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THE ROUTE OF GOODNESS.
EPISTEMIC EMOTIONS, SELF-TRANSFORMATION, AND PERFECTION

It is also correctly said that the end is certain actions or activities; for it is in such a manner that the goods regarding the soul come to be, and not from external goods. The statement that the happy human being lives well and acts well, too, is in harmony with the definition of happiness; for we have almost said that happiness is living well or acting well.

Aristotle, NE 1.8, 1098b18-22[1]

1. Introduction

According to Kraut [2007, 15], for the Ancient Greek philosophers there was one legitimate method to attain virtue – the route of goodness – and it should be identified with what we call "perfectionism" nowadays in the contemporary debate on virtue theory. For "perfectionism", human flourishing is identified with virtuous activity, and virtue as the excellence of the soul is achieved through a process of self-transformation. Perfectionism has a very noble breed: Aristotle is considered its founder, and some important perfectionist models about the development of human nature are spread throughout the history

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[1] I adopt here Baracchi's translation in Baracchi [2008, 80]. For a slightly different translation, cf. Aristotle 2014, 12.

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of the Western Philosophy, in very different accounts like the ones of Aquinas, Spinoza, and Hegel.

The aim of this essay is to detect the role of epistemic emotions in the development of rationality as human perfection. I will take the development of excellence as a process of self-transformation, broadening the notion of rationality to include affective powers, and discussing the eudaimonic value of wisdom. In doing so, I will refer to the account of epistemic emotions as building blocks of intellectual virtues [Candiotto 2017], arguing for one of its tenets, the one for which epistemic emotions have the capacity to transform the character of the epistemic agent beneficially.

2. Epistemic emotions

As it has been highlighted by Hookway [2003, 75-76], few theorists argue that appropriate patterns of affective responses may be required for knowing, and the study of their negative effects is extremely common. Nevertheless, we could find important exceptions in the history of philosophy – let me just mention the crucial role played by love in Scheler's account of knowledge, or the entanglement of feelings and cognition in Sartre's notion of consciousness – and a new debate on epistemic emotions has now found a certain grade of interest [Morton 2010; Brady 2013; Candiotto 2017]. The positive value of emotions is studied not only in relation to morality but also to epistemology. By "epistemic emotions", I mean not only those emotions that deal with knowledge, but specifically the ones that drive to knowledge. Thus, emotions are epistemic in the meaning of contribution to the knowledge production; for example, curiosity [Brady 2009]. We could debate if curiosity is properly an emotion, a metacognitive feeling or a pro-attitude. However, without entering the debate about the taxonomy of emotions, what it counts here is that certain affective states seem to be motives for knowledge, and thus, positively contribute to the process that aims to its achievement. Thus, curiosity seems to initiate scientific research, being a crucial component of questioning, and to support the process of inquiry, leading to motivating attention. Of course, what really matters is to understand how epistemic emotions could serve these functions.

I frame my account on epistemic emotions in virtue epistemology. Sosa's manifesto for a reform of the theory of knowledge, which is able to overcome the difficulties posed both by foundationalism and coherentism, vindicates an essential role to the epistemic agent in the process of knowledge building, and specifically to her «stable dispositions for belief acquisition, through their greater contribution toward getting us to the truth» [Sosa 1980, 23]. If we focus on the contemporary literature on virtue responsibilism [Zagzebsky 1986; Baehr 2011, 2016], we find that intellectual virtues such as perseverance, scrutiny or humility, are recognised as required character traits and dispositions of the epistemic agent. Intellectual virtues are understood as essential for the cognitive success, following the assumption that the subject contributes to the process of knowledge achievement. My point is that emotions serve a fundamental role in the constitution of virtues, not only for moral virtues, but also for the intellectual ones, and thus, I argue for their positive role in virtue epistemology. First, I take epistemic emotions and intellectual virtues as two different things, understanding emotions as capacities that should be refined to become virtues. Then, I claim that there is a process that binds epistemic emotions to intellectual virtues and subsequently to affective abilities, for which emotions are integrated within the knowing process. Since intellectual virtues are excellences for knowledge seeking, and epistemic emotions are one of their raw materials, epistemic emotions acquire a positive function in the process. In this essay, I am depicting this process as self-transformation, following the perfectionist view of development of intrinsic capacities.

