<CT>**AGENCY ASCRIPTIONS IN ETHICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY:**

<SUBTITLE; START ON A NEW LINE>**OR, NAVIGATING INTERSECTIONS, NARROW AND BROAD**

<AU>GUY AXTELL

<ABS>**Abstract:** In this article, the logic and functions of character-trait ascriptions in ethics and epistemology is compared, and two major problems, the "generality problem" for virtue epistemologies and the "global trait problem" for virtue ethics, are shown to be far more similar in structure than is commonly acknowledged. Beyond the *aporia* of character-trait ascription and between the Scylla and Charybdis that virtue theories are faced with in each field of philosophy, we find our passage by making full and explicit use of the "narrow-broad spectrum of trait ascription," and by accounting for the various uses of it in an inquiry-pragmatist account. In virtue theories informed by inquiry pragmatism, the agential habits and abilities deemed salient in explanations/evaluations of agents in particular cases, and the determination of the relevant domains and conditions that an agent's habit or ability is reliably efficacious in, is determined by pragmatic concerns related to our evaluative epistemic practices.
<LS>

<EPI>The sea is still the aporetic place par excellence, and it is still the best metaphor for the aporia of discourse.

—Sarah Kofman, "Beyond Aporia?" (1988, 800)<MC>

1. Introduction: Major Problems with Trait Ascriptions

Character-trait ascriptions serve a variety of purposes, philosophical and nonphilosophical. The appeal to human character and personality traits in folk psychology is arguably something of a mishmash of explanatory and evaluative intentions. Philosophers often try to ~~correct and to~~ render commonsense character psychology self-consistent and informative. There are, however, major problems they encounter on this journey, and for virtue theorists in particular these are often presented as a Scylla and Charybdis that cannot both be evaded.[1]

A major problem concerning the ascription of intellectual or epistemic character traits to an agent is the Generality Problem. Is there ~~is~~ a non–ad hoc way to select the proper level of generality at which to describe a belief-forming process in order to evaluate its reliability?[2] If every token of a belief-forming process belongs to many different types of such processes, there may be no principled way to select the proper level of generality to describe the process token that produced the belief. The Generality Problem has sometimes been presented as an objection to reliabilist theories of

justification (Conee and Feldman 2004, chap. 6), but it is more accurately a problem that must be a concern for any theory that has even a reliability component. This is in part why Linda Zagzebski, in *Virtues of the Mind* (1996), acknowledges that there is relatedly a problem for virtue epistemologies in setting the level of generality at which epistemic virtues are described, and this will be true whether the virtue epistemology is one that acknowledges "faculty" virtues, as agent reliabilist theories do, or restricts the virtues to acquired habits in the way that Zagzebski and other neo-Aristotelian accounts do..

A major problem concerning the ascription of moral character traits is what can here be called the Global Trait Problem, the problem often alternatively described (in a large and growing literature) as the "situationist challenge" to character theory. When we ascribe a global character trait like honesty or kindness to someone, we typically think of this trait as robustly held such that it resists undermining, and as one so settled or habitual that the agent will manifest it not just in a few situations that invite it, but in many. Situationists say that character-trait ascriptions are poor explainers and that "minor and seemingly irrelevant differences in the perceived situation appear more readily to explain behavior and behavioral differences than character traits" (Harman 2000, 223).[3]

Gilbert Harman (1999, 2000) claims that ascriptions of character traits to individuals in folk psychology and philosophical ethics is subject to a "fundamental attribution error"—we far too often jump to conclusions about underlying personality and character traits from the behavior we observe in people. Ultimately, Harman holds that there is in fact "no character or personality" (2000). John Doris (2002) holds that there are moral character traits, but that the only kinds of moral character traits that can be rightly attributed to persons are local or narrowly construed dispositions. Both Harman

3

and Doris make philosophic hay from empirical psychology, arguing that "Aristotelian-style virtue ethics" can have little empirical content—little value for predictive and explanatory purposes—since they "share with folk psychology a commitment to broad-based character traits of a sort that people simply do not have" (Harman 2000, 7).

The Global Trait Problem, I want to argue, *is largely a kind* of generality problem, a problem about the right level of generality at which moral trait ascriptions best serve the explanatory and normative interests involved in moral evaluation.[4] But my aim here is comparative and methodological; it is not an attempt to *solve* these problems in the abstract but an attempt to address them as *problems of practice* faced in a variety of fields cutting across philosophy and the social and behavioral sciences. By relating these two problems directly and revealing their shared logic, we might hope to reap the benefits of an improved understanding of the explanatory and evaluative practices that make use of character-trait ascriptions. One further aim of this essay is to show that whereas the Global Trait Problem is often held captive to stale debates in metaethics over which elements in a theory should be taken as conceptually primary or foundational, it could more profitably be treated in the way that an inquiry-focused or "inquiry-pragmatist" epistemology would suggest we treat the Generality Problem. On a pragmatist account, facts alone do not determine relevant types (Kappel 2006). Rather, in any particular case, the relevant reliability is determined by the agent's epistemic competence and performance, and the ways to settle on what field (or domain) and conditions a character trait is efficacious in turns upon pragmatic concerns related to our evaluative epistemic practices (Kappel 2006, 539–40). There is no question of identifying the total cause of an agent's action or belief, and the partial causes we select and deem salient and usefully

generalized upon, whether triggering or configuring causes, situational or agential, are contextual and have much to do with the *interests-in-explanation* of the persons providing the disposition-citing explanation.

First I will explore what common structure or logic our two problems share, insofar as they each necessitate distinguishing the functions of narrowly and broadly typed trait ascriptions, and the explanatory purposes that each of these is good for. In my view the narrow and broad kinds of trait ascription are strongly interconnected in our practices of agent evaluation, whether moral or epistemic, and can only be separated in theory. Philosophers have noted these interconnections, but when they have tried to explain them, they haven't done a very good job. To do a better job, we need to think seriously about how to apply a sliding scale, allowing some cases to be best addressed by trait ascription of a narrow sort, with other cases best addressed by more global or broadly typed trait ascriptions.

