

UNIFIED FOUNDATIONS FOR NORMATIVE EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

This paper sketches a theory of normative education according to which we gain normative knowledge by first becoming disposed to correctly assess normative situations. I introduce a distinction between what I shall call ‘perceptive’ and ‘productive’ virtues, arguing that the cultivation of productive virtues is contingent upon the mastery of perceptive ones. After some brief groundwork (§0), I introduce the distinction between the two and explore some unique features that they might exhibit (§1). I then argue that productive virtues require perceptive ones, and thereafter use this relation to develop a resulting theory of normative education (§2). I evaluate the theory as it applies to three areas of normative philosophy—ethics, epistemology, and aesthetics (§3)—and then conclude with some suggestions about future avenues for further work (§4).

§0 PROSPECTS FOR A VIRTUE THEORY

I would like to begin with a brief explanation of why it makes sense to offer a virtue theory of normative education. This amounts to identifying how the acquisition of non-propositional normative knowledge is grounded in the cultivation of virtues, and then showing how propositional normative knowledge can be derived from the non-propositional knowledge that this cultivation affords.

The acquisition of non-propositional knowledge is, at least for our purposes, the development of a skill¹. A skill is a disposition that is (at least instrumentally) valuable. This makes the gaining of non-propositional normative knowledge the development of a skill that is somehow normatively valenced. Presumably, moreover, for this skill to count as knowledge its valency must be positive. The capacity or disposition to act in a negatively valenced way should not count as normative knowledge². So, the gaining of non-propositional normative knowledge is the development of a skill that is of positive normative valency. And the development of such a positively-valenced skill is precisely the cultivation of a virtue.

This reasoning identifies the acquisition of non-propositional normative knowledge with the cultivation of virtues. If we would like our theory of normative education to apply to propositional normative knowledge as well, we must show how such knowledge derives from the cultivation of virtues. While I believe such knowledge can thus be derived, we do not have the space here to give the proposal the attention that it deserves; thus, here is a rough sketch about what form this derivation might take.

It is easy to see why knowledge of propositions of the form “S ought to in circumstances C” are derived from virtues. Suppose I have some virtue—say epistemic humility—which is the disposition to revise my beliefs in appropriate circumstances. For instance, suppose that I am disposed to revise my beliefs when presented with contrary evidence by experts. If I am aware that I have this virtue, I can infer the proposition that ‘one ought to revise one’s beliefs when presented with contrary evidence by experts.’

In other words, the cultivation of a virtue is concomitant with implicit propositional knowledge that may be inferred, upon reflection, from one’s virtuous character. This proposal presupposes, and would follow from, the more general claim that dispositions are concomitant with implicit propositional beliefs that may be inferred, upon reflection, from the disposition. This claim has been defended by Ernest Sosa, but since we do not have the space to defend the claim here, I direct any suspicions to Sosa’s work³.

§1 THE PERCEPTIVE/PRODUCTIVE DISTINCTION

A virtue is *productive* if it is a disposition to behave in a normatively laudable way⁴. Productive virtues are familiar: in ethics, honesty is the disposition to tell the truth in the appropriate circumstances; in epistemology, humility is the disposition to have an appropriate level of confidence in one’s beliefs; and in aesthetics, originality is the disposition to create original works. All of these behavioural dispositions are normatively laudable in their respective domains, and thus, are all productive virtues.

1 Another kind of non-propositional knowledge is sometimes discussed, namely, knowledge of a person. Since this kind of knowledge has little bearing on what is to come, we equate non-propositional knowledge with ‘know-how’, the knowledge of how to do something.

2 This point is less obvious than it may seem. Indeed, it seems to presume some kind of ‘motivational internalism’ about normative education. That is, it seems to presume that to properly understand some normative matter, one must feel motivated to act according to one’s understanding. If this point fails, the acquisition of non-propositional normative knowledge is no longer identified with the cultivation of a virtue, but rather the cultivation of either a virtue or a vice. However, nothing of substance hangs on this point.

3 Sosa, Ernest. “The Relevance of Moore and Wittgenstein.” In *The A Priori in Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

4 The terminology here may seem unmotivated. The terms ‘productive’ and ‘perceptive’ are most intuitive as they apply to aesthetics. As we will see, the productive aesthetic virtues are the virtues of the producer of art, the artist, and the perceptive virtues are the virtues of the perceiver of art, the appreciator. An unfortunate feature of the term ‘productive’ is that it casts the other virtues in a derogatory light. I should warn that the perceptive virtues are not ‘unproductive’ in the sense of being useless. Anyway, I hope the terminology will start to feel more natural, as we go.