I depict two functions that seem to be played by emotions [Candiotto 2017]: emotions as motivational component for intellectual virtues, and emotions as powers of transformation of the character. The motivational function of emotions – as motivation for action – is well-known in the psychological literature, and it has also found a good consensus among philosophers, especially for those prone to understand emotions as intentional states. The novelty of my approach is to highlight that certain emotions are motivations for the act of knowing. They aim for the achievement of wisdom, recognised as prudential value for the agent,

because they are one of the components of her intellectual virtues.[2] Thus, epistemic emotions are the motives towards which the agent gives value, i.e., wisdom, recognised as beneficial for her.

The function of emotions as powers of transformation is less discussed in philosophy, but it is possible to find important references in the psychoanalytical literature [Lacewing 2013], positive psychology [Fredrickson 2001] and educational theory and practice [English 2013]. In Candiotto [2017], I suggest understanding this function as the capacity to transform the agent into a responsible epistemic agent. In this case, epistemic emotions are steps for the development of the epistemic character towards excellence. What I am going to do now is to fine-grain this second function and explain the process as the responsible development of excellence. I am going to use the tools that come from perfectionism, moved by the conviction that virtue responsibilism and perfectionism are not only compatible, especially thanks to the common Aristotelian heritage, but also that perfectionism is the best explanation for our commitment to self-transformation. In fact, perfectionism explains why does the responsible epistemic agent strive for self-transformation.

3. Emotions for self-transformation

Challenging the mainstream analytic epistemology, Code [1993] has strongly asked to take subjectivity into account. For the author, analytic philosophers have rightly devoted their efforts to define what makes a proposition true, but by doing so, they thought to have abstracted from the subject, the real agent of the act of knowing, thus, developing a "view from nowhere" [Code 1993, 16]. If the epistemological enterprise must do with the assessment of the necessary and the sufficient conditions for a subject S to know the truth of some proposition P ("S-Knows-that-P"), why should we avoid taking S into account?

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[2] I am using here the notion of "prudential value", instead of the one of "intrinsic value" – for which wisdom is seek for its own sake, following Aristotle's account –, for highlighting that the motivation in place here is the one toward the agent's well-being. The reason lies in the fact that emotions, in evolutionary terms, serve the good of the organism.

The answer that has been given is the one for which we should achieve objective knowledge, and objective knowledge is defined as independent from the context (subjective characteristics included), and thus, it can be universal. Virtue epistemology, on the contrary, and in agreement with ancient epistemology, has recognised that the process of knowing belongs to the epistemic agent and thus, the conditions for the epistemic success should be found in her abilities and dispositions toward knowledge. Therefore, knowledge is the result of the application of certain abilities on the part of the epistemic agent. For virtue responsibilists, those abilities are not faculties already possessed by the epistemic agent, but capacities that should be developed. It is exactly regarding this point that I find a promising bridge with perfectionism. My claim is that the agent undertakes the process of training of abilities as a process of self-transformation, moved by the desire for perfection, which is understood in our case as wisdom – as the development of human essence.

If we agree with Aristotle, and we claim that the fundamental human function consists in *sophia* and *phronesis*, i.e., theoretical and practical rationality, respectively (or, following Ryan 2012, "deep rationality"), it follows that the development of our intrinsic function through the process of knowing is the most desirable good for the agent; this is because human flourishing consists in the development of our essence. I cannot discuss here the huge debate about Aristotle's function argument,[3] or the different arguments that have been used for defending perfectionism from the attack of the critics.[4] My point is to justify the function of epistemic emotions in the development of wisdom, taking perfectionism for granted.

For the "deep rationality theory of wisdom" [Ryan 2012], being wise means to be epistemically, practically and morally rational, and

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[3] The function argument states that human nature is rational, defining rationality as the humans' essential function. The essence is derived through the uniqueness criterion (what differentiates humans from all the other living beings). The fulfilment of this fundamental and distinctive function coincides with the flourishing of human nature, and thus, *eudaimonia* is the cultivation of practical and theoretical rationality. Cf. Aristotle, *NE* 1.7.