More study of this scale—of the *narrow-broad spectrum* of trait ascription— is needed if we are to meet the burdens of the two problems. But I take this study as leading away from or having a "deflating" effect on some of the debate surrounding whether we should be "internalists" or "externalists" (Feldman, Goldman) in epistemology and "localists" or "globalists" (Doris, Annas) or "occurrentists" or "dispositionalists" (Hurka, Zagzebski) in our accounts of moral character. Thus I will treat especially the debate between equally reductionistic occurrentist accounts like Thomas Hurka's and dispositionalist accounts like Linda Zagzebski's (both in this collection) as subordinate to our shared need for a more comprehensive and flexible account of trait attributions. This account recognizes that both narrowly and broadly

typed traits serve indispensable functions and that narrowly and broadly typed traits often are interconnected in agent and act evaluation. Setting aside such unmotivated "priority" debates is needed today if we are to get a clearer view of what really lies in the "intersections" between ethics and epistemology.

<A>2. The Logic of Intellectual Trait Ascription and the Generality Problem

The Generality Problem is, as we briefly described it, the problem that any process token is an instance of several process types, and it is not clear which process type is relevant for evaluating reliability. Most responses to the problem came from reliabilists, and followed the lead of Alvin Goldman, who holds that the best way to navigate through the dual potential pitfalls of defining the belief-forming process too narrowly or too broadly, is to try to locate the narrowest (content-neutral) process that is causally operative in belief production (Becker 2008, 363).[5]

But according to Christopher Lepock in "How to Make the Generality Problem Work for You" (forthcoming a), different types of appraisals pick out processes at different levels of generality, even when appraising the same belief. While many epistemologies and even some virtue epistemologies are reductionist in this way, granting conceptual or explanatory primacy to narrowly or broadly typed trait ascriptions, Lepock develops the logic of a matter of gradations or levels from narrowest to broadest, as an interpretation of the distinction between the faculty virtues that are the especial focus of the causal/explanatory interests of externalist epistemology, and the virtues and vices that bear upon the conduct of inquiry. An antireductionist account able to properly

acknowledge the distinction between and relationships among trait ascriptions at various levels of generality emerges from "mixed" accounts such as Christopher Hookway's, which the present work on the narrow-broad spectrum helps motivate. The philosophic importance of virtue-theoretic concepts goes beyond what contribution they may make to an analysis of knowing; at the broad end of the spectrum reside, according to inquiry-pragmatist forms of epistemology like Hookway's (2006) Peircean form, thickly describable inquiry and deliberation-regulating cognitive character traits, that is, the *reflective* virtues (compare Putnam 2002; Axtell and Carter 2008).

The problem we are addressing is fundamentally a problem of *practice*, since we can and likely should continue to use both narrow- and broad-type ascriptions but lack, in current theories, the resources to properly relate them. Recognition that trait ascriptions necessarily run along a spectrum from narrow to broad, together with acknowledgment that our explanatory interests shape the determination of what situational and agential factors we deem explanatorily salient, provides us a fresh start.

We can discern at least two distinct ways of attributing abilities or other efficacious character traits to agents, each underlying a different sort of appraisal of beliefs and believers: "One is based on the reliability of the process narrowly construed, and appraises the status of the particular belief. Another makes use of reliability of a more broadly construed process, and describes the creditworthiness of the agent in having formed the belief" (Lepock forthcoming a).

So when we look at how we actually ascribe or attribute epistemic traits to agents, we find indications that there isn't a single level of generality at which the ascriptions are directed. "When a [belief-forming] process is reliable at the narrow end of the scale, it is

NTR [narrow-type reliable]; when it is reliable at the broad end, it is BTR [broad-type reliable]" (forthcoming a). A narrow or local trait is one that yields its evaluatively relevant behavioral outputs in a relatively narrow or local set of circumstances (compare Sosa 2008). Broad or global traits also support desirable behaviors, but their applications go beyond even behaviors, to the agent's internal life. But while it might seem that distinguishing between two distinct uses of reliability only complicates the problem of generality, Lepock argues that we should exploit this situation, and try to "put the generality problem to work" for us.

To this end Lepock asks what sorts of appraisals make use, respectively, of narrowly typed and broadly typed reliability (hereafter NTR and BTR). Trait ascriptions range from "low-level" to "high-level" virtues, from those dispositions most directly involved in perceptual knowledge to the acquired virtues as capacities for metacognitive control. "There are *prima facie* important differences between these two categories and the sort of evaluations they are involved in. . . . It appears that the value of low-level virtues is transmitted directly to their products and only indirectly to the agents who have them, while the value of high-level virtues attaches directly to their possessor but only tenuously to their products" (Lepock forthcoming b).

To compare them more closely, narrowly typed epistemic trait ascriptions primarily serve to appraise the status of a particular belief, and it was primarily in this context that the generality problem was framed. Says Lepock,

<EXT>NTR tells us a great deal about the etiology of a particular belief or

narrow range thereof. . . . It tells us whether we can trust the particular belief in

question, or whether that particular belief is appropriately grounded. However, the epistemic status identified by NTR does not necessarily accrue to the agent. NTR tells us little about the agent's overall capacities or cognitive practices, because it reflects only the etiology of such a narrow range of beliefs on such a narrow range of occasions. Thus while NTR seems central to assessing the status of a single belief, it is less important for assigning credit or blame to believers. (Forthcoming a)<MC>

Broadly typed reliability, by comparison, does not convey very specific information about the particular belief at hand, yet it can convey a great deal about the believer's abilities and practices in the general area. Whereas the main function of narrow trait ascriptions may be belief evaluation, the main function and natural home of broad trait ascriptions is in the evaluation of agents themselves and the quality of their motives and efforts at inquiry. Also, when we are not in a position to evaluate whether someone's belief is knowledge but we do have some experience of his or her belief-forming practices, we typically fall back on BTR evaluations. "We are thus more willing to praise or blame believers for BTR, since it says more about their status as cognitive agents" (Lepock forthcoming a). We can see then that the two kinds of epistemic reliability serve different basic explanatory functions. But it is also highly useful to see that they are often intimately connected in epistemic evaluation of agents and their beliefs. Broadly typed reliability may exculpate agents from blame for beliefs formed in non-NTR ways. It can work the opposite way as well: "Using non-BTR processes prevents agents from receiving credit for their NTR beliefs" (Lepock forthcoming a).

9

NTR and BTR evaluations can come apart, as they do in several cases Lepock discusses, with the effect of undermining an initial intuition we may have had about the creditability to the agent for a particular true belief. There is an important role of credit in knowledge ascriptions, and creditability for true belief is most straightforward when a NTR success is backed by a BTR.

