ways that are harder to eliminate than many social epistemologists seem to appreciate. This frequently results in a mismatch between what social virtue epistemologists claim to be epistemic virtues and what the background theory can allow. This paper aims to help advance the cause of social virtue epistemology by pointing out some of the more challenging and easily overlooked of these mismatches. Though it is not the goal of this paper to fully address these challenges, we will attempt to say enough about them to indicate that we think there are promising strategies for doing so. The bottom line, though, is that *something* must be done to bring accounts of specific virtues and the background theories into agreement.

Our task is made difficult by the aforementioned diversity of theoretical work being done in social virtue epistemology, so we shall need to make some simplifying assumptions. First, we will distinguish three general ways in which virtue theories are traditionally individualistic. And second, we shall limit ourselves to discussing the two most prevalent background theories in the space of virtue epistemology – that of virtue responsibilism and virtue reliabilism.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In Section 2, we distinguish elements of theories of virtue that might give rise to different forms of individualism: "subject individualism," "faculty/trait individualism," and "value individualism." Then we show what specific challenges these elements might pose for virtue reliabilism and responsibilism. In the remainder of the paper, we focus on faculty/trait individualism and value individualism which point to the need to revise some background assumptions of virtue epistemology itself. Without it being done, as we argue, a serious socialization of virtue epistemology will not be possible. In Section 3, we approach the value question and the related challenge of other-regarding virtues, and in Section 4, we confront the nature question and the challenge of "epistemic outsourcing." In both cases, we identify and evaluate possible strategies for socializing these elements of virtue epistemology.

2. Epistemic individualism and classical virtue epistemology

2.1. Three possible sources of epistemic individualism

There are (at least) three elements of theories of virtue that exhibit a strong element of individualism. They are (1) the individual as the subject of virtue, (2) the nature of the

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connection between the subject's virtuous faculty or trait and the virtuous outcome, and (3) the attribution of the value produced by or inherent in the exhibition of the virtue. Call these various kinds of individualism "subject individualism," "faculty/trait individualism," and "value individualism."

Let us first discuss subject individualism, primarily in order to leave it behind. Traditionally, it is individual persons who are taken to be virtuous or not. It is their character traits or faculties that are candidates for being virtues in the first place. In the Aristotelian tradition, virtues are important mainly because manifesting virtue is what constitutes a flourishing (individual) life. And, of course, in epistemology more broadly, it has been individuals (and their parts and properties) who are at the center of normative theorizing. But there is a strand of social epistemology that we might call "collectivist epistemology" that challenges these longstanding assumptions. Works by Margaret Gilbert, Reza Lahroodi, and Jeroen de Ridder, among others,[2] for example, explore the idea that supra-individual entities (e.g., aggregates, collectives, etc.) can be epistemic agents and have properties that are epistemically evaluable in much the same way that we have always taken individuals to be. If this is so, then it might well be possible for such supra-individual entities to have epistemic virtues as well, as Lahroodi (2007) and Palermos (2022) have explored, for example.

This may be, as Lahroodi claims, "the most obvious way in which epistemic virtues might be social." (2007, p. 281) It is, however, also one of the most radical and demanding ways to pursue the socialization of virtue epistemology. Moreover, it wears its departure from traditional background accounts of the virtues on its sleeve, as it were. It is unlikely that proponents of collectivist virtue theory will fail to recognize the likelihood of a mismatch between standard background theories of virtue and the needs of a theory that allows collective entities to be virtuous. Since we are focusing on what we take to be the more hidden problems of socializing epistemic virtues, we will say no more about subject individualism here.

An often overlooked fact about theories of virtue is that, in order to be compelling, they need to have accounts of both the nature of virtue and of the value of virtue. Virtues are typically taken to be valuable in all cases, much as knowledge is. Hence, a condition of adequacy on a theory of epistemic virtue is that it can account for that value. When we look carefully at standard accounts of epistemic virtue, it turns out that the individualism that makes it hard for such theories to be a part of social epistemology can stem from either the nature component or the value component. Hence the need to distinguish the two components in order to diagnose the respective problems and the need to identify two additional kinds of virtue individualism.

Faculty/trait individualism is the idea that when one achieves a virtuous outcome of some kind, one does it "by oneself," so to speak. Traditionally, virtues have been defined as faculties or traits *of individuals*, and a virtuous act is one that is produced in the right way *by an individual*. But social epistemologists frequently stress the deep epistemic interdependence amongst epistemic agents, and the upshot is that many (most? all?) of our epistemic achievements are shared achievements. But if our epistemic achievements are often shared, then what of individual epistemic virtue? If we rarely achieve epistemic goods by the operation of our own faculties or traits alone, is epistemic virtue even possible?

Value individualism, on the other hand, is the standard claim that virtuous accomplishments are, in addition to being done "by oneself," are also in some sense "for oneself." The value produced by or inherent in virtues and the resultant virtuous acts is traditionally understood to adhere to the virtuous agent herself. But it has become

[2]See De Ridder (2014), Gilbert (1994, 2004), Lahroodi (2007), Palermos (2022), and Pino (2021).

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common for social epistemologists, following Kawall (2002, 2020) for instance, to point out that producing epistemic goods for others is crucial for the healthy operation of our epistemic community and, hence, should count as epistemically virtuous as well.

This is just a very brief sketch of the "mismatches" raised by these two kinds of individualism that are inherent in traditional background theories of virtue that are often assumed by social epistemologists. We will go into much greater detail in later sections devoted to them. The specifics of each mismatch depend upon the particular background theory one assumes, so we must get clear on these first.

Virtue epistemologies are typically divided into two types – virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. There is a lively debate about the extent to which these approaches are genuinely distinct or exclusive, but for our purposes we need to treat them separately. For whether they are exclusive or not, the canonical schemas for each type of virtue are different and face different challenges when one tries to "socialize" the virtues.