A virtue is *perceptive* if it is a disposition to correctly assess normative situations. For instance, in ethics, insight into the moral characters of others is a perceptive virtue. In epistemology, being unbiased in one's credulity is a perceptive virtue. And in aesthetics, the virtues of artistic appreciation are perceptive virtues. Perceptive virtues are virtues "in the second person." They reflect our capacity to assess other normative agents with whom, and situations in which, we need not be involved.

Perceptive virtues are comparatively unfamiliar to their productive counterparts, so we should take some time to convince ourselves that they really are virtues. As we will see, perceptive virtues are important for the cultivation of productive virtues, but one might object that this is not really a virtue if this is their only value. Perceptive virtues, this same objection might say, are really only instrumentally valuable, and therefore, not really virtues at all.

There is some *prima facie* force to this objection. Perceptive virtues reflect one's ability to properly assess normative situations. But as the objection goes, being able to properly assess the normative facts is pointless unless one uses this information to behave virtuously, that is, to cultivate productive virtues.

The objection would be met if we endorsed Aristotle's doctrine of the unity of the virtues⁵. Notoriously, Aristotle thought that in order to truly have any single virtue, say, courage, one must have all of them. So the situation in which one is perceptively, but not productively, virtuous cannot arise. But we have good reason to deny Aristotle's doctrine. It is clear that in ethics, for instance, one can be honest without being brave. The disposition to tell the truth in appropriate circumstances does not require the disposition to take appropriate risks, so we should perhaps look for a solution elsewhere.

Here is what I suggest: dispositions to properly assess the normative facts are virtues because, even in the absence of productive virtues, they contribute to our wellbeing. The perceptively virtuous person has gained an understanding of *some* normative discourse. Since so much of our lives engages us in these discourses, having such an understanding of them is partly constitutive of human wellbeing.

This response presumes that having an understanding of discourses critical to human life is virtuous and, therefore, partly constitutive of human wellbeing. While the objector is unlikely to accept this, denial of perceptive virtues has inimical consequences; in fact, it would appear to delegitimize virtue epistemology altogether. Indeed, virtue epistemology is motivated by the tenet that having an understanding of these discourses constitutes human well-being⁶. Given that this thesis has led to such fruitful inquiry, it might be a good idea to accept it⁷.

5 Telfer, Elizabeth. "The Unity of Moral Virtues in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 90 (1990).

6 Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

7 I think this objection is best understood more generally. What the objector is really concerned about is the notion of a 'non-behavioural' virtue. Capacities, perceptual or otherwise, are useless unless they allow one to cultivate the appropriate behavioural dispositions. And so they are at best instrumentally valuable. The same response can be given to the general objection, since virtue epistemologists have demonstrated the merits of treating certain capacities as virtues.

Our response to the key objection emphasizes an important feature of the perceptive virtues. They are ‘epistemic’ in that they concern one’s understanding of a normative discourse. I should stress that this does not mean that they only apply in epistemology. Rather, the perceptive virtues illustrate epistemic virtues to be present in all areas of normative life.

§1.1 MUTUAL EXCLUSION AND EXHAUSTION

There are more questions to be raised about the productive/perceptive distinction. First, are these collections of virtues mutually exclusive and exhaustive? It is clear that they are mutually exclusive as productive virtues concern behavioural dispositions. A person with a certain productive virtue has a disposition to behave in a certain way. Perceptive virtues are not behavioural as they concern a *capacity* to assess normative situations. Since no virtue can concern one’s behaviour and not concern one’s behaviour, no virtue can be productive and perceptive simultaneously.

Despite the mutual exclusion of these classes of virtues, we sometimes use one word to refer both to a productive virtue and a perceptive virtue. In aesthetics, for instance, ‘creativity’ may refer to either kind of virtue. For the appreciation of certain artworks—especially those more difficult to interpret—demands creativity. This kind of creativity is a perceptive virtue, but one must also remember that one can be creative in the sense of an artist, which is distinct from the former insofar as it is productive. Moreover, one can be perceptively creative without being productively creative; indeed, one can be perceptively creative without being an artist at all. This case demonstrates that even when one word is used to refer to two virtues of different kinds, the virtues can be easily discerned. So such cases are not counterexamples to the mutual exclusion of the productive and perceptive virtues⁸.

The question of mutual exhaustion, however, is more difficult to answer. For a virtue to be productive, all that is required is that it concerns one’s behaviour. So the question amounts to asking whether there are non-behavioural, non-perceptive virtues. While I cannot think of any examples, I am happy to leave this as a possibility. To rule this out, we would have to argue that the only way for a disposition to contribute to one’s well-being is for it to describe a laudable behaviour or a capacity to assess normative situations, and I see no reason to think this to be the case.