This way of framing the narrow-broad spectrum of trait ascription is necessary if we are to make sense of the challenges of the two problems to virtue theory. The flexibility of the spectrum or range account also helps us to recognize and to cut across certain unmotivated debates, and to recast the distinctions between propositional, doxastic, and personal justification. Some writers treat virtue epistemology as little more than an innovation within generic reliabilism. But "the trouble with treating virtues as belief-forming processes is that it seems to rule out any possibility of uniting the high-level and low-level virtues" (Lepock forthcoming a). The focus on processes neglects the importance in the upper range of cases with problem-solving strategies, and with the social and communal nature of the norms of inquiry. The notion of a process's "excellence" involves BTR; "achievement" and "reliability" are both diachronic concepts, terms denoting agential success across time, and as diachronic concepts they too involve BTR. Epistemic credit as credit for "getting it right" carries the externalist's acknowledgment of the diachronic and of personal justification through sound motivation and efforts at inquiry, as an important source of epistemic value. This recognition of the contribution to epistemic value made by stable intellectual character traits is part of the insight of reliabilism, and provides mixed theories with a substantial advantage over internalist epistemologies like Conee and Feldman's (see 2004), which vainly attempt to

cash out epistemic justification exclusively in terms of *synchronic* considerations of the agent and his or her present evidence, ignoring altogether the quality of the inquiry leading the agent to have just that total evidence to work with (for extended defense of the epistemic value of diachronic epistemic rationalitycriticism see Axtell forthcoming, and Axtell and Olson forthcoming). The latter theories retain the importance of personal justification but are committed to viewing diachronic traits, including the intellectual virtues, *as* regulators of inquiry, as strictly nonepistemic. This, as I argue elsewhere, denatures the centrality of these virtues in explanations attributing epistemic credit to the agent for the truth of his or her belief.[6]

Lepock thinks it is better to conceive of intellectual virtues as capacities for metacognitive control of our actions of inquiry and methods and strategies of problem solving. "Open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and the like are not dispositions to form beliefs, though they are (speaking loosely) dispositions . . . [and] engage in inquiry in certain ways" (2008a, 17). Most intellectual virtues have essential connections to capacities to search in some particular manner, and capacities to know when that kind of search is a good idea (Morton 2006). This way allows for the centrality in epistemology of the analysis of doxastic justification and what Feldman calls synchronic epistemic rationality but also for what Hookway (2006) says contrasts with the doxastic paradigm, an *inquiry-focused* epistemology. Even if, as Lepock holds, BTR isn't as directly involved in knowledge as it is in other important epistemic standings, such as theoretical understanding, intellectual virtues like intellectual humility and open-mindedness guard against certain biases and promote the agent's epistemic reliability in a variety of ways. They are praiseworthy traits that can be seen as configuring causes of belief or of action.

The manner in which they are valued reflects diachronic goals of maintaining a stable set of beliefs over time. But the argument is not that there is any neat mapping of narrow-type ascription onto belief evaluation, or of broad-type ascription onto agent evaluation. Nor is it the need to prioritize one over the other for the assuaging of reductionist aspirations. The proper way to distinguish and relate the different levels of generality is in terms of the driving *interests-in-explanation* that philosophers have in a particular case; and of course, the nature of the case itself partly determines this although our own special purposes matter as well. Thus the present account both draws from and supports virtue-based contextualism (see Sarah Wright in this collection, Greco 2009, Thomas 2008, and Upton 2005).

Recognition of the different, even if overlapping functions of NTR and BTR ascriptions (table 1), together with the view that reflective intellectual virtues should properly be conceived as capacities for metacognitive control of inquiry, offers other potential benefits. Lepock argues that his view is needed to make good sense of the commonsense ascription of intellectual virtue to figures like Newton and Aristotle. For we do so without presupposing that many of their particular scientific beliefs are in fact true. But this ascription is rendered senseless if virtues are identified strictly with reliably truth-conducive *processes*, as austere forms of reliabilism appear committed to. Such persons are commonly regarded as exemplars of scientific reasoning, despite the fact that the reliability, power, and portability of their faculties are unexceptional compared to those of educated people today.[7]

<INSERT TABLE 1 NEAR HERE>

Table 1. Lepock's *narrow-broad spectrum* of intellectual character-trait attributions

> **Comment [O2]:** Preferably delete the vertical and horizontal lines in the table. I'm having trouble with deleting the box itself.

NTR: Narrowly typed reliability

— Low-level virtues (faculty virtues). Dispositions construed as genetically endowed cognitive capacities.

—Best suited to evaluating the etiology of a single belief or narrow range of beliefs; tells us nothing about an agent's other beliefs.

—The value of low-level virtues is transmitted directly to their products and only indirectly to the agents who have them.

BTR: Broadly typed reliability

— High-level virtues (reflective virtues). Best suited to explaining the agent's intellectual abilities and methods/strategies in a certain domain/area of inquiry.

— Best suited to holistic evaluation of agents, including the quality of their activities of inquiry.

— The value of high-level virtues attaches directly to their possessor but only tenuously to their products.

So by way of review of our distinction between levels, intellectual-character-trait attributions vary across a narrow-broad spectrum. The approach recommended here, as we have seen, begins by asking why we have such different ways of ascribing intellectual traits to persons, and what distinctive functions are served by ascriptions made at different levels of generality. Knowledge is a collective good, and this kind of "genealogical" question prevents us from divorcing epistemological concerns from the realities of social interaction. Inquiry-focused virtue epistemologists argue that the uses of trait concepts at different levels of generality have quite distinctive functions, yet are also clearly connected in many instances of epistemic evaluation. NTR and BTR can both be seen as playing a justificatory role, or perhaps even as supplying different important *kinds* of justification, doxastic and personal. We will later return to develop more fully the suggestion that we might put such a solution to the Generality Problem "to work" in epistemology by taking it as an opportunity to utilize the resources of the narrow-broad spectrum of attributions. But let's now turn to another problem where narrow and broad construal of character traits is central, the situationist challenge to virtue ethics.

<A>3. The Logic of Moral Trait Ascription and the Global Trait Problem

When we look at our commonsense ascriptions of *moral* traits to agents, we find again that there is no single level of generality at which they are directed. Doris describes the most important differences as those between "local" and "global" trait ascription, and he

14

rejects "theory of character" insofar as it aims to be a theory with substantial empirical content (a theory that is "realist" in contrast to antirealist, or fictionalist) about the efficacy of global traits like moral virtues and vices. We will briefly look at the local/global distinction as Doris employs it, and then at Hurka's (2001, 2009) equally suspect treatment of that same distinction.

