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The Epistemological and the Moral/Political in Epistemic Responsibility: Beginnings and Reworkings in Lorraine Code's Work

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It is no exaggeration to say that a survey of Lorraine Code's philosophical works over the past thirty years can help to trace the development of feminist epistemology: from Code's initial and important criticisms of traditional approaches to knowledge in *Epistemic Responsibility* (1987)—which did not name her approach as "feminist"—to the explicit incorporation and application of feminist insights to knowledge claims in *What Can She Know?* (1991), to examining the significance of gendered locations in *Rhetorical Spaces* (1995), to the expansion of feminist epistemology to what it is to know well in a global context of intersecting factors of power, oppression, and threats to the environment in *Ecological Thinking* (2006). Each new publication fits into a trajectory of works that are groundbreaking and significant to the development and expansion of feminist epistemology. That trajectory will, no doubt, continue with the book she is currently working on and with those that are yet to be published.

It is perhaps a hallmark of feminist epistemology that it rejects the idea that rigid boundaries can or should be drawn between epistemology and moral and political philosophy. This feature is already evident in Code's first book where the connection between the epistemological and the moral is captured in the title itself—epistemic *responsibility* or what it is to *know well*. Two things are striking about Code's approach in her first book; the first weaves its way through and is developed in new ways throughout her work, and the second is dropped, or at least shifts, in her subsequent work. First, the idea of the knower as embedded in creative and interactive knowledge-seeking activities in communities plays a key role in *Epistemic Responsibility* and is present throughout Code's work. Yet, the idea that knowledge seekers are differently situated in terms of relations of power in those very communities will not come to the forefront of Code's work until *What Can She Know?* Second, *Epistemic Responsibility* is a much more sustained and explicit examination of moral theory and, in particular, of virtue ethics than Code's later work. Though I examine the second more extensively than the first in this paper, I need to discuss the first because the two points are connected and reveal something quite important in the evolution of *feminist* epistemology.

My plan for this paper is to start with Code's first book to record the key objections she raises against traditional and mainstream epistemological accounts. They are the sort of objections that will thread their way through all her work and be important to the development of feminist epistemology. I will then introduce,

summarize, and discuss the work Code does on virtue ethics in *Epistemic Responsibility* and speculate on why she abandons this path in the rest of her work. Code uses virtue ethics and, specifically, virtues of the intellect, to frame an account of moral responsibility that I find interesting, promising, and still relevant to the contemporary revival of virtue ethics and to feminist epistemology more generally.

Epistemic Responsibility: The Knower and the Known

Code opens *Epistemic Responsibility* with the following: "This book has grown out of a sense that something important is missing from philosophical discussions of 'the problem of knowledge.' Epistemologists in their analysis of the meaning and justification of knowledge claims rarely ask, 'But whose claims? When? And in what circumstances?'" (1987, ix). Answers to these kinds of questions about who and where weave their way through all of Code's work. But Code answers these questions in a humbler and perhaps narrower way in *Epistemic Responsibility*.

As in her other work, *Epistemic Responsibility* displays Code's skill of drawing from some of the central figures in the history of Western philosophy in order to credit what they contribute at the same time as she identifies where she departs from them. *Epistemic Responsibility* has a host of central figures that include Aristotle, Plato, William James, Kant, Rorty, Putnam, Foucault, and Wittgenstein, to name a few. Some of these figures will drop out in her later work, most notably Aristotle and the framework of virtue ethics. But the one figure who makes repeated appearances in Code's work is Kant. Starting in *Epistemic Responsibility* and then again in *What Can She Know?* and in *Rhetorical Spaces,* Code uses Kant as a pivotal figure because he initiated a major shift in epistemology from a focus on the observed, the object in the world, to the observer, the subject who comes to the world with concepts or capacities that are used to organize all cognition. The world, therefore, does not come with a ready-made structure that can be cognized by using a particular methodology. Moreover, we do not come into the world as blank slates ready to receive and discover the world that presents itself to us. Rather, we come with concepts, cognitive capacities, through which we perceive the world and give it a structure. In fact, Code's outline and use of Kant when I first read *What Can She Know?* decades ago had me understand the Kantian epistemological project in a way that I hadn't before.[1] I was reminded of this again when I read *Epistemic Responsibility* for the first time a year ago.