2.2. Virtue reliabilism

For a virtue reliabilist, an epistemic virtue is a mechanism that systematically produces some epistemic goods. For example, in John Greco's early account:

> Mechanism M for generating and/or maintaining beliefs is a cognitive virtue if and only if M is an ability to believe true propositions and avoid believing false propositions within a field of propositions F, when one is in a set of circumstances C. (Greco, 1993, pp. 414–415)

Or as Anne Baril explains Ernest Sosa's view:

> [E]pistemic virtue is "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" (Sosa 2000:25) "Competence" is used in the ordinary sense—it is an ability to do something successfully, and the thing it is an ability to successfully do is get truth and avoid error. (Baril, 2019, p. 70)

The paradigm cases of such virtues are cognitive and perceptual faculties, like the various modes of perception, memory, etc. We can generalize these definitions to include diverse sorts of epistemic goods,[3] and so propose a general structure for the reliabilist notion of epistemic virtue:

> **EpVRel:** An epistemic virtue, v, is an ability to reliably produce epistemic goods (in a certain field F and relevant to a certain set of circumstances C).

[3]Following authors such as Alston, Zagzebski, and Kvanvig, we take a broader approach to epistemic analysis and evaluation that adopts a wider class of epistemic goods worth acquiring. The classical controversy over the problem of knowledge analysis and the subsequent "value problem" showed that there may be more goals of epistemic activity beyond knowledge itself. Consequently, we assume that there is no reason to limit epistemic virtues to those that produce knowledge. Of course, our liberal pluralism of epistemic values does not make our argument implausible for those who would prefer a unitarian (for example, knowledge-centred) epistemology. Simply, if there are no other epistemic goods, no harm is done by using the broader term. In general, we try to propose the most general approach to any particular aspects of epistemic evaluation so that our analysis be acceptable to the majority of the epistemological parishes (see Alston, 2005; Kvanvig, 2003; Zagzebski, 1996).

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The definition strongly suggests an instrumentalist reading of the value of an epistemic virtue. That is, an epistemic virtue is valuable insofar as it produces valuable epistemic goods. Its value is derivative of the epistemic goods it produces.[4] And indeed, this is the usual way the value of reliabilist epistemic virtues is understood.[5]

> **ValueRel**: The value of an epistemic virtue v possessed by S is instrumental, deriving from the value of the epistemic goods to whose acquisition, maintenance, or transmission[6] ($=$AMT) v contributes.

Together EpVRel and ValueRel constitute the general account of virtue reliabilism. And it is in this sense that we shall further refer to this position.[7]

Now that we have this general characterization, we can begin to assess the source of the two kinds of individualism we are interested in. First, faculty/trait individualism is plausibly, though not quite explicitly, inherent in the definition of virtue in terms of an "ability." Abilities are had by individuals and a virtue is an ability that is sufficient to reliably produce epistemic goods "on its own." This, at least, is the most natural reading of such a definition. The main point for our purposes is that trying to account for epistemic virtues that involve, for example, interdependence among various individuals in a virtue reliabilist framework cannot simply take the framework as it is traditionally developed and ordinarily understood. Serious work addressing the nature of such a virtue, and defending and motivating the existence of such virtues is required.

Another reason to take this interpretation as the default is that most virtue reliabilists are developing accounts of epistemic virtue primarily to provide a theory of knowledge. Indeed, most such theories are best seen as developments and refinements "from earlier externalist epistemologies such as simple process reliabilism." (Turri, Alfano, & Greco, 2021) Few process reliabilists consider the possibility that knowledge for S might be the result of a combination of processes in multiple different individuals.[8]

[4]With all the consequences that would produce for the question of the value of knowledge if the knowledge were defined in terms of virtuous belief (Kvanvig, 2003; Zagzebski, 2003).

[5]But see Sosa (2007, pp. 87–88) where he confers on virtues a constitutive and not an instrumental contribution to the value of knowledge "... the value of apt belief is no less epistemically fundamental than that of true belief. For this imports a way in which epistemic virtues enter *constitutively* in the attainment of fundamental value, not just instrumentally. *Virtues are thus constitutive because the aptness of a belief is constituted by its being accurate because competent*." (emphasis added).

[6]We follow here a very helpful distinction in Cassam (2019). In his analysis of how an epistemic vice can obstruct knowledge, he notes that knowledge is a kind of good that we can acquire, retain, and transmit (gain, keep, and share). We adopt this division, extending it to the broader class of epistemic goods. We also prefer to speak of maintenance rather than retention of epistemic goods, in order to bring this into line with the more recent literature in the epistemology of beliefs. Indeed, while acquisition has always been the center of epistemological interest, and the transmission of knowledge has gained importance in connection with the development of social epistemology, maintenance itself has still not lived up to its deserved place in the mainstream epistemology. For more on this matter, see, for example, Chrisman (2022) and Mandelbaum (2014).

[7]It is conceptually possible to combine both EpVRel and ValueRel with alternative counterparts and create some alternative positions. The traditional virtue reliabilism accepts EpVRel and ValueRel, and this shall be our point of reference.

[8]This is also Goldberg's (2009, p. 244) diagnoses: "even those (like Goldman, Kornblith, and Alston) with externalist commitments or sympathies feel the pull of individualism about cognitive process individuation" (Alston, 1994; Goldman, 1979; Kornblith, 1994). In contrast, Goldberg's own process reliabilism allows that the relevant cognitive processes took place "outside the head" of a knower. He proposes that in cases of testimonial knowledge the relevant achievement is the social one where the lion's share of the credit is given to the speaker's competences in original knowledge acquisition, and then in its successful transmission. The hearer shares this credit inasmuch she properly accepts the belief transmitted.