Resurgent interest in ethical virtue is often dated to a half-century ago, 1958, when influential papers in ethics by G. E. M. Anscombe and Philippa Foot were published. Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy" criticized a thin-focused "law conception of ethics" in British moral philosophy, for its neglect of individual and social psychology. Anscombe suggested that ethical theory would not advance unless and until philosophers attended to the neglected psychology of character and emotion. But the rallying cries of many self-described virtue ethicists, "moral psychology," "practical wisdom," and "the resources of thick concepts," all find them caught up in various ways with the globalist assumptions that Doris, Harman, and other situationists find so problematic in light of empirical psychology (see Goldie 2000). However disconnected virtue ethics may have been from empirical psychology in previous decades, a general climate of trading armchair philosophy for empirically informed theory, as well as Doris's spirited polemic against globalist virtue ethics, has today brought the global trait problem to center stage.

Commonsense morality posits persons of good character who are not easily swayed by circumstance. Aristotelian good character is supposed to be an integrated association of robust traits and evaluatively consistent personality structures. But, wrote one situationist author recently, "Experiments show that efficacious traits are not global,

and allegedly global traits are not efficacious . . . character traits are either narrow and efficacious or broad and inert. Either way, the conception of traits favored by Aristotelian virtue ethics finds little empirical confirmation in these studies" (Prinz 2009, 118).

Doris thinks we must restrict ethical trait ascriptions to the local, or situational, like "dime-finding," or "dropped-paper" compassionate (Doris 1998; see Webber 2006, 2007, 2008 for criticism). We should altogether eliminate or at least treat as very error prone "highly general trait ascriptions like 'honest' or 'compassionate'" (Doris 2002, 112). Doris holds that one of the key upshots of the social psychological research is a "'fragmented' conception of character, which countenances a plethora of situation-specific 'narrow' or 'local' traits" that aren't unified with other traits (2005, 665). Doris's use of the local/global trait distinction reflects his contrast of his "fragmentary" account of personality with the Aristotelians' "evaluative consistency thesis," and his localism with their globalism. Doris's fragmentary account holds "that systematically observed behavior, rather than suggesting evaluatively consistent structures, suggests instead *fragmented* personality structures—evaluatively inconsistent associations of large numbers of local traits" (1998, 508). So the opposition as Doris constructs it is between globalists, who posit character as "an integrated association of robust traits and evaluatively consistent personality structures," and localists or situationists, who posit character only as "evaluatively inconsistent associations of large numbers of local traits" (1998, 508).

Now there have been many responses made to Doris's book, evoking a variety of stances. Many philosophers do think the situationist studies should be a wake-up call, to virtue theorists in particular. Ernest Sosa thus concedes that "it seems incumbent on

virtue theory to grant that the experiments do raise legitimate doubt as to how global and robust is human practical wisdom, and how global and robust are its more specific component virtues, such as kindness . . . honesty, [and] courage" (2008, 281). But Sosa and Webber both argue that holding Doris's "fragmentary account" isn't mandatory. Some philosophic defenders of broadly based moral trait ascriptions think that a theory of virtue can get by without as much empirical content as others expect it to have. The most obvious move in this regard is what Doris calls the "rarity argument" many virtue ethicists give: it matters little to virtue ethics how rare full virtue is, so long as it is not an impossible goal; even if full virtue or integrated character *is* rare, we all have *some* capacity and opportunity to inculcate virtue in ourselves. We still have reason to take character education as important, too, and to resist the prescriptive implication situationists draw, that we ditch it in favor of (presumably) enlightened "situation management."

Other defenders of broadly typed moral traits note that Doris takes latitudinal or cross-situational studies to supply all the data needed to reject a unitary account of character in favor of a fragmentary one, whereas our best defense of our characterological intuitions is our *longitudinal* acquaintance with the individuals around us—our knowing them over an extended period of time. What allows us to attribute global traits like honesty to an agent may be our long-term or longitudinal acquaintance with that person, but for practical reasons there is very little useful experimental study of this available. We can acknowledge that, as one defender of global traits put it, there are "contingent difficulties that often beset the ascription of traits, particularly their attribution to strangers and loose acquaintances, but also that "there is no fundamental attribution error

that impugns [global] attribution itself, [though there is] . . . a range of attribution difficulties that account for the ways in which [global] attribution can go wrong" (Webber 2007, 90–91, 102–3). There need be nothing wrong with ascribing stable and robust traits to people of whom we have long acquaintance, though the empirical studies should impact folk practices so as to improve them. The kind of character traits of interest as one moves toward the global end of the local/global spectrum include fundamental motives, desires, and goals, much as I earlier said that the broad end of intellectual trait ascription brings in diachronic as opposed to merely synchronic considerations.

Thomas Hurka's (2001, 2006, 2009) treatment of the local and global trait distinction also dichotomizes, turning it into fodder for debate between philosophical analysis of virtue deemed mutually exclusive and exhaustive. In "Virtuous Act, Virtuous Disposition," Hurka's initial thesis is actually strongly analogous to Lepock's: "Everyday moral thought uses the concepts of virtue and vice at two different levels" (Hurka 2006, 69). At the *global* level, says Hurka, it applies these concepts to persons or to stable character traits or dispositions. In contrast to these standing traits, the *local* applications of concepts of virtue and vice are applications to specific acts or mental states, such as occurrent desires or feelings. Hurka writes that "the global and local uses of the virtue-concepts are clearly connected, in that we expect virtuous persons to perform and have, and virtuous traits to issue in, particular virtuous acts, desires, and feelings. A philosophical account of virtue should explain this connection, but there are two different ways of doing so. Each takes one of the two uses to be primary and treats the other as derivative, but they disagree about which is the primary use" (2006, 69).

The Dispositional View, says Hurka, "takes the global use to be primary

and identifies virtuous acts, desires, and feelings in part as ones that issue from virtuous dispositions. Aristotle famously took this view. In the NE he said that for an act to be virtuous it must meet some initial conditions, including about its occurrent motivation, but must also 'proceed from a firm and unchangeable character'; if it does not, it may be such as a brave or generous person *would* perform, but is not *itself* brave or generous. . . . The dispositional view . . . treats virtuous dispositions as primary and defines virtuous occurrent states derivatively, as ones that proceed from such dispositions" (2006, 70). The Occurrent-State View, says Hurka, "takes the local use to be primary and identifies virtuous dispositions as ones to perform virtuous acts and to have virtuous desires and feelings. . . . It applies the virtue concepts first to such states and then defines virtuous dispositions derivatively" (2006, 70).