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[1] In addition to learning about Kant from Code, I also benefitted from delving into what I take to be an accessible and proper reading of Kant's important contribution to epistemology in Andrew Brook's *Kant and the Mind* (1994).

Epistemic Responsibility gave me additional insight not only into Kant but into Code on Kant and into Code on Code as it will play out in her later work. Code writes:

> For Kant, one of the fundamental questions of philosophy is, 'What can I know?' In my view, insight into the nature of the knower is required to answer this question satisfactorily. If the question is read with the emphasis upon the first verb—'What *can* I know?'—then clearly part of the answer, and an important part, must be in terms of the nature of cognitive capacity. If it is read with the emphasis upon the pronoun—'What can *I* know?'—then who I am, the circumstances of my epistemic life, my cognitive 'location' will rightly figure in the reply. Emphasis upon the *I*, upon the knower, permits the recognition that what holds knowledge together is a real human being. . . . Only if the emphasis is entirely upon the last verb—'What can I *know*?'—is there any justification for neglecting the other terms; but I can see no reason for privileging the latter reading. (127)

The emphasis on *can* in "What *can* I know" reveals Kant's assumption that all knowers come into the world with the same capacities and can come to know the same things about the world. However, as Code points out, the "standard knower" in Kantian epistemology is of an "intelligent, forty-year-old Konigsberg bachelor as constitutive of the norm for human knowledge in general" (110). Code herself will only grasp the full significance of the emphasis on *I* in "What can *I* know" a few years later when she writes *What Can She Know?* The use of "she" will indicate that Code is making the explicit turn to seeing knowers as not only different one from another, but as affected by where they are located in a nexus of relations of power. This will be an important move in developing an account of feminist epistemology that takes background conditions of oppression as affecting *who* is believed and *who* is taken to know.

In *Epistemic Responsibility*, Code will argue, against Kant, that her account provides "no suggestion that human nature is fixed so that each human being will develop in precisely the same way, whatever the environmental conditions; rather, there is a structuring of the world and, reciprocally, of knowers. The manner of this structuring is dependent upon a knower's interaction with the world and will vary accordingly" (100). Code's account of the reciprocal relation between the world and what knowers bring to the world that in turn shapes their understanding of the world and of themselves allows her to make the following claim in *Epistemic Responsibility*: "My central contention is that the knower, or would-be knower, bears as much of the onus of credibility as does the known" (x).

The notion of credibility already goes well beyond Kant in connecting epistemological and moral/political projects. The theme of credibility weaves its way through all of Code's work. Yet she will take her work on credibility in a different direction in *What Can She Know?*, a direction that unpacks how those who are members of oppressed groups are taken to *lack* credibility. This is not, at least not explicitly, what she does in *Epistemic Responsibility* where she focuses instead on "moral values and questions of 'character' [as] integral aspects of epistemic evaluation" (3). In her first book, it is the people, and not the background conditions, that need to be critically examined for what *they* can know and for what sort of character they ought to develop to know well.

Epistemic Responsibility: Knowledge and Virtue

In her first book, Code will answer questions about the "epistemic evaluation" of character by using the framework of virtue ethics and, in particular, that of virtues of the intellect. The alignment between intellect and virtue, knowledge and ethics, is more easily made in Greek philosophy than in contemporary epistemology as is evident in Plato's often quoted phrase, "Knowledge becomes evil if the aim be not virtuous." Code agrees with this linking of intellect and virtue when she explains that "knowing well, being epistemically responsible, have implications for people's individual, social, and political lives" (10). The path to explaining credibility in *Epistemic Responsibility*, therefore, leads Code to attend to the character who can learn to know well by cultivating and habituating virtues that allow them to interact with others in the world in morally responsible ways. Because virtue ethics is agent-centered, rather than action-centered, virtue ethicists answer questions about morally right action by paying attention to the shaping of dispositions, habits, and feelings that allow agents to know the what, when, how, where, and with whom of right action. An agent-centered approach pays attention to how a person should *be* in order to be counted on to correctly assess what the right action will be. As Aristotle puts it, being virtuous involves knowing how to act "to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right aim, and in the right way" (*EN* 1109a27–29). What Code adds to the Aristotelian account is a more explicit and richer *social* agent, a relational self who knows and can come to know responsibly and well in interactions with others in communities. Yet, the path to using the virtues of the intellect to know how to become virtuous through habit, disposition, and action with others in communities is dropped in Code's later work. A quick look at the indices for her three other books reveals at most one entry per book for "virtue ethics."