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Interestingly, though, there seems to be nothing in the general account of reliabilist virtue itself that precludes counting as virtues those abilities that produce knowledge, say, in others. But, as Anne Baril explains, it is almost never even considered as a possibility:

> Usually it is in virtue of bearing some relevant relation to a person's own knowledge (or understanding, or personal intellectual worth, etc.) that some quality of hers is counted among the epistemic virtues. (2019, pp. 70–71)

One notable exception to this tendency is Jason Kawall's articles on other-regarding virtues, which we will discuss in a later section. For now, the point to take away is that, while neither the definition of epistemic virtue nor the account of the goods that make them valuable precludes counting as a virtue an ability that produces epistemic goods in a third party, the context of their theoretical development is such that it is almost never theorized about.

Similarly, value individualism seems to be both inherent in the most natural reading of virtue reliabilism and not explicitly encoded. Again, the most natural interpretation of standard virtue reliabilism is that the value of the virtuous faculty adheres to the agent who bears the faculty. Nobody we are aware of (other than possibly those working on collectivist versions of virtue theory) defends a view according to which a virtuous ability is shared somehow by more than one individual. Again, the point is not that no sense can be made of reliabilist virtues in a context of frequent interdependence; the point is that doing so requires making some serious revisions to one's background theory of virtue.

For many, part of the appeal of virtue reliabilism is that the justification-producing mechanisms are good old-fashioned cognitive faculties like our senses, powers of inference, etc. There is a continuity from the empiricist strand of our philosophical history that this taps into. It may be that social virtue reliabilists will need to explain why, say, being a reliable testifier is the same kind of valuable epistemic faculty as, say, good vision. So while neither EpVRel nor ValueRel explicitly commit them to value or faculty/trait individualism, given the way traditional virtue reliabilist theories are usually introduced, developed, and defended, anyone wishing to develop a genuinely social version of the theory has some serious work to do.

2.3. Virtue responsibilism

Classical virtue responsibilism proposes a different account of both the nature and the value of virtue. Montmarquet's early version of virtue responsibilism (Montmarquet 1993, p. 30) took a radical step of defining virtue in a way that did not imply reliable success. The role of virtue consists in giving the right motivation for a truth-desiring person. Epistemic virtues are qualities that a truth-desiring person should want to have, and they are virtues regardless of whether they subsequently lead to the acquisition of epistemic goods (which for Montmarquet are true beliefs). However, it is Linda Zagzebski who developed the now-canonical (though not the only) version of virtue responsibilism. It is a version of her position that we will adopt here as paradigmatic of virtue responsibilism.[9]

[9]See her criticism of Montmarquet's pure motivationalist account of epistemic virtues – Zagzebski (1996, pp. 186–194).

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EpVResp: An (epistemic) virtue *v* (is) a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired (epistemic) end and reliable success in bringing about that end. (see Zagzebski, 1996, p. 137)

Notice that there are several distinct elements to Zagzebski's definition of an epistemic virtue. It is a "deep and enduring acquired excellence." This means that virtues are character traits which we acquire through habituation. Furthermore, the trait must involve "a characteristic motivation to produce" epistemic goods. And, finally, the trait must prove to be a reliable way to achieve the goods toward which it aims.

This broader account of the nature of virtue is further complemented with a distinct account of the value of virtue. As in the case of virtue reliabilism, the Zagzebskian virtue responsibilist requires epistemic virtues to be reliably productive of epistemic goods. Hence, responsibilist virtues have the same kind of instrumental value as do reliabilist virtues. However, the addition of a motivation component provides an additional vector of epistemic value. It could thus appear that the value of epistemic virtues would be bidimensional as well. In what concerns reliable success, it would be reduced to ValueRel, and in what concerns a proper motivation, it would relate to some kind of intrinsic personal value. However, Zagzebski argues that ValueRel cannot stand on its own for the same reasons that Kvanvig (2003) framed in his discussion of the Meno Problem (Zagzebski, 2003). Thus, she proposes that the value of virtues be ultimately derived from the value of the good motivation.[10]

There remains, of course, the question of whence the value of proper motivation. Zagzebski considers two different ways to understand the value of proper motivation, one in terms of its contribution to a flourishing life, and the other in terms of the intrinsic value of the motivations themselves (Zagzebski, 1996, pp. 197–211). She ultimately chooses the latter as her account, but it is worth pointing out that this is both idiosyncratic to Zagzebski and also somewhat at the service of her theistic metaphysical commitments. It is much more common to take the more traditional Aristotelian view that virtues are valuable because of their contribution to flourishing.[11] As we are here using Zagzebski's view simply as a canonical example, we will take the other course and

[10]Indeed, it could not be any different if we remember Zagzebski's proposal to define knowledge in terms of epistemic virtue. Knowledge is a state of belief arising from acts of epistemic virtue (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 271). If so, the value of reliability stems from the value of its object, that is, knowledge. And given the aforementioned definition, knowledge inherits its value from its virtuous origin. Thus, either we descend into a vicious circle of reliabilist value, or we express the value of knowledge in terms of the value of a motivational component of virtue, and acknowledge that also the value of reliability itself is derived from the value of the motivational component.