Hurka identifies the local and global uses of virtue concepts with two competing accounts of virtue, each supporting a different, albeit equally reductive, systematic account of the nature and value of the virtues (see also Hurka and Epstein 2009). He thus polarizes the debate strongly in at least two ways: first, by accepting an occurrentist *definition* of virtue against Slote's and Zagzebski's incompatible but equally contentious dispositionalist definitions; and second, by prioritizing aims over rules and virtues among the basic elements of moral theory. He describes the dispositional view as "overwhelmingly dominant," but argues against it on a number of scores, including by claiming that the contemporary commonsense understanding of virtue is actually the occurrent-state one: "When everyday moral thought applies the virtue-concepts, it is primarily to occurrent states considered on their own" (2006, 70)

One example Hurka gives is of the soldier who is awarded a Medal of Honor for throwing himself on a hand grenade to save others. The members of a military committee are considering whether or not to give the soldier a medal for bravery: "Would they say, 'We know he threw himself on a grenade despite knowing it would cost him his life and in order to save the lives of his comrades. But we cannot give him a medal for bravery because we do not know whether his act issued from a stable disposition or was, on the contrary, out of character'?" "They would say no such thing," Hurka judges, "and they would be obnoxious if they did" (2006, 72).

The folk certainly make global judgments about virtue, but they treat those judgments "as derivative from local judgments about the virtuousness of particular acts, desires, and feelings, and takes those states' virtuousness to be independent of any tie to dispositions." "Moreover," Hurka goes on to contend against dispositionalists, "it is right to do so: an act of helping another from a desire for his welfare is no less admirable when out of character than when dispositionally based" (2006, 74).

In summary, this section has described two of the main uses of narrowly and broadly typed moral trait ascriptions in the literature today: Doris's contrast between the local and the global construal of traits, and the localist/globalist debate it engenders; and Hurka's own treatment of local and global uses of virtue concepts, and the occurrentist/dispositionalist debate it engenders. I compared briefly the importance of latitudinal studies and longitudinal acquaintance in defense of the legitimate functions of broadly typed moral trait ascriptions. Hurka constructs this either/or choice (between dispositionalism and occurrentism) much as Doris constructs that between globalists and localists, and traits and situations. While I said little in direct criticism of either author,

20

directing attention to the rhetorical strategy of dichotomizing between the two kinds of trait ascription sets off our own nonreductionist approach by contrast. This sets us up, then, for a closer comparison between our two problems regarding trait ascription, and for arguing that such dichotomization is uncalled for and that our handling of the Global Trait Problem would benefit from following the same sort of approach we found Lepock bringing to the Generality Problem.

<A>**4. The Common Structure of the Two Problems**

We have taken our two problems about trait ascription as serious problems in ethics and epistemology. But an approach by way of putting the narrow-broad spectrum to work rejects the primacy-granting reductive "higher-level accounts" offered by Hurka and by Zagzebski, in favor of allowing our actual evaluative practices to be our focus and our guide. As Nicholas Rescher notes, "The understanding/explanation orientation is much less atomistic and more social than the certainty/justification orientation" (2001, 237). An epistemology that does not make inquiry central will likely also be unable to satisfactorily integrate the findings and perspectives of social and collective epistemology. Why try to reduce one kind of attribution to the other, when it is possible through a more flexible model to accommodate both? The main reason why I have been attracted by Lepock's development of the narrow-broad spectrum, as his own interpretation of Hookway's distinction between faculty and reflective virtues, is that it facilitates such a nonreductive account and undercuts unmotivated debates such as those between localists and globalists, occurrentists and dispositionalists. Narrowly and broadly

typed traits are thus seen as ascribed in response to different, even if overlapping, explanatory interests, with neither being primary over or reducible to the other. Our actual epistemic appraisals may not just be measures of NTR or BTR; often added to these are other considerations, from anti-Gettier conditions to internalist conditions, which additions make the quest for reducibility that much more difficult. Mostly, the approach entreats us to carefully distinguish different sorts of appraisal, and to use this information to help determine the relevant process type or relevant level of generality that responds to the explanatory interests we have in any particular case. As a problem of practice, it is easier to be clear about the different types of appraisal or evaluation we employ—for instance, even reliabilist and internalist appraisal—when we treat them as concerned with things addressed at different levels of generality.

The forms of virtue epistemology that are distinguished both from virtue reliabilist and neo-Aristotelian forms by a strongly antireductionist stance are those most closely associated with inquiry pragmatists, or those that Hookway, citing Peirce, describes as supporting "epistemology-as-inquiry" (Hookway 2006, 95). It is here also that I locate my own approach.[8]

If we consider what virtue theories the global trait problem is most serious for, they are globalist virtue ethical theories, including Stoic and neo-Aristotelian versions of virtue theories, since these make the strongest claims about the causal efficacy and philosophical importance of broadly typed traits of character. The focus on habits of responsible and successful inquiry among the pragmatist virtue theories helps them resist the flaws of globalism, while addressing empirical challenges to folk epistemological practices as well. If there is no single level of generality at which trait ascriptions in

22

either area aim, and especially if, as I've suggested but not set out to prove here, narrow and broadly typed traits are interconnected in evaluation of agents and their actions, then we need a nonreductionistic approach, which is what we are denied by engagement in undermotivated debates like those between the situationist localist and neo-Aristotelian globalist or again between the occurrentist and dispositionalist analyses of moral virtue. If we want to facilitate more constructive work at the intersections of ethics and epistemology, we need to see that our ability to do so is improved by our adopting a more deflationary attitude toward a number of contentious debates over the conceptual primacy of the narrow or the broad, the local or the global, the occurrent or the dispositional, the "thin" or the "thick" (on the latter, see Hurka and Elstein forthcoming, Axtell and Carter 2008, Battaly 2008, and Elgin 2008). With this deflationary attitude in place, I suggest we place ourselves on a more constructive footing to put salience contextualist approaches to the Global Trait Problem and the Generality Problem to work for us.[9]

We might draw the further upshot that Zagzebski's virtue theory, sometimes called neo-Aristotelian or "pure" virtue theory on account of some of its other commitments, comes out looking especially problematic (see also 2003, 2006). This is not because it attempts a unified account of virtue across ethics and epistemology, for that is something that opposing inquiry-focused accounts can also endorse. It is acutely problematic because it is structured in ways that leave it especially challenged by each of the two specific problems we've examined. Zagzebski's view is:

<NL>

1. especially challenged by the Generality Problem, because of the robust (or "motive reliabilist" [Levin]) use of the "because of virtue" idea to entail truth and preclude Gettier and environmental forms of epistemic luck; and

2. especially challenged by the Global Trait Problem (and directly targeted by Doris) because of her neo-Aristotelian demand that the sources of virtuous actions be "entrenched' moral virtues, and that moral agents be *motivationally self-sufficient*.[10]<MC>

Of course, these are not faults of Zagzebski's approach alone. Extant theories of virtue do not do a very good job of unifying low- and high-level virtues. Here as in science, unification and reductionism are not the same thing, though a zealous reductive spirit wants to treat them that way and limits itself by creating but another "great divide" in ethics, this time between concern with what we ought to "do" and concern with who we want to "be."

