

Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

If the nature of humans is to inquire into the world around them, then the way this inquiry is conducted is revealing in that it can say something about the character or worth of the person. The person who desires certain goals (truth, knowledge, understanding, etc) for their intrinsic value, and who exercises certain virtues (open-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual courage, patience, humility, etc) in order to achieve these ends is an intellectually virtuous person. This is Baehr's position on the nature of intellectual virtue, a position that explains intellectual virtues as 'responsibilist' or 'character-based' since the exercise of these virtues is an act of responsibility by the person performing them which in turn reflects on the worth of the person.

Given that these virtues are intellectual (as opposed to moral) and therefore intimately concerned with the acquisition of knowledge, the question then is, do the intellectual virtues contribute to traditional epistemological problems? The relation between intellectual virtues and epistemology can be framed within the discourses of Strong Conservative VE and Weak Conservative VE. Strong Conservatives VE maintain that the intellectual virtues have a pivotal role to play in traditional epistemology, while the Weak Conservative VE position is that the intellectual virtues can only contribute in a secondary or background role. Baehr defends the Weak Conservative VE position since he maintains that the Strong Conservative VE position is untenable. While Zagzebski, as a representative of the Strong Conservative position, holds that knowledge is the product of intellectual virtuous inquiry, Baehr shows the intellectual virtues are neither sufficient nor necessary for knowledge. They are not sufficient because a person can be intellectually virtuous without achieving knowledge, and they are not necessary because there are instances of 'low grade' knowledge ('I am looking out of my window') that do not require the exercise of the intellectual virtues.

In his defence of Weak Conservative VE, Baehr argues that reliabilist and evidentialist accounts of knowledge need intellectual virtue to complete their accounts. 'Reliabilism' (or faculty-based accounts) shift the onus of intellectual virtue upon various the cognitive faculties (memory, vision, reasoning, etc) but in so doing fails to explain a number of features that are usually considered part

of the process of knowledge acquisition and knowledge itself. While the virtue reliabilist account is sufficient for reaching 'low grade' truths ("that one has a headache, that one drove to work, or that two plus three equal five"), it fails to explain the acquisition of truth in those areas that are intuitively considered as 'knowledge' (history, science, religion). The pursuit of truth in these areas requires certain traits of intellectual character (intellectual carefulness, perseverance, honesty etc) in addition to the proper functioning of one's faculties. Baehr goes on to argue that the relationship between character and faculty virtues should be re-configured in terms of a continuum with character virtues as the background source of the faculties: 'This is because an exercise of character virtues is sometimes (perhaps always) *manifested* in and partly *constituted* by an operation of faculty virtues' (p. 58)

Evidentialism defines knowledge as a belief that is justified on the basis ('supported') of good evidence. Baehr points to the weakness of this definition by arguing that it is possible to correlate good evidence to a belief but the resulting knowledge is unsatisfactory on the grounds that it is generated by defective inquiry (intellectual laziness, inattentiveness, gullibility, etc). By claiming that the weaknesses of evidentialism can be overcome by introducing the intellectual virtues as a supplement (carefulness, inquisitiveness, open-mindedness) to it, Baehr re-iterates the point that the intellectual virtues are needed to play a secondary, background role in traditional epistemology.

Conservative approaches can be contrasted with Autonomous approaches which, as the name implies, maintain that virtue epistemology is independent of traditional epistemology. Within this approach, there are also two contending views with the 'Strong Autonomous' position focussing on the intellectual virtues as a replacement for traditional epistemology, while the 'Weak Autonomous' position considering intellectual virtues as a supplement to traditional epistemology. Baehr's proposes that intellectual virtues are expressions of a person's 'intellectual worth' such that, unlike natural or innate traits, their exercise is a mark of intellectual excellence. In order to establish what counts as an intellectual excellence, Baehr needs to introduce some kind of standard that enables one to distinguish between excellences and non-excellences. This step entails the introduction of the contentious point that there exists an objective domain of cognitive value (truth, knowledge, etc) that is valuable for its own sake. The argument utilizes a 'virtuous cycle' in that a person is virtuous if he/she desires cognitive values for their own sake, but it is

only because of these cognitive values that a person has the possibility of being virtuous.

In his analysis of the independence of intellectual virtues from traditional epistemological issues Baehr proposes a broad theory of the intellectual virtues. The upshot of such a theory is that the study of the intellectual virtues can constitute an autonomous area of research in epistemology focussing on the specific characteristics of each particular intellectual virtue that, by default, would function to show the differences between them.

Baehr's central thesis is that although the intellectual virtues cannot contribute fundamentally to the analysis of traditional epistemological problems, they still play an important secondary and background role. Baehr defends a 'Weak Conservative' position in that he retains a 'modest' link to traditional epistemology in opposition to the 'Strong Conservatives' who argue for a more substantial involvement of virtue epistemology in the resolution of traditional epistemological issues.

Jason Baehr's *The Inquiring Mind* is directed towards a readership that is philosophically educated and will be especially fruitful to those interested in the current debates on virtue theory.