[11]Another reason why Zagzebski prefers the motivation-based account is controversies about and lack of good theoretical concept of *eudaimonia*. However, since then a considerable amount of work has been done in clarifying this concept (to name just Russell, 2012), and the suggested conceptual gap is no longer an issue that would speak against the happiness-based approach. What is more, Zagzebski's argument could be turned on its head. Surely, the virtue of motivation-based approach is its generality and modesty. It presumes just a universal desire of truth or knowledge. It does not justify nor explain it further. In that way, it avoids the criticism that a more robust happiness-based theory has to confront. Still, were there any stronger anthropological (and metaphysical) presuppositions, but hidden for the sake of an argument, the motivation-based approach would be no better than happiness-based one. On the contrary, by not recognizing them, it seems less credible. And if, indeed, the motivation approach is happy with a general presumption of desire for truth without any further explanation, this lack of explanation seems more of a defect than an asset. In fact, this is exactly the point that Pouivet (2020, pp. 69–73) accuses the existing virtue epistemology of, and he himself proposes to supplement it with metaphysics or anthropology. On his part, he draws his inspiration from Thomism, but, of course, one can imagine competing solutions at the outset.

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assume the flourishing account of the value of epistemic virtues. Thus, for virtue responsibilism, the value of an epistemic virtue may be explained in the following manner:

> **ValueResp**: The value of an epistemic virtue *v* possessed by S stems from its contribution to S's life of *eudaimonia*.[12]

As before, let us briefly take stock of how value individualism and faculty/trait individualism are inherent to the virtue responsibilist framework. The trait individualism is both explicit and theoretically deep. Virtues simply are "deep and enduring" traits of the individual. Moreover, what makes virtues valuable is their contribution to the virtuous person's life of *eudaimonia*. *My* virtues are good because they contribute to *my* becoming a eudaemon. It is not straightforward how my production of epistemic goods for others makes me a more excellent human – at least on traditional Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian grounds. Contributing positively to someone else's life might be good in various ways and for various reasons, but it does not count as virtuous (unless the contribution to others' good somehow also contributes to your own, which is often how virtue ethicists defend the morality of other-regarding acts).

So the value individualism is also both quite explicit and theoretically deep. When we say that these commitments to the two kinds of individualism are "theoretically deep," we mean that they are not coincidental or accidental. As this section demonstrates, those commitments are vital to the central metaphysical and normative features of the view.

2.4. Two challenges

These general considerations go some way toward making our case that virtue epistemologists cannot take their preferred background theory of virtue for granted when developing accounts of more social epistemic virtues. If virtue epistemology is to thrive in the contemporary debate, it must adapt its accounts of virtue and of virtue's value to be consistent with the social nature of knowledge (and other epistemic goods). In the next two sections, we will look more deeply at the challenge that value individualism and faculty/trait reliabilism pose to virtue epistemology. We will do this by looking more closely at two ways one might wish to socialize epistemic virtues and showing what kinds of deep modifications to theories of virtue would be required to do so.

One way of socializing epistemic virtues that has been proposed is that there are epistemic virtues, the products of which are primarily or exclusively good for someone other than the virtue bearer. Clearly, this runs afoul of value individualism. If an epistemic virtue theory is to accommodate such virtues, it will have to broaden its theory of value accordingly. We will discuss this issue further in Section 3.

Another example is the division of epistemic labor that seems common in the achievement of a wide variety of epistemic goods. Our achievement of knowledge, say, often will depend on contributions from other epistemic agents, especially in cases of testimony. Here the issue is not so much that one person's virtue is directed toward another person's good. Rather, the feature of interest is that our own virtue is often not

[12]This is a weaker form. In a stronger form, virtues not only contribute to the life of eudaimonia, but are constituents of it. So, alternatively, ValueResp could be formulated as follows: ValueResp*: The value of an epistemic virtue *v* possessed by S stems from the fact the *v* is the constituent of the S's life of *eudaimonia*. In what follows, we stick to the original form as a broader one, but, in regard to the problem of the socialization of virtue epistemology, whatever concerns ValueResp could easily be adapted to ValueResp*.

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sufficient to bring about our desired epistemic ends and so it is less than obvious that it can give us a sort of credit that would transform a mere true belief (possibly a lucky one) into knowledge.

This degree of epistemic interdependence seems to violate at least the spirit of faculty/trait individualism. But given the social nature of human inquirers and knowers, this is more of a feature than a bug. Hence, a fully social virtue epistemology should be able to account for our having genuine epistemic virtues that, perhaps even more often than not, do not suffice to produce the epistemic goods toward which they are aimed.

We are not aware of anyone who addresses this issue head-on, but there are some obviously analogous issues with the problem of shared credit for knowledge when it is the result of multiple epistemic agents working together. So, in Section 4 we will look at an attempt to make sense of these instances of shared epistemic credit for guidance in how to make sense of epistemic goods brought about by multiple agents' virtues.

It is worth pointing out at this stage that we are not defending any particular version of virtue epistemology. We are arguing that socializing virtues requires a hard look and quite likely revision of the background framework of virtue that is usually employed in epistemology. And we are offering some suggestions about ways forward for both virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. But fully developing any of those strategies would be the work of another paper.

3. Value individualism

It is at least a standard pre-supposition of both canonical virtue epistemological camps that the value of virtue is strictly connected to the benefits to its bearer (be it her knowledgeable achievement or her overall personal flourishing). And here, interestingly, it is virtue responsibilists who particularly stress the self-centeredness of epistemic virtues:

> In fact, the connection between the virtues that arise from the motivation for knowledge and that reliably lead to it are easier to associate with the life of *eudaimonia* than are many of the other-regarding moral virtues such as benevolence, mercy, and generosity. *Knowledge is primarily a self-regarding good, even though the search for it usually requires the cooperation of others*. (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 201, emphasis added)

For Zagzebski, the object of an epistemic virtue is egocentric and correspondingly the value of virtue has to be explained in such terms.

There is, however, at least one group of epistemic virtues that does not fit this framework. Let us call them "generous virtues," by which we mean alleged epistemic virtues that are indeed other-regarding (see Jarczewski, 2024b). They do not contribute to their bearer's good (at least directly), but some have argued that we would still want to recognize them (i) as virtues and (ii) as epistemic (Roberts & Wood, 2007, pp. 286–304). Kawall (2002, pp. 258–260) details three potential subtypes of such generous virtues, along with corresponding duties: (i) particular traditional virtues: honesty, sincerity, and integrity; (ii) duties to develop the skills of a good teacher; (iii) duties to develop the skills of a good listener.