The case for a unified virtue-theoretic account of normativity need not and should not be cast, as Roger Crisp rightly warns, as "the question of how one should live or what kind of person one should be *rather* than the question of how one should act" (2010). What we can say is that the broad end of the spectrum of trait ascriptions in both ethics and epistemology is concerned with diachronically described traits, and with more holistic evaluations of agency than with narrower concerns about the rightness of a particular act or the justification of a particular belief.[11]

So a final implication I want to draw from our comparison of the two problems is that the dichotomizing and reductive spirit of Doris's and Hurka's approaches to moral trait ascription obscures the need to recognize the interrelatedness of the narrowly and broadly-typed traits in moral evaluation. Both authors, as we've seen (section 3), turn the differences between narrowly and broadly typed trait ascriptions into fodder for philosophical debates motivated only by prioritizing the one or the other. Doris's use of the local/global distinction threatens to turn it into a false dichotomy wherever and whenever he uses it to insinuate an inexorable choice between (realistic) fragmentary and (utopian) global conceptions of personality; Hurka's use of the distinction follows a similar dichotomizing strategy, but in the service of a consequentialist "higher-level" reduction of dispositionalist to occurrentist moral theory. The choice he presents as inexorable is between virtues treated and defined atomistically and virtues treated and defined holistically—that is, between one view that privileges "specific acts or mental states such as occurrent desires of feelings," and one that privileges "persons, stable character traits or dispositions" (2006, 70). But from the present perspective I think we can see that the intended forced choice is wholly factitious.

Hurka's account, which acknowledges that systems of ethics proceed from emphasizing one pole or the other, is refreshingly blunt. Most philosophers try much more actively to "sink" the fact of such privileging or selective emphasis. For instance, should internalists and externalists about epistemic justification acknowledge that what motivates their debate is merely their respective selecting of one meaning of justification from among several, that by their taking one instance of knowledge, "brute" or "reflective," as paradigmatic they would necessarily be *giving up* the claim that their

account constitutes a "complete" account of epistemic justification. If the situationist and the neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist acknowledge that they mean quite different things by behavior, or the occurrentist and the dispositionalist that the facts pertaining to occurrent states and to diachronic traits are potentially *independent* sources of value, then the contrary systems of thought they generate could still be resources for the active agent engaged in moral deliberation and reflection, but the conflict *between* such systems couldn't really be expressed. But would that be a bad or a good thing?

To be sure, the systems or theoretical perspectives in question do fit particular cases better or worse, and the Global Trait Problem isn't skirted merely by pointing out that appeal to dispositions serves an indispensable role in ethics. Preserving the philosophical importance of explanations involving the broadly typed character virtues may well require distancing ourselves from certain aspects of what Doris targets in his critique of globalism, especially the conception of the morally virtuous agent as motivationally self-sufficient.

To move toward conclusion, it is useful to point out that up to a point there are some quite strong analogies between Hurka's and Lepock's understandings of the narrow-broad spectrum of trait ascriptions. What is both shared and highly useful in Hurka's and Lepock's approaches may be summarized this in a series of steps:

<NL>

(a) there is no single level of generality at which trait ascriptions in their respective subfields of philosophy are aimed;

(b) ascription varies across a narrow-broad spectrum;

(c) the uses of trait concepts at different levels are clearly connected;

(d)   a philosophical account of virtue should explain this connection;

(e)   there are different ways of doing this; and

(f)   this often fuels debate between competing accounts of virtue based on the primacy of the concepts at one end of the spectrum or the other.<MC>

I find these points to be an excellent start for a logic of trait ascription that can help us navigate the intersections of ethics and epistemology. There, however, the approaches of Lepock and Hurka begin to diverge dramatically, as Lepock goes on to argue that:

<NL>

(g)   both levels of trait ascription are often involved in epistemic appraisal of agents and their beliefs;

(h)   there is no *general* answer to the question of which end of the spectrum is logically or conceptually prior to the other;

(i)   we should therefore take nonreductionism as our default position and avoid contentious debates motivated only by the privileging of one end of the narrow-broad spectrum; and

(j)   this allows us to put the narrow-broad distinction (and indeed the Generality Problem and the Global Trait Problems) *to work* for us in concrete ways by seeing how such potential barriers to trait ascription get addressed in our evaluative practices, and in particular cases.<MC>

It is these latter steps, missing in Hurka's treatment of these same issues, that I think aid us in navigating clear of the Scylla and Charybdis so often claimed to shipwreck philosophical attempts to render characterological attributions both informative and philosophically consistent. The epistemological contextualism that ensues from putting the narrow-broad spectrum to work is just a demand for better awareness of the different roles played by our own explanatory interests as we try to say what method, field, and conditions should be employed when assessing the epistemically relevant reliability of any particular belief. Salience contextualism argues for the need to nonreductively balance and utilize the resources of trait concepts that function at different levels of generality.[12] Can we, by following Lepock's rather than Hurka's example here, apply this same approach to the Global Trait Problem? At this stage I hope that readers will share the conviction that we can and should, but also see that both Doris's and Hurka's approaches militate against it. Although Hurka, in his manner of treating the Global Trait Problem, appears to confer with our present approach in (a) to (f) he takes a quite contrary stance with respect to (g) to (j). The dispositionalist (Zagzebski, Slote) argues from the idea that it can never be right to sacrifice virtue to the view that virtue is more valuable than other goods, even infinitely more valuable. Hurka has "argued against this view, holding to the contrary that virtue is always a lesser good" (2010). So Hurka's stance implicitly holds (g*) to (j*):

    <NL>

    (g*) the levels of trait ascription cannot be independent sources of value, but one or the other must be deemed primary;

(h*) this primacy of the local or occurrent end of the spectrum explains the value
     of the other end;

(i*) we should therefore view this and similarly structured primacy debates and
     the choices they entail as inevitable in systematic theories in ethics; and

(j*) we should reject the pluralism inherent in the spectrum approach in favor of
     one or another reductivism—either that of the occurrentist or that of the
     dispositionalist.<MC>

