

Virtues, robustness, and truth-conduciveness

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Two types of intellectual virtues (Hookway):

- “low-level” virtues: reliable, knowledge-generating faculties;
- “high-level” virtues: traits of cognitive character regulating inquiry or deliberation.

Some chief differences:

- low-level virtues are belief-generating faculties, while high-level virtues are qualities of agents or their belief-formation;
- appeals to low-level virtues bear a much stronger presumption of truth;
- knowledge can be generated by narrow or localized faculties, while high-level virtues are characteristically robust.

One moral to draw from these is that low-level virtues are chiefly involved in the appraisal of knowledge; high-level virtues, in the appraisal of agents and inquiries.

My goal here: to give an account that explains both in terms of their contributions to attaining our cognitive goal of significant true belief.

Process desiderata are ways in which a process, faculty, or disposition can contribute to the attainment of significant true belief. Particularly important among these are

- *reliability/truth-conduciveness*: the tendency to produce true beliefs
- *power*: the range or quantity of true beliefs generated
- *portability*: the range of environments or situations in which true beliefs can be generated
- *significance-conduciveness*: the tendency of a process to yield significant beliefs

Virtues can contribute to our cognitive goals by contributing to any of the process desiderata. Capacities for regulating inquiry can also be themselves powerful (applying to a wide range of faculties or inquiries) or portable (operative in a wide range of environments or situations).

For evaluations of beliefs, reliability is paramount, but for appraisals of agents and their capacities, all the process desiderata matter. Thus,

- low-level virtues must be highly reliable, but other desiderata are secondary or irrelevant;
- high-level virtues:
 - can contribute to any of the process desiderata;
 - are generally truth-conducive, but not reliable enough to entail knowledge;
 - are sometimes themselves robust.

Some examples

C-virtues, which help us determine what paths to follow among the many implications of our beliefs:

- little effect on truth-ratio;
- mainly increase likelihood of acquiring significant beliefs;
- increase power by making certain problems tractable (e.g., determining the implications of X for Y).

originality, the capacity to find novel ideas and apply them to problems:

- not notably truth-conducive;
- increases power.

intellectual humility, a lack of concern for status or intellectual dominance, and a disposition not to claim unwarranted entitlements based on one's intellectual achievements:

- enhances truth-ratio, but without guaranteeing enough reliability for knowledge;
- enhances power and portability;
- is also itself robust, contributing to many aspects of reasoning in a broad range of situations;
- parallels moral virtue of humility, and thus may contribute to acquiring wisdom or morally/interpersonally significant true beliefs.

One application: problems involving benighted virtuous agents, in which attributions of intellectual virtue diverge from propensities for success in the agent's environment.

Newton and Aristotle are exemplars of scientific virtue despite having fewer true beliefs about the world than unexceptional present-day agents (Montmarquet, Riggs).

- Newton and Aristotle have robust traits that make large contributions to reliability, power, and significance, which are what we advert to when we call them virtuous.
- These contributions, however, are not sufficient to overcome the relative disadvantages arising from lack of background knowledge, crude instruments, etc.

Einstein-in-a-vat seemingly has all the virtues of regular Einstein, despite the fact that his faculties are massively unreliable (Montmarquet, Baehr).

- One part of a response to this problem will be that vat-Einstein has capacities for acquiring a wide range of significant true beliefs over a broad range of environments, just not his own.
- Vat-Einstein is deficient in reliability, but the power and portability of his capacities is comparable to Einstein's.

Another application: it should be fruitful to examine mid-level virtues, traits that contribute to our cognitive goals in ways characteristic of high-level virtues, but which are not robust.

- e.g., localized versions of high-level virtues
- e.g., virtues of resource-management: strategies and shortcuts for making problems tractable