In the same vein, Byerly (2021) proposes a general framework for what he calls the virtues of intellectual dependability, that is virtues that characterize a dependable person within the epistemic social network, and that promote the acquisition and transmission

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of knowledge on social grounds.[13] According to Byerly, they may be distinguished by "a common motivation to promote others' epistemic goods" (2021, p. 36). By definition, all these virtues contribute directly to the social good and their social epistemic value is quite evident. The problem here is the opposite: do they also have a personal epistemic value for the virtuous agent? And, if so, in what way? This is in fact a question of whether they are epistemic virtues at all (because the existing definitions of epistemic virtue identify the bearer of virtue (and producer of epistemic good) with the beneficiary of epistemic good; the value of virtue for the agent derives from the value of epistemic good *she* gains). Since the definitions of epistemic virtue offered thus far refer to the production of epistemic goods, the goal of the present section is to answer how we should modify the definition of epistemic virtues so that it captures a value based on other-regarding goods.

Generous virtues are problematic for virtue reliabilism since it is far from clear whether and in what sense they could contribute to the acquisition of epistemic goods for the virtuous agent herself. This however can be easily amended. As we have mentioned, the very possibility of the socialization of reliabilist virtues is not substantially excluded, but their individualism is rather linked to the place of these virtues within the broader framework of a theory of knowledge. Hence it might be sufficient to provide a broad (social) reading of the scope of goods produced by virtues:

> **ValueRel'**: The value of an epistemic virtue *v* possessed by S stems from the fact that *v* contributes to AMT of epistemic goods *for anyone*.

On this view, a virtue is blind in the sense that it aims at the epistemic good regardless of its beneficiary. This is sometimes (and perhaps in most cases) its bearer, but it does not have to be so. If a virtue reliabilist can make the case that epistemic goods in or for others is a legitimate object of an intellectual virtue, then the social expansion of virtue reliabilism might be easily managed.

But as we suggested earlier, things are clearly not so simple for the virtue responsibilist. Generous virtues are particularly problematic for virtue responsibilists. Compare once more Zagzebski:

> Since the primary aim of the motivation to know is to possess something for oneself and only indirectly for others, its contribution to the flourishing of its possessor is straightforward, even if there are exceptions, as already noted. In the case of the other-regarding moral virtues, their place in the flourishing life is not credible without a more extensive story. (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 201)

[13]Byerly's concept of the virtues of intellectual dependability is indeed very close to what we mean by generous virtues. In fact, Byerly includes intellectual generosity in his set of the virtues of intellectual dependability in which the first place (programmatic, as it were) is given to intellectual benevolence. In our understanding, through his label, Byerly emphasizes the social interdependence in the acquisition of knowledge and the need to identify distinguished cognitive agents who can, and perhaps even should, be reasonably trusted with the acquisition of testimonial knowledge. We, on the other hand, by terming other-regarding virtues as generous virtues, place more emphasis on their disinterestedness and allow that the circle of influence of these virtues be wider. In a non-ideal environment, it would be all very well to find dependable people, even imperfectly so, but it may well be that, in the final analysis, our social AMT of knowledge may be served by the individual virtues of many independent agents, some, perhaps most, of whom are eminently far from the sought-after ideal of intellectual dependability. That being said, we agree in principle with Byerly's position and suspect that, in the final analysis, our sets of virtues are the same. The difference is merely a matter of emphasis.

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This quotation indicates the core problem for her for the socialization of epistemic virtues. It suggests that the demarcation between epistemic and moral virtues is indeed correlated to the self- and other-regardingness. Epistemic virtues would be primarily self-regarding since knowledge is a personal good, and only indirectly can they be other-regarding. Moral virtues can be directly other-regarding. Thus, if the generous epistemic virtues are genuine epistemic virtues, the aforementioned demarcation has to be modified (see Jarczewski, 2024a).

There are further problems as well. In responsibilist terms, the value of a virtue is constituted by the flourishing of an individual. It is thus necessary to clarify in what way other-regarding virtues contribute to the virtuous individual's flourishing. And this contribution cannot be accidental or context-dependent. So, the following questions arise: how should we make sense of the non-accidental contribution of other-regarding epistemic virtues to the flourishing of the virtuous individual? In what way can someone's possessing an other-regarding epistemic virtue produce epistemic goods for them?

Jason Kawall's discussion of these issues can point us in the direction of answers to these questions and help us imagine ways forward for the virtue responsibilist. Kawall says:

> Embracing other-regarding epistemic virtues would allow us to bridge our goals of accumulating knowledge for ourselves, *and sharing knowledge with others being an honest, clear testifier would be seen as part of our epistemic flourishing* in the same way as being patient, or open-minded in forming our own beliefs. (Kawall, 2002, p. 269, emphasis added)

There are really two separate points to be derived from this passage. First, and perhaps closer to Kawall's intent, we are creatures who achieve our epistemic successes, when we have them, together more often than not. Hence, to be an excellent epistemic agent is to be good at not just finding out reliable information, but sharing it as well. It is a part of being the most excellent human we can be. Our flourishing depends on it because our human nature is conceived of in a somewhat communitarian spirit.

Second, and more mundanely perhaps, because we are members of an epistemic community, we depend on others in our own AMT of epistemic goods. Much of our knowledge derives from the testimony of others, and collaboration is generally a good strategy of knowledge AMT (probably not worse than individualistic, and possibly a better one). The better epistemic position our fellows occupy and the better epistemic agents they are, the better positioned we ourselves are. Thus, if sharing knowledge (and other epistemic goods) is a way to ultimately improve one's own epistemic standing thanks to membership in an inquiring community, then other-regarding epistemic virtues are self-regarding as well.