§1.2 REFLECTIVE VIRTUES

We close our exploration of the productive/perceptive distinction by identifying two important subclasses of the perceptive virtues. First, since perceptive virtues are dispositions to properly assess normative agents and situations, we can consider dispositions to properly assess ourselves and situations in which we are involved as ‘reflective’ virtues. They are worth distinguishing from the other perceptive virtues because their cultivation poses challenges that are unique among the perceptive virtues and because they aid the cultivation of the productive virtues in a unique way.

⁸ Another example, from ethics now, are the virtues to which ‘courage’ refers. Courage is most commonly thought of as a productive ethical virtue. It describes one’s tendency to take appropriate risks. But the perception of certain moral facts also requires courage. It takes courage, for instance, for the privileged to acknowledge their privilege.

Before exploring what is unique about reflective virtues, we have a superficial question to answer. Notice that every perceptive virtue determines a reflective one? If p is a disposition involving the proper assessment of normative agents and situations, then p' is the corresponding disposition when restricted to the assessment of oneself and situations in which one is involved. Our superficial question is whether the cultivation of p requires the cultivation of p' ? It is clear that someone who exhibits a perceptive virtue only in situations in which they are not involved is still exhibiting some kind of virtue, which we will call $p - p'$. The question, then, is whether $p - p'$ is just p , or if instead, all of these virtues, p , p' , and $p - p'$, are to be distinguished. My own inclination is to say that $p - p'$ is not really a perceptive virtue, and that only when conjoined with p' does it form a perceptive virtue p . This is motivated by the thought that to be a perceptive person, one must be good at assessing normative situations without qualification. For instance, someone who is insightful into the moral shortcomings of others, but is painfully self-unaware of their own, is not 'really' insightful⁹. Given this, the reflective virtues are not strictly speaking a subclass of the perceptive virtues. Rather, every perceptive virtue is in part a reflective virtue as well. However, we can still speak as if the reflective virtues are contained in the perceptive virtues since each perceptive virtue determines a corresponding reflective virtue. Nothing substantial hangs on this point, as it is only necessary so that we can properly taxonomize the classes of virtues that we have identified.

What is uniquely challenging about the cultivation of reflective virtues is something of a mystery. We know from psychology *that* they are uniquely challenging¹⁰, which is not all that surprising. After all, we stand in a profoundly different relationship to ourselves than we do to others, so it is to be expected that the methods by which we assess ourselves will be different from those by which we assess others. But none of this indicates what unique challenges are posed. Rather than try to settle an age-old question as a lemma, let us simply observe that the reflective virtues pose some or other unique challenges, and thus, deserve our special attention in our task to become more perceptive persons.

In addition to being uniquely difficult to cultivate, the reflective virtues are of unique instrumental value. Being reflectively virtuous allows one to gain knowledge of the status of one's own productive virtues, and accordingly, the opportunity to calibrate one's behaviour accordingly. For instance, the reflectively virtuous person can tell when she is being cowardly and when she is being reckless, and this allows her to be brave.

To summarize, the uniquely challenging and valuable nature of the reflective virtues shows that they are worth distinguishing amongst the perceptive virtues. In any case, they will play an important theoretical role in what is to come.

⁹ These 'partial' perceptive virtues, if not *bona fide* perceptive virtues, are candidate counterexamples to the mutual exhaustion of the productive/perceptive distinction.

¹⁰ Ellemers, Naomi, Jojanneke van der Toorn, Yavor Paunov, and Thed van Leeuwen. "The Psychology of Morality: A Review and Analysis of Empirical Studies Published From 1940 Through 2017." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 23, no. 4 (November 2019).

§1.3 RECEPTIVE VIRTUES

The second important subclass of perceptive virtues are the virtues that describe one's capacity to be appropriately receptive to criticism. These 'receptive' virtues will also play an important role in our theory of normative education.

It is plausible that the cultivation of the receptive virtues requires some type of non-reflective perceptive virtues; in fact, one of the central difficulties in the cultivation of receptive virtues is knowing which criticism to take seriously. In particular, then, the cultivation of the receptive virtues seems to require a notable perceptive epistemic virtue, namely, the capacity to discern credible sources of knowledge.

Since, as with the reflective virtues, the receptive virtues concern our own behaviour and character, their cultivation comes with similar challenges. And, as with the reflective virtues, the receptive virtues are uniquely valuable—cultivating any type of productive virtue without feedback from others is quite the task. We will see more about the instrumental value of the receptive virtues below when we set out our theory.