Yet I find Code's "conception of virtue . . . whose orientation is broadly Aristotelian" to be illuminating for at least two reasons. First, her focus on virtues of the intellect allows her to defend a position on the question of relativism, a

question, I venture to say, that has been posed repeatedly in connection with her work. The virtue ethics account that Code takes in *Epistemic Responsibility* cashes out in a form of realism (*knowing* how to live well in a community of knowers) that shifts in Code's subsequent work. Second, while Code steers away from this path of virtue ethics after *Epistemic Responsibility* (and there are reasons for this), there has been quite a resurgence in this area of moral theory in the past decade as demonstrated, for example, by Lisa Tessman's book, *Burdened Virtues*: *Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*. However, as I will go on to show in the section that follows, Tessman is a moral philosopher whose work does not focus on virtues of the intellect in a way that can highlight the significance of the community-oriented, relational aspects of Code's account of virtue ethics. On this front, I will argue, Code's account in *Epistemic Responsibility* is better positioned to deal with deficiencies in both Aristotelian and contemporary feminist appropriations and applications of virtue ethics. I will deal with the two points in reverse order, discussing the second now and turning to explore the first point on the issue of relativism in the final section.

Epistemic Responsibility: Virtue Ethics and the Beginnings of Relational Theory

The virtue ethics framework that Code adopts in *Epistemic Responsibility* ties knowing well to being virtuous—with others and in a community of knowers. I now know better what was behind Code's question about my paper on "Relational Ethics and Memory" at the 2015 Canadian Philosophical Association/North American Society for Social Philosophy panel on Sue Campbell's book, *Our Faithfulness to the Past* (2014).[2] Code responded to my account of the difference between individualist ethics and relational ethics by asking whether it should be said that all ethics has to be relational. I confess I was unsure how to answer that question at that time—especially because I have worked on relational theory and its challenges to the individualism in mainstream liberal theory for decades. But I found myself in an "aha" moment of understanding what was behind her question when I got to Chapter 7 of *Epistemic Responsibility*, where Code explains that all moral theory, with the exception of Hobbes, starts with the assumption that human beings are social beings—that assumption will be what motivates moral and political theorists to figure out how best to interact with others and to structure societies. Code writes, "Human beings, who are the agents in moral theory and the knowledge seekers in theory of knowledge, are curiously different creatures in each domain of

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[2] Sue Campbell's work has been hugely important to projects of developing and applying relational theory more generally and to my own work in this area (Koggel 2014).

enquiry. Moral theory, with the possible exception of Hobbesian-type approaches, starts from the assumption that human beings are social beings" (166).

Code arrives at the idea that all ethics has to be relational by way of contrasting how moral theory has done better on issues of recognizing the fundamental significance of relationships and communities to the shaping of a self than has traditional epistemology. Already in her first book, Code is rejecting the central feature of mainstream epistemology that takes knowledge seeking and acquisition to be best achieved by solitary knowers who can abstract themselves from the distractions of "people's individual, social, and political lives" (10). This move away from solitary knowers will be crucial to feminist epistemology and to social epistemology more generally. On the side of moral and political philosophy, however, and after Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, the idea of solitary moral agents who can abstract themselves from contexts, conditions, and circumstances is still alive and continues to call for challenge and criticism by anti-oppression theorists.

I can now better answer Code's challenging assertion that moral theory just is fundamentally relational. Code focused on the individualism that she found in traditional epistemology, and that drew her to the relational aspects of virtue ethics. This then gave her a vantage point from which to challenge the fundamental tenets of traditional epistemology. I take another route in that I challenge the individualism at the heart of traditional and mainstream Western liberal theory. In this tradition, theorists tend to argue that the moral agent is best viewed as solitary and isolated in the *reasoning* required of them to determine right action—they must abstract themselves from their circumstances and conditions so as to achieve an objective and impartial stance from which to determine morally right action. These are not the community oriented knowledge seekers interacting with and being affected by others in contexts that call on them to know well and responsibly so as to become virtuous agents. They are certainly not the knowledge seekers described by Kant in his assumptions about the interchangeability of knowers who come into the world equipped with cognitive capacities that have them structure experience and acquire knowledge of the stuff that makes up the world. Like solitary moral agents, Kant's knowers also reveal partial and particular perspectives. And they are certainly not the agents that have been central to my own work, in which agents are affected by and shaped in and through networks of relationships in communities.