As we intimated earlier the problem primarily lies in the account of the value of virtue for responsibilists (and the value individualism inherent in it):

> **ValueResp**: The value of an epistemic virtue *v* possessed by S stems from its contribution to S's life of *eudaimonia*.

Each of the above points suggests a slightly different strategy to revise ValueResp to accommodate generous virtues and to avoid a commitment to value individualism. The first point suggests a revision of what we mean by "possessed by S" and the second a revision of what we mean by "S's life of eudaimonia." We will provide a brief sketch of each in turn.

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3.1. The relational self and epistemic interdependence

One way to get what's good for other people into the value of a virtue would be to get those people appropriately connected to the virtuous person herself. But not just any relationship will do. It will need to be such that a virtue's being good for the other person still somehow contributes to the virtuous person's eudaimonic life. Some recent work by Heidi Grasswick (building on the work of Lorraine Code and Annette Baier, among others) might help here. Grasswick develops an account of constitutive relational autonomy that she thinks can play a central role in responsibilist virtue epistemology.

Autonomy is relevant here because of its centrality in a responsibilist virtue epistemology. Responsibilism requires robust epistemic agency on the part of the virtuous person. And according to Grasswick, *epistemic autonomy* "... is central to the idea of epistemic agency itself" (Grasswick, 2018, p. 196). Autonomy is a relatively familiar notion in the history of Western philosophy, but it has often had connotations of "rugged self-reliance." Much contemporary work on epistemic autonomy repudiates that conception of autonomy and acknowledges that epistemic autonomy is consistent with epistemic dependence on others. (Matheson & Lougheed, 2022) Still, Grasswick's conception of relational autonomy goes far beyond this acknowledgment.

In short, Grasswick argues that not only are individuals reliant on the care and nurturance of others to develop from helpless infants into autonomous epistemic agents, but the very capacity of epistemic agency is inherently social as well. In her terms, our epistemic autonomy is not only developmentally relational, but constitutively relational as well. The exercise of our epistemic agency, which we must do to develop and exhibit epistemic virtue, at least sometimes requires interacting with others: "On the constitutive model, our epistemic dependence on each other runs deep: much of what allows us to be successful as knowers, and many of the very activities of inquiry, involve being responsive to other knowers. Reasoned inquiry is dialogical" (Grasswick, 2018, p. 201). There are many complex and fascinating details here, but the upshot for our purposes is that the epistemically autonomous agent, on this view, cannot engage in (much) inquiry without being in epistemic relation with others.

This might provide the connection necessary to solve the problem at hand for responsibilist virtue epistemology. There are at least two different ways this might go. One way would be taking Grasswick's view to imply that the self is, at least to some extent and in some relevant ways, plural.[14] Hence, what is epistemically good for (at least some) others would also be epistemically good for the agent herself because the exercise of her epistemic agency depends constitutively on (at least some) others. This would require, at a minimum, defending such an account of the self. But additionally, it would require showing that such an account is social enough to make sense of the full range of generous virtues. That will be easier or harder depending on how widely shared our autonomy turns out to be. This may also turn out to be a pivot to collectivist epistemology.

Another way this might go is to keep a fairly traditional concept of the individual self, but accommodate generous virtues along Grasswickian lines by arguing that the shared autonomy results in shared responsibility for producing the epistemic goods, and so to shared credit for the achievement. This is actually a strategy that we consider in a slightly different guide in Section 4, so we will say no more about it here.

Obviously, there are many complexities and details of both of these strategies that we have not addressed here, and we are not defending Grasswick's view as a way to resolve value individualism. We mean only to be highlighting the significance of the

[14]For more on what Grasswick herself thinks "individuals-in-community" look like, see Grasswick (2004).

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modifications needed to reconcile the existence of social epistemic virtues with their theory.

3.2. Epistemic generosity and personal flourishing

There is at least one other possibility that gets to a similar resolution without modifying our conceptions of central features like autonomy or agency. Instead, we will consider a modification to the idea of what the epistemic part of a life of eudaimonia looks like. Any account of what a flourishing human life looks like will depend, as it did for Aristotle, on a prior conception of something like "human nature." What it takes for a human to flourish depends crucially on what being human is necessarily like. We have already noted that humans are the kind of creature for whom epistemic success is largely a communal endeavor. Even without assuming a relational view of our epistemic autonomy, it is clear that most of what we know we learned from others, including our language and reasoning skills. Having epistemic success is, presumably, key to one's flourishing in general. Hence our individual flourishing depends on getting a lot of what we need from others. So, once again, when we help others epistemically, we are improving our own epistemic lot as well. Our individual flourishing is enhanced when other people are better off epistemically.

But perhaps a slightly more robust approach would be to understand human nature as more inherently social, such that being dependent on a broader epistemic community (and contributing to its quality) is not so much a contingent strategy for achieving epistemic goods but rather a deep feature of being human at all. On such a construal of human nature, producing epistemic goods for others would straightforwardly contribute to a human's flourishing because it would be an important part of being an excellent human.