§2 THE CONCORDANCE OF VIRTUES¹¹

At this point, I would like to identify an important connection between the classes of virtues that we have identified thus far. The cultivation of the productive virtues is greatly aided by a mastery of the perceptive virtues. Restrictions of this connection to certain normative subdisciplines have been recognized¹². But the fact that the connection holds in general has, to my knowledge, gone unnoticed. As we will see, the general connection suggests that there is a structure that underlies the virtues broadly conceived, and that this structure affords a theory of normative education.

To establish the connection, consider how the perceptively vicious person would go about cultivating productive virtues. Say someone—let us call him Ed—wants to do well in the world. Ed wants to be morally outstanding, an excellent source of knowledge, and even the next great filmmaker. But Ed is woefully imperceptive. He gives perverse answers to ethical thought experiments, is more credulous toward white men, and watches Lynch movies while scrolling through Facebook.

The point is that Ed is going to have a hard time. He will not know how to behave morally until he learns to tell right from wrong. His knowledge will not be trustworthy until he learns whose knowledge to trust, and he cannot become the next great filmmaker until he makes an effort to learn what makes a film great.

What this case illustrates is that in order to reliably behave in a normatively laudable way, we must have an appreciation of the relevant standards. Gaining an appreciation of these standards amounts to becoming disposed to correctly assess situations in their relevant

¹¹ This phrase is taken from Gomes (2009) who, in the context of aesthetics, noted the findings presented here. We will discuss Gomes's paper in §3.3 when we evaluate our theory as it applies to aesthetics.

¹² As we will discuss below, Woodruff (2001) and Gomes (2009) have noticed the distinction in aesthetics. It might be argued that Aristotle noticed this connection in ethics, but this is far from obvious. To my knowledge, the connection has gone unmentioned in epistemology.

applications. To many, this will seem too trivial an observation to bother pointing out. We will see that, when applied to specific normative areas of philosophy, it yields non-trivial consequences. Before carrying out these applications though, we should set out the theory of normative education that this connection furnishes.

§2.1 A VIRTUE THEORY OF NORMATIVE EDUCATION

So far, we have identified two mutually exclusive classes of virtues (the perceptive and productive virtues) and two important subclasses of the former class (the reflective and receptive virtues). We have also argued that the cultivation of the productive virtues is greatly aided by a mastery of the perceptive virtues, which when combined with the previous idea, furnishes the theory of normative education provided in this section.

The gaining of non-propositional normative knowledge is the cultivation of virtues. The cultivation of perceptive virtues leads to the capacity to properly assess normative situations and agents. Once one has this capacity, one then attempts to emulate who she perceives as virtuous and avoids emulating those that she perceives as vicious; in other words, this is what the “the cultivation of productive virtues” looks like in its practical application. If one has also cultivated the reflective and receptive virtues, then one can assess one’s own attempts to be virtuous alongside constructive criticism from others. It is this reflection that calibrates one’s future behaviour with such assessments.

Roughly speaking, the non-reflective, non-receptive perceptive virtues are giving the agent a place to start. Prior to having cultivated the reflective, receptive, and productive virtues, the agent has some idea of what a good person is. She has seen both examples and nonexamples and has tried with some success to apply these in order to make judgements in her own life. The reflective and receptive virtues serve to bridge the gap between these other perceptive virtues and productive virtues. Once one has some sense of the relevant standards, one can attempt to implement this understanding into one’s own behaviour. And the reflective and receptive virtues allow one to assess these attempts and to improve over time.

In the following example, suppose that I am a brave person. As a child and young adolescent, I developed a certain perceptive virtue describing my capacity to discern cowardly and reckless people from brave people. Perhaps I saw my mother take the risk of leaving an abusive relationship, but only once she knew that she and her child would be safer on their own. Perhaps I saw some boys at school take needless risks and get hurt or reprimanded as a result. Through exposure to several similar examples and nonexamples, I came to a rough understanding of what it means to be brave. I implemented this rough understanding into my own behaviour and, having cultivated the reflective virtue corresponding to the aforementioned perceptive virtue, assessed my attempts. Perhaps previous experience led me to believe that driving fast was brave, so I drove fast. I then reflected on this action (or perhaps was criticized for it), and in realizing the needlessness of this risk, refrained from driving fast in the future. Through several similar experiences, I use the reflective and receptive virtues to hone my understanding of bravery and, ultimately, to become brave myself.