Code's virtue ethics approach in *Epistemic Responsibility* provides the foundation for an account of moral activity and reasoning that is essentially social. It is what will center the epistemology of knowing well on social and communal activities of human beings interacting, learning, trusting, and acquiring knowledge of the world and of each other in order to survive and flourish as human beings: "It is undeniable that human flourishing is deeply dependent on knowing well" (9). Take away the language of "flourishing" and these will continue to be themes pursued in

Code's work and in feminist epistemology more generally. Yet feminists whose work is less centered in epistemology than in moral and political theory are retrieving the language of flourishing and the framework of virtue ethics and making it directly applicable to contexts of oppression and suffering. Tessman provides one such account that leaves Aristotle far behind in her application of a virtue ethics framework to the "context of oppression and of the liberatory struggles that take place against oppression" (2005, 3). Tessman focuses on the limits to and burdens on moral goodness under adverse conditions of oppression, "where the external or background conditions necessary for flourishing will tend to be lacking or diminished" (159). As with Code in *Epistemic Responsibility*, Tessman is drawn to virtue ethics, a "tradition of ethical theory that is agent-centered and that foregrounds questions of character" (3). Unlike Code, however, Tessman does not foreground how moral interactions and reasoning about how best to live well with others take place in communities of knowers, knowers who ought to be held accountable for knowing well and responsibly. Yet in at least some places in *Burdened Virtues*, Tessman recognizes the significance of communities and of the relational self.

Against Aristotle, Tessman argues that moral agents can only flourish in *inclusive* communities in which members are committed to addressing the suffering of others and ensuring the well-being of all members: "One must stipulate that the pursuit of one's own flourishing cannot qualify as morally praiseworthy (and what one attains cannot count as flourishing) unless one is engaged, as part of that pursuit, in promoting the flourishing of an inclusive social collectivity" (76). For Tessman, however, the inclusivity requirement leaves little room for optimism that agents can be virtuous let alone flourish: "Moral goodness requires a pursuit of not just my own well-being, and not just the well-being of those whose well-being I depend on, but also the well-being of those whose very lack of well-being may have been a condition of my privileges" (76). In other words, Tessman turns the focus back to what individual agents can and should do in the face of enormous suffering and thereby reaches the conclusion that "none of us will ever live well in any foreseeable future, for it is inconceivable that across the globe unjust suffering will be eradicated" (87).

What I have said about Tessman's book, at an APA "Author Meets Critics" session and in the paper that was published as a cluster on her book in *Hypatia* (2008b), is that Tessman had a lot to say about burdened virtues but did not say enough about how virtues of the intellect could help to explain the responsibilities that moral agents have to understand *how* who we are and what we do in our interactions with others contributes to the world of enormous suffering. Tessman asks brutally blunt questions about why so many of us "stand by while atrocities happen across the globe" (82). She rightly draws attention to the extremes of total

indifference and too much sensitivity to others' suffering that make it impossible to discuss her burdened "virtue of sensitivity to others' suffering" in terms of finding a mean between these extremes. Both extremes are damaging to the self. Total indifference is reflected in the passivity and complacency that goes along with benefiting from privilege, or focusing exclusively on one's own goals, or believing that anyone can rise above their circumstances on their own with enough effort. While it is morally wrong to be indifferent to the suffering of others, too much sensitivity comes with anguish and pain in the face of never being able to eradicate suffering or of needing to make choices about whose suffering to address and thereby still leaving a vast amount of suffering unanswered. Tessman is right to give a place to this as a *burdened* virtue in our context of great injustices and enormous suffering. She is also right to argue that her inclusivity requirement for human flourishing would have it that the virtue of sensitivity to others just will be burdened well into the foreseeable future.