From what has been said, it should be clear that Hurka and Zagzebski, if not as
epitomizing the occurrentist/dispositionalist debate, are at least the most sharply opposed
of our the contributors over this issue in the present collection, opposed over what
elements of a moral theory—goods, virtues, and duties—are conceptually primary or
foundational. While I have benefited from the richness of thought in both authors, I do
want to suggest that one upshot of our study is to cast doubt on the usefulness of their
respective ways of turning the distinction between dispositional and occurrent uses of
virtue terms into a clash of competing philosophical *systems.*

This comes with some qualification. Hurka's "higher-level account" (2010)
provides a consequentialist model that is in an important sense less reductionistic than
other and better known consequentialist models. To be sure, Hurka makes an insightful
critique of virtue ethics. He says that a moral philosophy should not make global
dispositions a condition for the value of occurrent attitudes, and I agree. He also says that
we should not let the importance accorded by virtue ethicists to thick concepts in recent
years be used to deride the importance of thin normativity and act evaluation, and I agree

29

as well. But these are not best accomplished by taking sides on opposed Occurrentist and Dispositionalist systems of ethics.[13] They are instead best accomplished by respecting the quite different functions that local and global trait ascriptions serve, and acknowledging their interconnectedness in the explanatory and normative interests that we have in the moral evaluation.

<LS>

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Box 6943

Radford University

Radford, VA 24142

USA

gsaxtell@radford.edu

<A>**References**

Adams, Robert M. 2009. *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*. Oxford:

    Oxford University Press.Anscombe, G. E. M. 1958. "Modern Moral Philosophy."

    Philosophy 33, no. 124:1–19.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2008. *Experiments in Ethics.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

    University Press.

Axtell, Guy. 2009. "Diachronic Rationality and Epistemic Value." Unpublished

    manuscript under review.

———. Axtell, Guy. Forthcoming. "From Internalist Evidentialism to Virtue

    Responsibilism." In *Evidentialism and Its Discontents*, edited by Trent

    Dougherty. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Axtell, Guy, and J. Adam Carter. 2008. "Just the Right Thickness: A Defense of Second-

    Wave Virtue Epistemologies." *Philosophical Papers* issue entitled "Epistemology

    Through Thick and Thin," 37, no. 3:413–34.

Axtell, Guy, and Phillip Olson. Forthcoming. "Three Independent Factors in

    Epistemology." *Contemporary Pragmatism.*

Battaly, Heather. 2008. "Metaethics Meets Virtue Epistemology: Salvaging

    Disagreement about the Epistemically Thick." *Philosophical Papers* 37, 3:435–

    54.

Becker, Kelly. 2008. "Epistemic Luck and the Generality Problem." *Philosophical*

    Papers 139:353–66.

Beebe, James. 2004. "The *Generality Problem*, Statistical Relevance and the Tri-Level

    Hypothesis." *Nous* 38, 1:177–95.

Comment [O4]: Please add in the text or notes a citation of this piece from Dougherty's edited volume, or delete this entry here.

Conee, Earl, and Richard Feldman. 2004. *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology.*
  Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crisp, Roger. 2010. "Virtue Ethics and Virtue Epistemology." Included in this collection.

Dewey, John. 1989. *The Later Works.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Doris, John. 1998. "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics. *Nous* 32, no. 4:504–30.

———. 2002. *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior.* Cambridge:
  Cambridge University Press.

———. 2005. "Replies: Evidence and Sensibility." *Philosophy and Phenomenological*
  Research 71, no. 3: 656–77.

Elgin, Catherine. 2008. "Trustworthiness." *Philosophical Papers* 37, no. 3:371–87.

Foot, Philippa. 1958. "Moral Arguments." *Mind* 67:502–13.

Fricker, Miranda. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing.* Oxford:
  Oxford University Press.

———. 2008. "Scepticism and the Genealogy of Knowledge: Situating Epistemology In
  Time." *Philosophical Papers* 37, no. 1:27–50.

Greco, John, ed. 2004. *Sosa and His Critics.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Greco, John. 2009. *Achieving Knowledge.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goldie, Peter. 2000. *The Emotions.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Harman, Gilbert. 1999. "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and
  the Fundamental Attribution Error." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*
  99:315–31.

———. 2000. "The Nonexistence of Character Traits." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian*
  Society 100:223–26.

Hetherington, Stephen (ed.) 2006. *Epistemology Futures.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hookway, Christopher. 2006. "Epistemology and Inquiry: The Primacy of Practice." In Heatherington 2006, 95–110.

Hurka, Thomas. 2001. *Virtue, Vice, and Value.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2006. "Virtuous Act, Virtuous Dispositions," *Analysis* 66, 1:69–76.

———. 2010. "Right Act, Virtuous Motive." Included in this collection.

Hurka, Thomas, and Daniel Elstein. Forthcoming. "From Thick to Thin: Two Easy Reduction Plans." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy.*

Kappel, Klemens. 2006. "A Diagnosis and Resolution to the Generality Problem," *Philosophical Studies* 127:525–60.

Sarah Kofman. 1988. "Beyond Aporia?" In *Post-Structuralist Classics*, edited by Andrew Benjamin, 77–88. London: Routledge.

Lepock, Christopher. 2006. "Adaptability and Perspective." *Philosophical Studies* 129, no. 2: 377–91.

———. 2007. "Metacognition and Intellectual Virtue." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta.

———. 2008. "Metacognition and Epistemic Virtue," available at http://www.ualberta.ca/~clepock/lepock%20-%20metacognition%20&%20epistemic%20virtue.doc (last accessed 22 September 2009).

———. Forthcoming a. "How to Make the Generality Problem Work for You." *Acta Analytica*.

———. Forthcoming b. "Unifying the Intellectual Virtues." *Philosophy*

    and Phenomenological Research.

Levin, Michael. 2004. "Virtue Epistemology: No New Cures." *Philosophy and*

    Phenomenological Research 69, no. 2:397–410.

Lockie, Robert. 2008. "Problems for Virtue Theories in Epistemology." *Philosophical*

    Studies 138, no. 2:169–91.

Morton, Adam. "Knowing What to Think About: When Epistemology Meets the Theory

    of Choice." In Heatherington 2006, 111–28.

Pappas, Gregory. 2008. *John Dewey's Ethics.* 2008. Bloomington: Indiana University

    Press.