§2.2 TRADITION AND PROGRESS

Our theory of normative education emphasizes the role of exemplars in the gaining of normative knowledge. These exemplars will often conform to some kind of normative tradition. I will now explore the implications of this feature in our theory, and what specific implication the cultivation of productive virtues had in aiding our understanding of the relevant normative traditions.

As stated, this implication may be cause for some alarm as it fails to account for some form of normative ‘progress’. Progress in the normative domain is, in virtue theoretic terms, an increase in the wellbeing of the average person engaged in the domain. For instance, moral progress is familiar; many White Americans used to think slavery was morally permissible, but now they do not. This is meant to signify some type of moral progress.

For several reasons, which are to be outlined below, some have thought that an emphasis on tradition impedes this kind of normative progress. For instance, artists of recent centuries have been dismissive of tradition, claiming that it hinders creativity¹³. Similarly, in ethics, an emphasis on tradition has been thought to stifle moral progress. However, once we gain an understanding of tradition and its role in our theory, we will see that these worries are merely apparent. Indeed, the role of tradition in our theory provides a satisfactory explanation of how normative progress is possible and even affords some practical advice as to how it is best achieved.

Consider the following two arguments to the conclusion that tradition impedes normative progress¹⁴. The first argument says that normative progress is catalyzed not by rules prescribed from a moral tradition, but from those with a natural endowment. For one cannot contribute to any normative discourse simply by following rules. Since an appreciation of tradition can only yield a capacity to follow those rules, it has no value toward advancing normative progress.

The second argument proceeds by example. It points to historical examples of the eschewal of tradition leading to normative progress. In ethics, the abolition of slavery can be seen as the eschewal of a tradition, and it goes without saying that this is a clear case of moral progress. In epistemology, the shift from the mythical cosmologies of Homer and Hesiod to the cosmologies based in reasoned argumentation of the Milesians and Eleatics was an eschewal of tradition, and signifies epistemic progress¹⁵. And in aesthetics, Shakespeare’s eschewal of the Aristotelian unities gave us *King Lear*, and this is a kind of aesthetic progress¹⁶. From these examples, we see that normative progress often requires the eschewal of tradition, and so an emphasis on that tradition actually impedes normative progress.

13 Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso, Emilio Settemelli, and Bruno Corra. “The Futurist Synthetic Theater.” In *Let’s Murder the Moonshine: Selected Writings of F.T. Marinetti*, edited by R.W. Flint, translated by R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Classics, 1991; Pierre Albert-Birot. “Banality.” In *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, edited by Mary Ann Caws. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001; Noel Carroll. “Art, Creativity, and Tradition.” In *The Creation of Art: New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics*, edited by Berys Nigel Gaut and Paisley Livingston. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

14 These arguments, along with my critiques of them, are direct generalizations of arguments and critiques presented in Carroll (2003), section II, in the context of aesthetic progress.

15 Stokes, Michael C. “Hesiodic and Milesian Cosmogonies I–I’”, *Phronesis* 7, 1-2 (1962).

16 Carroll, “Art, Creativity, and Tradition.”

The first argument misconstrues the nature of the rules that constitute a normative tradition. It is true that there are probably no rules that guarantee normative progress, or at least none of which we are aware of. Moreover, it is probably true that there are no ‘algorithmic’ normative rules in the sense that their application can be isolated from other normative considerations and factors. But it does not follow from this that rules have no role to play in normative progress. Indeed, I claim that rules, properly conceived, do allow those who understand them to contribute to the relevant normative discourse. This falsifies the argument’s second premise.

Properly conceived, the rules that constitute a normative tradition are virtues. They describe normatively valuable dispositions; not a normative instruction manual, as it were. The rules even in the most stipulative normative traditions (for instance, twelve-tone serialism in musical composition) are sensitive to other factors, and their application requires subtle and informed judgement. Thus, in claiming that one cannot contribute to a normative discourse through following rules, the argument mistakes a tradition for a collection of mechanical rules, rather than a body of virtues.

The second argument mistakes the role that tradition plays in the examples it cites, as none of them are wholesale dismissals of their respective traditions. Rather, they are revisions of our beliefs, and the virtues that we aim to cultivate are informed, in part, by the tradition that they revise.

These considerations demonstrate that tradition, properly conceived, need not impede normative progress. Traditions are not collections of algorithmic rules, but rather, bodies of virtues. And normative progress is not a result of a disregard for tradition, but rather, a result of a sustained engagement with tradition that leads to revision. In a familiar slogan, we must know the rules in order to break them.

