

Intellectual Virtues in Neoplatonism?

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DWMC Colloquium
 17th november 2022

T1: Epistemic normativity stems from virtue

What it is for someone to believe or do something well epistemically is to be accounted for in terms of virtues. That is to say, it may be that believing or doing something well epistemically is believing or acting from virtue.

C. Kelp, *Virtue Theoretic Epistemology* (2020), 6.

T2: Intellectual virtues are means to our epistemic ends

But despite the diversity of these approaches to ‘virtue epistemology’, there is one point of agreement—namely, that epistemic virtues, whatever they may be, are defined either teleologically or instrumentally (or both) in terms of our epistemic ends. Accordingly, a character trait of an agent is an epistemic virtue only if, by the operation of that trait, one is either ‘aiming at’ some epistemic end or one is actually likely to obtain it (or both).

W. D. Riggs, “Understanding ‘Virtue’ and the Virtue of Understanding” in DePaul & Zagzebski, *Virtue Epistemology* (2003), 204-5

T3: The concept of intellectual virtue is inspired by Aristotle

Aristotle's list of virtues included excellences of the speculative intellect, as well as social graces such as wit and conversational ability, practical abilities such as the proper management of money, and aesthetic qualities such as those exhibited by the “great-souled” man.

L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, 1996, 84.

T4: The scale of virtues in Neoplatonism

Plotinus	Porphyry	Iamblichus	Marinus	Damascius
Political		Natural		
		Ethical		
		Political		
Purificatory	Purificatory			
	Contemplative			
	Paradigmatic	Paradigmatic	Theurgic	Theurgic
		Theurgic	?Unnamed	

See *Enneads* I, 2 [19]; *Sententiae* 32; *Life of Proclus* 2; Damascius' *In Phaedonem* I.138-144. For Iamblichus, cf. J. Finamore, “Iamblichus on the Grades of Virtue”, in Afonasin, Dillon & Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Foundations of Late Platonism*, 2012.

=> Every level up to the paradigmatic contains its own version of the four cardinal virtues.

=> No extensive related discussion in Proclus, except :

- *In Remp.* I.206-235, which only deals with the four cardinal virtues.
- *In Tim.* II.111.4-13, which distinguishes levels of divine and cosmic virtues.
 (but see D. Baltzly, “The virtues and 'Becoming like God': Alcinous to Proclus”, *OSAP* 26 (2004))

=> Yet, are virtue epistemologists really looking for *these* kinds of virtues?

T5: The qualities of the ideal learner according to Proclus

Turning now to examine the details of the text, we may say that it gives us **a picture both of what goes to make a worthy auditor of such a lesson, and what makes a competent instructor.** For the auditor must be of outstanding **natural ability**, that he may be a philosopher by nature and enthusiastic for immaterial being, always pursuing and as suming something else beyond what is visible to the senses and not resting content with what presents itself [...]. Then he should have a wide range of **experience**, and by this I don't mean of human affairs (for these are of small importance and quite irrelevant to divinised life), but rather of logical and physical and mathematical subjects. [...] Our candidate, then, as we have said, must possess such natural ability as this. Next, as has been said, he must possess experience of many and various disciplines, by means of which he may be raised to an understanding of things intelligible. And, thirdly, he must have such **intense enthusiasm** towards this study that, when his instructor gives only a hint, he may be capable of following such hints by virtue of an enthusiasm which concentrates his attention. **There are three things, then, which he says are required by anyone embarking on the study of the intelligible nature — natural ability, experience, and enthusiasm.** Natural ability will naturally endow him with faith in the divine, experience will enable him to hold fast to the truth of paradoxical doctrines, and his enthusiasm will stir up in him a love of this study [...]. And, if you like, through experience he will acquire receptivity in the cognitive part of his soul, while through enthusiasm he will gain an intensification of the vital part, directed towards the intelligibles, and through natural excellence the preexisting basis for both these, since right from birth all these qualities have been granted to him.¹ (transl. Morrow & Dillon)