Prinz, Jesse. 2009. "The Normativity Challenge: Why Empirically Real Traits Won't

    Save Virtue Ethics." In *Virtue Ethics, Character, and Moral Psychology* 13, 2–3,

    edited by Candace L. Upton, 117–44. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pritchard, Duncan. Forthcoming2008. "Knowledge, Understanding and Epistemic

    Value." In *Epistemology*, edited by Anthony O'Hear, 000–00. Cambridge:

    Cambridge University Press.

———. 2007. "Recent Work on Epistemic Value." *American Philosophical Quarterly*

    44, 85–110.

Putnam, Hilary. 2002. *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy.* Cambridge, Mass.:

    Harvard University Press.

Rescher, Nicholas. 2001. *Epistemology.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sosa, Ernest. 2008. "Situations Against Virtues: The Situationist Attack on Virtue

    Theory." In *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: Philosophical Theory and*

Comment [O5]: What are these numbers? Please check that this entry is correct. Is this a published book? Yes

Comment [O6]: Please provide page numbers. This one is forthcoming Nov. 2009 and there's no page numbers to be found.

    Scientific Practice, edited by C. Mantzavinos, 274–91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thomas, Alan. 2008. "The Genealogy of Epistemic Virtue Concepts." *Philosophical Papers* 37, no. 3:345–69.

Upton, Candace. 2005. "A Contextual Account of Character Traits." *Philosophical Studies* 122:133–51.

Webber, Jonathan. 2006a. "Character, Consistency, and Classification." *Mind* 115, no. 459:651–58.

———. 2006b. "Virtue, Character and Situation." *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 3, no. 2:193–213.

———. 2007. "Character, Global and Local." *Utilitas* 19, no. 4:430–34.

Zagzebski, Linda. 1996. *Virtues of the Mind.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2003. "Epistemic Value and the Primacy of What We Care About." *Philosophical Studies* 33, no. 3:353–77.

———. 2006. "Ideal Agents and Ideal Observers in Epistemology." In Heatherington 2006, 131–48.

<FOOTNOTES>

---

[1] For other recent and related treatments of character-trait ascriptions see Fricker 2007 and 2008 and Upton 2005.

[2] "For example, suppose I form a true belief based on a coin toss. One would normally think that this process is unreliable. But one could always cite a more fine-grained

individuation of the type to undermine that verdict, say, for example, forming beliefs about who will win the 2007 NCAA basketball tournament based on flipping this coin on the Monday afternoon before the championship game. If the belief is true, this 'process' is correct 100% of the time, hence adequately truth-conducive, hence reliable" (Becker 2008, 354).

[3] The thesis of the explanatory salience of robust and cross-situationally manifested moral dispositions is claimed to come open to empirical refutation by studies, many of them well known and even infamous, like the Milgram and the Stanford Prison experiments. See Doris 2002 for extended discussion and interpretation.

[4] I thank John Greco for discussion of this point.

[5] Conee and Feldman (2004, 14400){Please provide page number} relate the Single Case, No Distinction, and Generality Problems by saying that "the problem for defenders of the reliability theory, then, is to provide an account of relevant types that is broad enough to avoid The Single Case Problem but not so broad as to encounter The No-Distinction Problem. Let us call the problem of finding such an account 'The Problem of Generality'" See also Beebe 2004 for a sound overview.

[6] See Axtell 2009; see also Crisp 2010 on the centrality of diachronic traits in virtue epistemology as well as virtue ethics.

[7] Lepock 2007, 167; Riggs 2003, 210–13. Lepock argues that "what makes it possible to explain our appraisals here is the fact that a virtuous trait can be valuable in part because of its own power and portability, even though it does not typically have enough effect on belief-formation to make one's beliefs into knowledge" (2007, 167).

[8] This approach is akin to that suggested in Dewey's account of reflective morality, in which at whichever end we begin we find ourselves intellectually compelled to consider the other end. Prioritizing or reductionistic definitions of virtue such as those we find the occurrentist and dispositionalist employing are immediately suspect if in fact "we are not dealing with two different things but with two poles of the same thing" (Dewey 1989, 7:173).

[9] This reply to Hurka, then, is not so much different from Robert Adams's reply when he writes of dispositional and occurrent uses of virtue concepts that "both types of conception have their uses," and that there is little harm with being pluralist about the sources of virtue, and with operating with both, "provided we are clear about what we are doing" (Adams 2009, 124).

[10] While Doris has to date restricted the situationist challenge to ethical theory, he at one point in the book gives reason to think that it could be generalized to target at least some versions of virtue epistemology. He writes: "[T]he contextual variability of cognitive functioning may problematize globalist, highly general, accounts of intelligence. A wealth of empirical work indicates that people experience remarkable difficulty 'transferring' cognitive skills across even closely related domains; they may perform well in one context and poorly in other, seemingly very similar situations, rather like the case

of moral behavior. If the 'contextualism' about cognitive ability this empirical work inspires is right (see Ceci 1996), it would be a nuisance, not only for conceptions of practical reasoning emphasizing reliable flexibility but also for recent 'virtue epistemologies,' that import globalist psychological theories from the ethics literature in an attempt to elucidate central epistemic notions (e.g., Zagzebski 1996, esp. 178)" (Doris 2005, 670).

[11] Gregory Pappas's book *John Dewey's Ethics* gives us another and still more challenging response, in terms of which Dewey's thought should not be assimilated to that of self-described virtue ethicists, despite the criticisms they share of deontology and consequentialism: "It has been assumed that the great divide in ethics is between act-centered views, ethics of doing, and character-centered views, ethics of being; in other words, morality should be conceived as a matter of doing good or being good. . . . John Dewey anticipated it and evaluated its legitimacy. Dewey undermines the grounds for the divide issue, and he proposes a way to move beyond the debates between character-centered and act-centered ethics" (Pappas 2008, 129).

[12] Indeed, without studying the shifts in explanatory frames that occur as we move from trait ascriptions of one level to those of another, it would arguably be impossible to determine when two explanations as occurrentists and dispositionalists typically present them are consistent or inconsistent with or irrelevant to one another.

---

[13] Compare Appiah's discussion of how virtue ethics became distorted when during the 1960s and 1970s it repurposed itself to that narrower conception of morality that is the subject of mainstream moral philosophy. This is the shortcoming of virtue ethicists themselves, of course, but also of Kantians and consequentialists who would reduce an account of excellence to a cluster of duties or consequences, and procedures for fulfilling them. Once this is the case, the eudaemonist approach is lost: "Virtue ethics rather loses its point. And its way" (Appiah 2008, 63).