So far, we have discussed normative progress as a result of the revision of normative tradition. Another kind of normative progress results from the increased coherence of the virtues cultivated by those engaged in the tradition and the tradition itself. The abolition of slavery is an example of this kind of normative progress since, even during its heyday, slavery was inconsistent with prevailing moral tradition. (Specifically, it was inconsistent with the social contract tradition of inalienable rights.) So the tradition that slave owners engaged in did not, as a matter of fact, endorse the owning of slaves. The moral progress signified by the abolition of slavery was not a revision of moral tradition, but rather, a better realization of an existing tradition.

Slavery further illuminates the distinction between these kinds of normative progress. The abolition of slavery came with the important qualification that it did not apply to incarcerated persons, which as a qualification still remains in place today. Since the slavery of incarcerated persons is wrong, this calls for a *revision* of tradition. If this revision takes place, then this will constitute the former kind of normative progress.

§2.3 ETIOLOGY

Our emphasis on the role of exemplars in normative education has yet another apparently troubling consequence. It implies that normative education requires the prior existence of normative agents, which suggests that our theory has no hope of providing an etiology of normativity.

On this point, I admit defeat. It is true that any theory of normative education in which exemplars play a central role will be unable, on its own, to account for how normative discourses were started in the first place. However, the fact of the matter is that exemplars do play an important role in normative education. Our moral sensibilities are irrevocably influenced by those close to us. The standards by which we judge our claims to knowledge are, in part, a product of the epistemic norms and traditions of our day. And, perhaps most undeniably, artists and their appreciators are forced to engage with the artworks and traditions that furnish the aesthetic landscape their artworks occupy.

Plainly, the fact that our use of exemplars makes the etiology of normativity mysterious should not lead us to deny or to ignore our use of exemplars. Rather, I suggest that we bracket the etiological questions until we have a fuller understanding of the current workings of our normative discourses are.

§3 THE VIRTUE THEORY IN PRACTICE

§3.1 ETHICS

We now evaluate our theory as it applies to some areas of normative philosophy, beginning with ethics. When restricted to ethics alone, we might say that we become good people by first learning how to tell right from wrong, and then apply these standards with the help of reflection and criticism to our own lives. The perceptive virtues describe this capacity to discern right from wrong, and the productive virtues describe one's disposition to do the right thing in the right circumstances. The best way to shed light on this theory of moral education is to contrast it with another theory that shares some of its most important features, namely the theory presented in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Aristotle famously thought that we become good people through a *mimesis* of the moral leaders of our community¹⁷. This proposal immediately raises two related issues. First, it seems even less able to give an etiology of ethics than our own theory, as not only does moral education require the prior existence of moral agents, but it also requires the prior existence of a moral community with moral leaders. In other words, though the use of exemplars requires the prior existence of moral agents, Aristotle's use of *mimesis* and moral leaders requires the prior existence of a fully functioning moral discourse. So, though the prospects for our theory to provide an etiology of morals are bleak, Aristotle's are definitionally hopeless¹⁸.

¹⁷ Kraut, Richard. "Aristotle's Ethics," May 1, 2001. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/aristotle-ethics/>.

¹⁸ Of course, etiological questions would not have occurred to Aristotle, given his belief in the eternity of species.

Second, Aristotle's theory of moral education seems to overemphasize the role of tradition. Indeed, for Aristotle, an understanding of moral tradition not only helps in moral education—it is all that is required¹⁹. So as long as one grasps the relevant tradition, one can simply copy them and, in turn, become a good person. Thus, Aristotle's theory seems unable to account for moral progress as it requires some discrepancy between tradition and the cultivation of virtues.

These problems suggest that Aristotle's use of *mimesis* forces moral knowledge to be undesirably uniform over time. Our theory replaces the *mimesis* of exemplars with the development of a capacity to assess exemplars, and hence fares better on these problems. This is the central difference between our theory and a purely Aristotelian virtue ethics.

§3.2 EPISTEMOLOGY

When restricted to epistemology, our proposal is that we become good epistemic agents by first gaining a rough understanding of the standards against which one ought to judge one's beliefs, and then apply these standards with the help of reflection and criticism from others to our own belief-formations. The perceptive virtues describe a capacity to assess the epistemic virtues of others and the justificatory status of their beliefs. The productive virtues describe dispositions to form beliefs and to engage in epistemic discourse in a laudable way.