But there may be a way out, one suggested by Code's epistemological account of virtues of the intellect that can only be understood and given substance in the context of communities of knowers. If "one's well-being is really tied up with the well-being of all others" (Tessman 2005, 87), then this requires the kind of critical reflection (virtues of the intellect) that recognizes and rejects a norm of human flourishing that allows so many people to remain complacent in the face of great injustice and enormous suffering—even in interactions with those in our communities. This is an important point because it expands the discussion beyond the burdens connected with individuals needing to choose whose suffering to address to discussions of the burden of coming to know *how* who we are and *what* we do contributes to and connects with enormous suffering to different others, whole communities, and the world itself. It would broaden the discussion of suffering, for example, to that created by environmental or natural disasters brought on by climate change or the suffering connected with the decimation of cultures, livelihoods, communities, and the environment brought on by multinational corporations who exploit resources and people. And it would broaden the discussion of burden to a demand to know responsibly and well how what we perceive and pursue as the good life (for ourselves) connects with the suffering and fate of others in a postcolonial, interdependent, and globalized world.

These are all topics that Code pursues in her later work and in some depth in *Ecological Thinking*. Unlike *Epistemic Responsibility*, however, *Ecological Thinking* explores these themes not through virtue ethics but in and through a thoroughly relational account developed for a context of interconnected networks of

relationships that stretch across the globe.[3] And so we return to the significance of a responsibility to know well and to the interconnectedness of the epistemological and the moral/political. Ultimately, I found Code's account of virtues of the intellect surprisingly contemporary in its articulation of a new epistemology that takes seriously the responsibility that knowers have to know well and responsibly.

Feminist epistemologists may still find insights in a virtue-ethics approach in which epistemic aims are tied to moral and political ones. The upshot is that these aims need to be in sync rather than pitted against each other. It may mean that a full understanding of our commitments to fairness, equality, and justice, for example, requires us to situate these commitments in the world in which we live, a world that manifests relationships of oppression, discrimination, and disadvantage. It will mean that we need to be vigilant in our efforts to understand and know these conditions and how they affect particular others who are members of oppressed groups. It will mean an attitude of humility and openness in the face of difference. It will mean that we use that knowledge and understanding to develop virtues that manifest a conscious awareness of our own role in assuming norms, biases, and stereotypes that are often implicit in our interactions with others and that shape the feelings we have toward others and the actions we take. These ideas and arguments are taken up in some of the important literature on implicit bias (e.g., Shotwell 2011) that calls on us to be conscious of the ways in which our stated moral commitments to treating others with respect are often out of sync with epistemic biases that thwart and undermine those very commitments. Virtue ethics may still have a role to play in thinking through what it means to shape a character that can be called on to do the right thing through habituating one's actions and emotions so as to know well and responsibly. As Code points out in *Epistemic Responsibility*, these knowledge seeking activities can only happen in communities in which there is a commitment to a responsible knowing so as to live well with others.

Epistemic Responsibility: Virtues of the Intellect and Relativism
The call to know *well* and *responsibly* means that there are right and wrong ways to acquire knowledge and interact with others in morally responsible ways. Code is clearer in this early work than she is in later work that hers is a realist and not relativist account. Here is how these two things, realism and virtues of the intellect, come together for Code in *Epistemic Responsibility*. In place of the solitary, individualistic, and interchangeable knowers that populate traditional epistemology, either by way of a passive receiving and recording of what objects in the world

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[3] I explore these themes in more detail in my paper, "Ecological Thinking and Epistemic Location: The Local and the Global," published as a cluster in *Hypatia* (Koggel 2008a).

reveal or by way of an active imposition of a structure on the world, Code takes knowers to be socially and cognitively interdependent creatures and knowledge-seeking to be a moral activity done together with others in a community of knowers. The fundamental sociality of knowledge seekers and the communities in which they seek to know, what she refers to as "human cognitive interdependence" (1987, 60), will constrain what individual knowers can be said to know.