Both of these approaches require a revision to the generally assumed account of human flourishing and its associated account of human nature rather than a revision of the theory of virtue itself (though that might also be necessary). It is worth pointing out that any of the strategies discussed in this section might also be useful for other popular virtues whose value can be hard to account for, but aren't obviously or directly other-regarding either. The proposed direction, taking into account the influence of epistemic virtues in shaping the social environment that supports agents in acquiring knowledge, may help to explain such problematic social virtues as open-mindedness, trust, and empathy. For example, such authors as Battaly (2018), Carter & Gordon (2014), and Levy (2021) have argued that open-mindedness is not universally valuable the way virtues are supposed to be.[15] It might be the case that in non-ideal conditions, one can get worse off being open-minded, and a healthy dose of close-mindedness might just be what truth-seeking agent should adopt. Likewise, trust and empathy might easily be considered moral virtues, but their epistemic import might not be as straightforward as one wished. Both the above strategies for accounting for generous virtues might help explain the value of those epistemic virtues in terms of their promoting human flourishing in an extended, more social, sense.[16] No doubt open-mindedness, trust, and empathy strengthen the epistemic community one belongs to, and in that way can be valuable in all the ways discussed above.

Obviously, from these brief sketches, it is far from clear that any of these strategies is ultimately defensible or would solve the problem at hand. Our point in this section is, in part, to suggest some ways forward for the development of a responsibilist social virtue

[15]Against them, see Khorasanee (2024) and Kwong (2017).

[16]For one account of this to consider, see Jarczewski (2024c).

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epistemology. But it has also been to highlight the kinds of serious philosophical work that such a project entails, whatever strategy one ends up pursuing. Work that is rarely, if ever, done.

In the next section, we turn to the second dimension of epistemic individualism and the related, problematic social epistemic phenomenon – the shared production of epistemic goods. We will do so by way of Adam Green's account of shared epistemic credit. As with the views just discussed, the idea is not that Green's solution is the only one of interest or definitive. But because of his explicit and consistent building on Greco's (implicitly: individualistic) traditional virtue epistemology, it provides a good case study for our inquiry into how virtue epistemology can accommodate social epistemic phenomena.

4. Trait individualism

In the previous section, we proposed to socialize the account of epistemic virtues by explicitly allowing that a trait or mechanism can be an epistemic virtue in light of its generation of epistemic goods for (at least some) others, not just the virtue bearer. This, however, does not protect against another form of individualism insofar as any given epistemic good is produced by one agent who gets credit for it.[17] But some epistemic goods are not produced individually. In many interesting cases (if not most), epistemic goods and the activities that produce them are fundamentally social from the outset. These goods are created through cooperation within the division of epistemic labor, and then they are maintained through epistemic social networks in order to be shared (Goldberg, 2011, 2018; Green, 2016). Thus, more needs to be done to make sense of the social character not only of the transmitted knowledge, but also of the very process of knowledge acquisition and maintenance.

This, however, challenges the traditional concept of epistemic virtues (Kallestrup & Pritchard, 2012; Lackey, 2007). An individualist approach to knowledge AMT (and other epistemic goods) corresponds to the individualism of virtues. They are the excellences of individuals, and one way to express it is by means of Greco's notion of credit: " . . . in cases of knowledge, then, S deserves credit for believing the truth, since S's believing the truth is the result of an epistemic virtue or ability". (Greco, 2010, p. 140) Thus, S knows that p "only if S's reliable cognitive character is an important necessary part of the total set of causal factors that give rise to S's believing the truth regarding p" (Greco, 2003, p. 123).

While these passages from Greco do not entail that S's knowledge is produced entirely (or nearly so) by S, they strongly suggest it. This impression gives rise to problems with making sense of testimonial knowledge. In cases of testimonial knowledge, it can seem that it is primarily due to the testifier's epistemic excellences that the hearer comes to hold the true belief, p. However, if so, the hearer does not seem to meet the criteria for knowing that p.[18] The basic dilemma is this: in many cases, the hearer seems to do little to count as exercising virtues or abilities in coming to know something by testimony. If we say they know anyway, then we are trivializing the

[17]It is still true if an agent is collective one. If epistemic good is produced by a collective agent, it is this collective agent who gets credit for the achievement. However, it does not follow directly that individual members of the collective by virtue of this membership alone deserve credit for knowledge. This has yet to be established and this is the problem we discuss further.

[18]The creditworthiness dilemma was famously articulated in Lackey (2007, 2009), where she uses the very cases of testimonial knowledge as counter-examples to Sosa's and Greco's accounts of knowledge which distinguish knowledge and belief in terms of credit and deserving by the agent. This constitutes her main point of criticism against virtue epistemology. In this paper, we take the intuitions related to credit at face value and show, on Green's example, what the defense of the credit view on knowledge adapted for testimonial knowledge requires and might consist in.

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required contribution from virtue for knowledge. If we say they do not know, then we are led to a disturbing skepticism.

One way to solve this problem is to acknowledge that epistemic goods like knowledge are often generated by more than one person acting in concert. Knowledge and other epistemic ends are extremely demanding and thus can exceed the capacity of an individual inquirer, so often they come through the collaboration of individuals.[19] But acknowledging this social aspect of human epistemic life comes at a price. The potential critic would point out that such a fragmentation of epistemic labor can jeopardize the value of particular epistemic virtues. Taken to the extreme, the contribution to the epistemic good can become so indirect and minimal that it puts into question the credit for the participating agent and, consequently, of the virtue from which she acted. Thus, the question arises of how we should define epistemic virtue and modify the account of its value to adjust it to a more robust social epistemology.

This project has been developed among others by Green (2016)[20] who proposed socializing Greco's virtue reliabilism in order to make sense of epistemic outsourcing.[21] Following the method adopted before, let us start with the question of the nature of epistemic virtues. Interestingly, Green evokes its definitions from Sosa (2007, p. 29) and Greco (2010, p. 77), but does not offer his own. That is because he focuses on credit as the primary category of epistemic evaluation in his book. The epistemic virtue is a background concept in that one of its roles may be thought of as a stable disposition that relates to credit. This should not surprise us in the reliabilist context given the traditional approach to epistemic virtues where they were intended to resolve the Analysis of Knowledge Problem. In Greco (2003, 2010), the credit-condition and virtue-condition are interdefinable. Thus, we can reconstruct Green's notion of virtue along the following lines:[22]

> **EpVGreen0**: *V* is epistemic virtue for *S* if it is a stable disposition that would be most instrumentally useful in qualifying *S* for credit for knowledge, on a frequent basis. (see Green, 2016, p. 10)

On level 0, it is not yet settled whether the value of knowledge is individualist or social. Everything depends on the primary notion of Credit. At the same time, we retain

[19]For a classical example concerning science, see Hardwig (1985).