The perceptive epistemic virtues can take a moment to wrap one's head around. Recall that perceptive virtues are all 'epistemic' insofar as they describe one's understanding of a normative domain. The perceptive epistemic virtues, then, are 'epistemic' in two senses. First, they are 'epistemic' because they describe one's understanding of a normative domain. Second, they are 'epistemic' because the relevant normative domain is epistemology. This double entendre is to be expected, since the theory presented, when restricted to epistemology, is a theory of 'epistemic education'; that is, a theory about how we gain 'epistemic knowledge'. This sounds somehow redundant, but it is not since the theory presented is a theory of how we gain knowledge about epistemic matters.

§3.2.1 REASSESSING INTERNALISM AND EXTERNALISM ABOUT JUSTIFICATION

Indeed, understanding 'epistemic education' turns out to be crucial to the traditional questions of epistemology; specifically, the internalist-externalist debate about justification can be framed as a question regarding epistemic education since it regards how we gain knowledge through the justification of our beliefs. The internalist says that we can always gain such knowledge through reflection whereas the externalist denies this.

We can construe this debate in terms of our theory. Dispositions to form beliefs that are justified correspond to productive epistemic virtues, which we will call J-virtues. Virtues describing one's capacity to assess the status of one's J-virtues, then, are reflective epistemic

¹⁹ As with the etiological problems with Aristotle's theory, this problem would not have occurred to Aristotle, given his unabashed Greek supremacism. A proper treatment of this matter would investigate the relationship between tradition and *endoxa*, Aristotle's 'reputable opinions' that figure so importantly in his thinking.

virtues, which we will call RJ-virtues.

The internalist-externalist debate regards whether there are RJ-virtues. The internalist says yes and the externalist says no. If there are RJ-virtues, then the justificatory status of one's beliefs can be reliably determined through reflection (i.e. internalism). Otherwise, there is no reliable way to access, through reflection, the justificatory status of one's beliefs (i.e. externalism).

This formulation of the debate is importantly different from other formulations. Specifically, the debate is often formulated extensionally. Internalism is the thesis that there is no belief the justificatory status of which is reflectively inaccessible to the believer, whereas externalism says that there are such beliefs²⁰. I think that our virtue-theoretic formulation gets closer to the heart of what is at issue; namely, the nature of the mechanism by which we reliably gain knowledge of the justificatory status of our beliefs.

The virtue theory of epistemic education does not tell us whether there are RJ-virtues, but the proponent of the theory will likely lean toward a positive answer. She has already accepted a notion of reflective virtues corresponding to other productive virtues, and it is not clear what considerations would set J-virtues apart from these. The proponent of the virtue theory denies the existence of RJ-virtues, which nonetheless constitutes an unwarranted theoretical asymmetry²¹.

§3.3 AESTHETICS

Our proposal, when restricted to aesthetics, takes on a rather different character. For unlike in the other normative disciplines, the cultivation of the perceptive aesthetic virtues and productive aesthetic virtues constitute distinct activities. The perceptive virtues correspond to the virtues of the appreciator, and the productive virtues correspond to the virtues of the artist. Given that artistic appreciation and artistic production are distinct activities, the general connection espoused in §2 is most informative in aesthetics. It proposes that in order to be a great artist, one must be a great artistic appreciator.

Our theory of normative education restricts to aesthetics as follows: we become great artists by first learning what makes art great, and then applying this understanding, with the help of reflection and criticism from others, to our own artistic creations. We first become insightful, perseverant, creative appreciators of art, and this affords us a rough understanding of what we think constitutes great art. We then implement this rough understanding into our own artistic creations, and through reflection and criticism from others, hone our understanding of great art in the hopes of one day becoming great artists ourselves.

In aesthetics, the connections between tradition and progress identified in §2.2 can be made

20 Pappas, George. "Internalist vs. Externalist Conceptions of Epistemic Justification." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, January 24, 2005. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/justep-intext/>.

21 Given this, it is natural to ask what is 'internalist' about our theory of epistemic education. A plausible answer is found in Bach (1985). For Bach, internalists are focused not on what makes beliefs justified, but rather what makes a believer justified. This diagnosis is probably correct in our case. We are focused on J-virtues, dispositions to form justified beliefs. For this reason, the objects that are being assessed are agents, not beliefs. If Bach is right, this is likely why our theory lends itself toward internalism about justification.

more explicit. For there are productive aesthetic virtues that correspond to dispositions to incite aesthetic progress, namely, creativity and originality. Thus, the central finding of §2.2, when restricted to aesthetics, is that creativity and originality are not at odds with tradition, but rather, informed by it²².