It turns out, then, that the fundamental sociality of humans—as captured in a philosophical thread stretching from Aristotle to Hume to communitarians to feminist relational theorists —is all important for explaining both knowledge and virtue. As Code puts it, "Such relationships generate a complex set of responsibilities that can be fulfilled only by cultivating an appropriate sensitivity to the other person's situation" (11). This early articulation of a relational approach is a defence of the fundamental and inescapable significance of relationships to an account of the self, to the shaping of moral agents, and to the pursuit of knowledge. These are hints of relational theory that will emerge more fully in Code's later work. They are insights that have been crucial to developing my own work in moral and political theory (Koggel 1998, 2002, 2012). While I have never situated my work in the tradition of virtue ethics, I now understand better how my work has affinities with that tradition. Code's first book has made me ask myself what those affinities are and to what extent virtue ethics still has something to offer.[4]

I want to end by exploring Code's explicit defence of realism over relativism in *Epistemic Responsibility* and how this emerges from her account of the significance of acquiring and habituating virtues of the intellect. Code writes:

> Intellectual virtue is, above all, a matter of orientation toward the world, toward one's knowledge-seeking self, and toward other such selves as part of the world. Central to it is a sort of openness to how things are: a respect for the normative force of 'realism'. This attitude involves a willingness to let things speak for themselves, a kind of humility toward the experienced world that curbs any excessive desire to impose one's cognitive structuring upon it. Intellectual honesty consists in a finely tuned balancing of these two factors, in cultivating an appropriate interplay between self and world. (1987, 20)

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[4] I have learned a great deal about the possibilities for connecting relational theory and virtue ethics not only from *Epistemic Responsibility* but also from supervising Andrew Hoult's MA thesis (2015), in which he argues that virtue ethics can benefit from a thoroughgoing relational approach that situates moral agents in broad networks of relationships in which people are affected by structures and conditions oppression manifested in the global context.

The question, and an issue for virtue ethicists more generally, is how to explain what is required to cultivate an intellectually virtuous character. Answering this kind of question must turn the attention to the moral agent, issues of character, and evaluations of whether particular agents can be said to be epistemically responsible for what they know. For Code, attempting to answer these kinds of questions will reveal tensions that may explain why she abandons a virtue ethics approach in her subsequent work.

In *Epistemic Responsibility*, Code puts the onus on evaluating "character" and on those who claim to know needing to "produce good reasons for what they claim to know or understand" (12). But it will become more and more difficult to have a virtue ethics account bear the burden of accounting for how those who have power and privilege are likely to be *taken* to have good reasons and to thereby be understood as knowing well and responsibly. While the idea of cognitive activity as a communal process places limits, at least somewhat, on what will count as good reasons, without a proper account of power and the politics of power in all its forms, it still allows those who shape the norms, the rules, and the methodology, whether in domains of science or ethics/politics, to be taken as virtuous knowers.

In *Epistemic Responsibility*, Code takes the Kantian question of "What can I know" to wrongly put the emphasis on the *can* instead of the *I*. What this means will be developed in steps and in interesting ways throughout Code's work, from the title itself of *What Can She Know?*, to the broader notion of "gendered locations," to the more global account of "ecological thinking." But highlighting the significance of location to an account of *who* knows or *who* gets to know raises the spectre of relativism more easily and especially for philosophers who cannot tolerate such a possibility—thus the reaction of fear and accusation by the panelists and audience members at a 1993 CPA book panel on *What Can She Know?* that Code was embracing relativism. I understand all of this better now in light of what Code tried to do in *Epistemic Responsibility* in defending a version of realism that, in the end, focused too exclusively on knowers, no matter what their location or circumstances, who need to situate themselves with respect to approaching the world with humility in order to interpret it responsibly and well. Code's version of realism in her first book made use of the idea, often dismissed or rejected in mainstream liberal moral and political theory, that virtue ethics is not an "anything goes" kind of moral theory that embraces relativism. This is the natural outcome of an account that aims to have us know well and responsibly—there are right and wrong ways to be and do so as to live well with others.

Code's use of virtue ethics in *Epistemic Responsibility* will accept Aristotle's contextually sensitive account of agents as needing to develop dispositions, character, and habits that have them *know* how to act at the right time, in the right way, and with the right aim. While often not thought of this way, virtue ethics is on

the side of realism and not relativism. Yet Code's account is also a radical departure from Aristotle in its call for humility and openness in a community of knowers. It will be the case, however, that dispositions of humility and openness may not be enough to ensure that what is taken to be virtuous is not relative to particular people, in particular contexts, at particular times, and with the wrong aims of assuming norms and biases that allow one to hold on to and benefit from positions of power. And so the concepts of the "social imaginary" and of "ecological thinking" will come to better capture and explain responsible knowing as collective and ongoing projects of coming to know well across differences and contexts.