[20]To be sure, Green's account is not the sole available perspective in the market. A parallel project that aims to further differentiate various types of creditable roles in producing beliefs was presented in Kawall (2020). Other projects that explore similar themes include Goldberg (2009) and McMyler (2012). We have chosen Green for illustrative purposes. His project directly proposes a transition from Greco's trait individualism to socialized virtue epistemology, providing a clear understanding of what such a process entails.

[21]It is important to do justice to Greco and underline that he later proposed a very insightful virtue theoretical account of knowledge transmission in which knowledge transmission (and at least some cases of knowledge generation) is achieved through joint agency (Greco, 2020). While this position differs in some important elements from the development proposed by Green, from the point of view of the present question about the socialization of epistemic virtues and the resulting understanding of their value, they are structurally similar. Nonetheless, everything that follows on the nature and the value of socialized epistemic virtues can properly be applied to Greco's later position as well.

[22]To be sure, as we have said before, the credit-role is for Green just one of the ways the epistemic virtues can be pointed out, but it is by no means their only role. Thus, the following definition should not be understood as a reduction of virtue to credit. Nevertheless, defining virtue in terms of credit is one of the alternative definitions, but still a valid one. This is of great importance for the present argument, based on the approach that Green chooses to make sense of the social character of AMT of knowledge, and testimonial knowledge in particular.

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an individualist understanding of virtue; it is linked to a specific agent. Green proposes the following reconstruction of the individualist account of CREDIT:

> **CREDIT**: If x knows that p, then the abilities of x used in the formation and sustenance of the belief that p deserve primary credit (or something relevantly close to that notion) for x knowing p. (Green, 2016, p. 13)

Then, inspired by the anti-individualistic reliabilism in Goldberg (2010), he proposes to socialize epistemic credit:

> **CREDIT FOR US**: If x knows that p, then the abilities that contribute to the formation and sustenance of x's belief that p deserve primary credit (or something close to it) for x knowing p *whether those abilities are contributed solely by x or also by other agents*. (Green, 2016, p. 14)

Based on EPVGREEN0 and CREDIT FOR US, let us construct a definition of epistemic virtue:

> **EPVGREEN1**: V is epistemic virtue for S if it is a stable disposition that would be most instrumentally useful in qualifying S for *primary* CREDIT FOR US for knowledge.

This can be developed on the basis of the relevant elements of CREDIT FOR US:

> **EPVGREEN2**: V is epistemic virtue for S if it is a stable disposition that would be most instrumentally useful in qualifying S for *primary* credit for knowledge, *whether the contribution of S to knowledge is exclusive or shared with other agents*.

The present definition admits that the contribution of the agent's epistemic virtue alone may not be sufficient for knowledge AMT. This, of course, is not completely new. In Greco above, virtue was "part of the total set of causal factors that give rise to S's believing the truth regarding p." And Green consciously uses this route. The set of the causal factors does not apply only to the nonpersonal epistemic environment, but may extend to other epistemic agents in a complex web of interactions. On the other hand, also in line with Greco, Green emphasizes that the required contribution to the epistemic good cannot be peripheral but has to be primary (in Greco: "important necessary").

EPVGREEN2 is obviously a version of virtue reliabilism. Can virtue responsibilism accommodate virtues that result in only partial credit for the epistemic good produced as well? Interestingly, both virtue responsibilism and virtue reliabilism associate epistemic virtue with credit for the achievement of epistemic goods. In principle, one might think this would mean a similar move would work for the one as works for the other. Recall our schematic characterization of virtue responsibilism.

> **EPVRESP:** An (epistemic) virtue *v* (is) a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired (epistemic) end and reliable success in bringing about that end.

The key part of this characterization for our current purposes is "reliable success in bringing about that end." For *v* to be a virtue, it must reliably produce epistemic goods. But must it do so all by itself, so to speak? It seems reasonable to think that deserving

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"primary credit" for bringing it about would be enough, for all the reasons given previously in this section. The problem of deserving credit for receiving testimony is just as acute for the responsibilist, after all.

Thus, there seem to be promising avenues to provide an account of the social nature of epistemic virtue, whether reliabilist or responsibilist, that is not limited to the social character of the good that the aforementioned virtue produces, but refers in a substantial way to the social character of the very epistemic activity through which this good is acquired, maintained, and transmitted. As before, we are not defending this particular approach, but it does show one way for epistemologies to accommodate socialized virtues, but it will require modification of existing theories.

5. Conclusion

The goal of the present paper was to articulate the senses in which standard theories of epistemic virtue can be considered individualistic. We argued that the task of socializing virtue epistemology has to address three distinct questions: the one of the possibility of collective virtues, the one of the nature, and the one of the value of epistemic virtues. In the paper, we have focused on two last ones. If virtue epistemology is to thrive in the contemporary debate, it must adapt its accounts of virtue and of virtue's value to be consistent with the social nature of knowledge (and other epistemic goods). We analyzed both questions separately for virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. We focused on two points of tension between the standard individualistic conception of epistemic virtue and familiar claims from the social epistemology literature: other-regarding virtues and "epistemic outsourcing." Throughout the paper, we argued that new challenges of social epistemology need not be fatal to virtue epistemology, but may help improve it.[23]

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