§3.3.1 SAVING VIRTUE AESTHETICS

As noted above, the connection between the productive and perceptive virtues has already been noticed in aesthetics. It was noticed by Woodruff and developed further in Gomes²³. They proposed the connection in order to account for the fact that aspiring artists are advised to engage with their artform as appreciators. For instance, Gomes recounts some advice commonly given to novelists: “If you want to write a book, read a library.”

Gomes presents the connection as a problem for the virtue-theoretic approach to aesthetics pioneered by Woodruff and Goldie²⁴. Gomes’s worry is that this connection, what he calls the ‘concordance of virtues’, is not present in ethics. Since virtue aesthetics relies heavily on analogies between ethics and aesthetics, if there is no structure in ethics analogous to the concordance of aesthetic virtues then it seems to discredit the whole approach.

One payoff of our theory is that it soothes Gomes’s worry about virtue aesthetics. We have seen that the structure of aesthetic virtues noticed by Woodruff and Gomes is in fact present in all areas of normative philosophy. Indeed, this structure is furnished by the humdrum observation that in order to go about becoming a good person, one must have some sense of what one is trying to do.

§4 FURTHER WORK

This paper has been exploratory in spirit. I hope to have established nothing more than the fact that developing a general theory of normative education is worthwhile, and that the virtue theory presented is a good place to start. Indeed, the paper is best understood as a call for a research programme which investigates the virtue-theoretic structure underlying our normative discourses. The task of developing a virtue theory of normative education is monumental, and the required tools (especially non-propositional knowledge) have not yet been sharpened. For these reasons, the paper suggests several avenues for further work. We close by identifying some of these avenues.

²² As in note 10, this is precisely the finding of Carroll (2003), of which the thesis of §2.2 is a direct generalization.

²³ Woodruff, David M. “A Virtue Theory of Aesthetics.” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35, no. 3 (2001). Gomes, Anil. “Goldie on the Virtues of Art.” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49, no. 1 (2009).

²⁴ Woodruff, “A Virtue Theory of Aesthetics.” Goldie, Peter, “Towards A Virtue Theory of Art.” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 47, no. 4 (October 1, 2007). Goldie, Peter, “Virtues of Art and Human Well-Being.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 82 (2008).

§4.1 METHODOLOGY FOR NORMATIVITY:

The theory presented points to important methodological questions in studying normativity; specifically, it forces us to ask whether theoretical unity is desirable, or to be expected in studying normativity. If theoretical unity is desirable, then this buttresses the theory. If it is undesirable, then this weakens the theory. If we should be ambivalent on the matter, then this methodological question will not affect our theory. These methodological questions must be answered if we are to properly assess the theory's plausibility.

The converse question also arises: if our theory is correct, does this suggest that theoretical unity is desirable, or to be expected, in studying normativity? According to the theory, there is a structure underlying all normative education. This plausibly suggests that richer theories could be developed that describe normativity. While the strength of the theory does not depend on the converse question, if the answer turns out positive, this would be a notable consequence of the theory.

§4.2 REALISM ABOUT NORMATIVITY:

Another avenue for further work is the reassessment of realism in normative domains in light of the theory presented. We have offered a theory of normative knowledge, but we have not explicitly discussed what justifies the knowledge our theory describes. This is largely because the notion of non-propositional knowledge is still underdeveloped; that is, conditions on non-propositional knowledge that correspond to the justification condition on propositional knowledge have not yet been identified.

In light of our theory, the realist's challenge is to demonstrate why the non-propositional normative knowledge gained through the cultivation of the virtues is "justified", in whatever way that might mean. Hence, the full development of our theory will require a notion of justification for non-propositional knowledge to be identified, as well as an argument that the virtues afford suitably justified non-propositional knowledge.

§4.3 MORE ON PROGRESS

Perhaps the section of this paper that is at once most exciting and most underdeveloped is §2.2 on tradition and progress. It was said that normative progress occurs when a normative tradition is expanded on or revised, rather than eschewed. A propitious avenue for further work would be to develop this idea in a way that engages with the literature on normative progress. There is a vast literature on moral progress and the proper assessment of the virtue theory presented here will require sustained engagement with this literature.

CONCLUSION

We presented a theory of normative education according to which we gain normative knowledge by first becoming disposed to properly assess normative agents and situations. Some broad lessons regarding normative philosophy were drawn, about the relationship between our normative traditions and normative progress, as well as the etiology of normativity. We saw that our theory not only solves some important problems with Aristotle's theory of moral education as it applies to ethics, but that it also provides some critical insight into the internalist-externalist debate as it applies to epistemology. And lastly, we saw that our theory as it applies to aesthetics saves virtue-theoretic approaches to aesthetics from otherwise formidable objections.

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