Code will abandon virtue ethics and take the explicit turn to critically analyzing power in networks that stretch across the globe and affect how knowledge is produced so as to sustain rather than challenge background conditions of oppression. And so Code will worry less about whether she can be called a relativist and turn to the task of figuring out how to know well and responsibly. She will distance herself from this debate by challenging those who build epistemological approaches and moral and political theories on versions of realism or relativism against which all comers are judged and condemned: "An acknowledgment of the relativistic implications of feminist epistemology would make space for reassessing the stark conceptions of relativism that have prompted critics to target a caricatured, hyperbolic relativism that no self-respecting relativist would endorse" (2010, 537). "Hyberbolic relativism" appears in accounts by theorists who think virtue ethics is a form of relativism because it cannot give us absolute answers to questions of morally right action, as well as in accounts by those who charge feminist epistemologists with being relativists because they do not ground what we can know in a methodology that abstracts people from real-world conditions and contexts. As Code puts it in a brilliant paper that explores answers to the question posed in its title, "Must a Feminist Be a Relativist After All?": "Warning against a slide into relativism became a strategy for silencing any suggestion that situations, subjectivities, or interests figure integrally in the making, and *should* figure in the adjudication of knowledge claims" (538).

Conclusion

If I have read too much into what Code attempted to do with virtue ethics in *Epistemic Responsibility* or speculated too freely on why virtue ethics was abandoned in her work after this first book, it is with the intention of tracing themes that continue to preoccupy those working on the intersections between epistemology and moral/political theory. Exploring themes that retrieve philosophical traditions that embrace relational ways of knowing and being, and contrasting these with traditions that start and end with what individuals can know about the world and morally right action apart from their circumstances, conditions,

and situatedness in relations of power, has given me important insights. It has helped me understand why Code's beginnings in virtue ethics made the idea that all ethics is relational obvious to her in a way that my beginnings in traditional liberal theory have not made it obvious to me. It has helped me understand that it would take a long time to develop virtue ethics in ways that could speak to the exclusionary form of it in Aristotle and the all-too-frequent alignment of virtue ethics with moral rather than political theory. Starting with an account of knowers as engaging and interacting with others in networks of relationships that manifest conditions and structures of oppression and that stretch across the globe means that virtue ethics must now be made relevant to moral *and* political theory.

In this paper, I merely scratch the surface in exploring why I think there is still some promise in an epistemology that focuses on virtues of the intellect to connect projects in theory of knowledge with those in moral and political philosophy. My reflections on what virtue ethics can offer in our world of enormous suffering and oppression have the benefit of being able to engage with the work of feminist virtue ethicists and of relational theory more generally. I venture to say that reflecting on Code's use of virtue ethics in *Epistemic Responsibility* has also allowed me to engage with the work of feminist epistemologists in new ways. Code's later work would take different paths, ones less fraught with the pitfalls of evaluating "the characters of would-be knowers" (1987, 3). Yet the basic idea of "cognitive activity as a communal process" (1987, 64) remains and continues to be a rich foundation for a wide variety of feminist epistemologists. On the issue of relativism, it will still be the case that "as it is known, reality is knower-relative, then; but a relativism of this nature would by no means endorse just any mode of interpretation" (1987, 135).

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the discipline of philosophy that is often so rigidly bounded and policed. I have learned and continue to learn a tremendous amount through my long friendship with Lorraine and in my repeated engagements with her work—through the books she continues to publish and now with my own graduate students who learn from and use her work. Finally, it was pure genius as well for Kate Norlock to suggest that the participants at that CSWIP panel rewrite their papers and to have them included with Anna's introduction and Lorraine's response for publication in an issue of *Feminist Philosophical Quarterly*. Thank you, Kate, and thank you, Anna, Susan, Alexis, Cathy, and Lorraine for following through and having these papers appear in print in celebration of the 30-year anniversary of *Epistemic Responsibility*.

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