T6: My reconstruction of the components of these qualities

Good nature	Preparation/Experience	Motivation
Health & physical condition	Music & gymnastics = τροφή	Eagerness (προθυμία)
Good character, e.g. φρόνημα	Poetry, myths, morals = παιδεία	Tautness (συντονία/τάσις)
Sharpness (ἀγχινοία)	Good opinions	Wonder (θαῦμα) => relation
Age	Logical & scientific training	Awe (ἔκπληξις) => relation

(mostly from *In Parm.*, *In Tim.*, *In Alc.*, *In Eucl.*, *In Remp.* and *TP I*)

=> all of these contribute to recollection, which includes not only learning with a teaching, but also self-driven discovery (cf. *In Alc.* 176.19-25; 225.11-14; *In Remp.* II.286.3-13; *TP I.1*, p. 8.5-15).

¹ Αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν λέξιν ἐπισκοπούμενοι φαμεν ὅτι δι' αὐτῆς ἐνδείκνυται, τίς μὲν ἔστιν ἀκροατῆς ἀξιόχρεως τῆς τούτων ἀκροάσεως, τίς δὲ ὁ περὶ τούτων διδάσκειν ἐπιτήδειος· δεῖ γὰρ διὴ τὸν μὲν ἀκροατὴν εὐφυΐα διαφέρειν, ἵνα φύσει φιλόσοφος ᾖ, καὶ περὶ τὴν ἀσώματον οὐσίαν ἐπιτηθέμενος, καὶ πρὸ τῶν ὁρωμένων αἰεὶ τι ἄλλο μεταθέων καὶ ἀναλογιζόμενος, καὶ μὴ ἀρκοῦμενος τοῖς παροῦσι [...] ἔπειτα πολλῶν αὐτὸν ἔμπειρον εἶναι, καὶ οὐ δήπου πραγμάτων ἀνθρωπικῶν (σμικρὰ γὰρ ταῦτα καὶ οὐδὲν προσήκοντα πρὸς τὴν ἔνθεον ζωὴν), ἀλλὰ λογικῶν καὶ φυσικῶν καὶ μαθηματικῶν θεωρημάτων. [...] Τούτῳ δ' οὖν παρεῖναι χρὴ τὴν τοιαύτην, ὡς εἶπομεν, εὐφυΐαν· ἔπειτα ἔμπειρίαν πολλῶν, ὡς εἴρηται, καὶ παντοδαπῶν θεωρημάτων, δι' ὧν ἀναχθήσεται πρὸς τὴν ἐκείνων κατανόησιν· καὶ τρίτον, προθυμίαν καὶ τάσιν περὶ τὴν θεωρίαν οὕτως ὥστε, καὶ ἐνδεικνυμένου μόνον τοῦ ἡγουμένου, δύνασθαι παρέπεσθαι ταῖς ἐνδείξεσι διὰ τὴν προθυμίαν ἐπιτείνουσας τὴν προσοχὴν. Τρία δ' οὖν ἔστιν ἃ διήρησι χρῆναι τῷ θεωρήσαντι ταύτην τὴν φύσιν, εὐφυΐα, ἔμπειρία, προθυμία. Καὶ διὰ μὲν τὴν εὐφυΐαν ἔσται τὴν περὶ τὸ θεῖον πίστιν αὐτοφωῶς προβεβλημένος, διὰ δὲ τὴν ἔμπειρίαν ἔξει τῶν παραδόξων θεωρημάτων ἀσφαλῆ τὴν ἀλήθειαν, διὰ δὲ τὴν προθυμίαν ἀνακινήσει τὸ ἐρωτικὸν ἄντου τὸ περὶ τὴν θεωρίαν [...] Εἰ δὲ βούλει, διὰ μὲν τὴν ἔμπειρίαν ἔξει τοῦ γνωστικοῦ τῆς νυχῆς ἐπιτηδειότητα, διὰ δὲ τὴν προθυμίαν τὴν τοῦ ζωτικοῦ τάσιν εἰς ἐκεῖνα φέρουσας, διὰ δὲ τὴν εὐφυΐαν τὴν ἀμφοτέρων προϋπάρχουσαν προκατασκευὴν ἐκ τῆς πρώτης γενέσεως καὶ τῶν ὄλων εἰς αὐτὸν ἐνδεδομένον. (*In Parm.* IV.926.4-927.35)