[4] Cf. Hurka 1993 for the essence argument, and Korsgaard 2008 for the agency argument.

to be committed to improvement. Following the aim to achieve a comprehensive theory of wisdom, Ryan has argued against the difference between practical and theoretical wisdom and has depicted a hybrid model of "deep rationality" that is able to include both. I cannot discuss here the strengths of this account against the other models available in the literature, but I just want to highlight that this account on rationality seems to be the best for grasping the scope of this essential human function. Then, it posits a fundamental link between rational improvement and wisdom that, in my terms, discloses the path of self-transformation. Firstly, striving for wisdom is a transformative experience from ignorance to knowledge, but it cannot be reduced to it. Especially from a perfectionist point of view, what matters is not just the achievement of epistemic goods, but the process that brings there, the one that will develop human nature as a process of growth and self-improvement.[5] Wisdom does not only entail a narrow meaning of rationality, but a broader set of skills and practices that should be employed by an epistemic responsible agent for being fully engaged in the route of goodness.

The process of self-transformation should be understood as self-improvement because the reshaping of the horizon of meaning is moved by the desire of perfection, which in this case is regarding epistemic excellence. This desire is grounded in what the agent already possesses, the epistemic emotions in our specific case, but that should be developed. The process of development transforms the potencies in excellencies, and thus, in our case, it transforms epistemic emotions in intellectual virtues. Additionally, this desire for self-transformation is grounded in the real possibility of change, assured in our case by regulation of emotions and brain plasticity [Tappolet 2012, 220-221]. The desire for perfection is spread through the process as its condition of existence. Without desire, there is no development, since desire extends the process through time, opening up new horizons of meaning for self-transformation.

Thus, the function that I am considering here is the one of self-transformation as self-improvement. Epistemic emotions are involved in the transformation of the character's epistemic side, since they enable the

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[5] Cf. Cottingham 2013 for the ancient roots of the notion in Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas and Descartes.

development of intellectual virtues. However, we should avoid the risk of considering this process only from its intellectual side. In fact, as Hadot [1995, 102] clearly stated, the ancient spiritual exercises aimed at the transformation of the entire character of someone's life, since they possessed «a concrete attitude, a way of life and seeing the world» [Hadot 1995, 108], and they were moved by an ethical outcome (*eudaimonia*). *Eudaimonia*, as human flourishing and happiness, is the activation of the soul in its fullness (according to excellence). This means to actualise one's potential completely, to be fully what someone is [Baracchi 2008, 79-101]. That is why my account of self-transformation as spiritual exercise acquires its proper meaning within a perfectionist framework.

Therefore, epistemic excellence does not deal with a sharp and clever mind only. Too many cases of evil geniuses have proven the dark side of intelligence, from real life dictators to the super-villains of the pop culture. The refinement of epistemic emotions as intellectual virtues is essential because the virtues of the mind need epistemic emotions, in their entanglement with the desire of perfection, not only as natural tendencies for the good but also because emotions have the capacity to extend the boundaries of the process to real life. This means that the transformation will not affect the intellectual side of the character only, but the whole person involved in the epistemic journey.

Transformation is, in fact, more than cognitive: it is directed to personal development (Candiotto et al., forthcoming) and it is supported by affectivity. Operating on the person's patterns of awareness, their transformative power operates in the same structure of the self and perception of reality. This is the reason for which the practice of philosophy has been defined as a transformation of the way of life [Hadot 1995],[6] and for which I prefer to recognise wisdom as the end of the epistemic journey and not just knowledge. It is wisdom that is the most valuable good, and feelings and emotions are deeper and stronger if they are related to what we care about most [De Monticelli 2015, 151],

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[6] The transformation of the living derives from the transformation of perception. For Hadot, this protocognitive account on transformation derives not only from Plotinus, heir of Plato's account on the conversion of the soul [Hadot 1993], but also from the French phenomenology and existentialism [Hadot 2001]. On *epistrophé* as conversion of the soul, cf. Cusinato 2014.

which is wisdom in the case of epistemic emotions. However, someone is wise if she knows how to live well [Grimm 2015, 142-144], i.e., if this knowledge has become a way of life, fully embodied and embedded in daily practices. In other words, if this knowledge has transformed her character. The specificity of philosophy within the framework of the spiritual exercises is to have recognised that knowledge and truth are what really matter for achieving wisdom, and is thus the outcome of the process of self-transformation for living well. My aim here is to highlight that self-transformation is achievable only if a well-rounded notion of knowledge is at work, the one that is grounded in the affective dimension of the existence.

Thus, I am broadening the notion of rationality – as the essential human function to be developed – for including, following Kraut [2007, 131-148], affective powers as well.[7] In fact, «a flourishing human being is one who possesses, develops, and enjoys the exercise of cognitive, affective, sensory, and social powers (no less than physical powers)» [Kraut 2007, 137]. My aim is moved not only by the recognition of the limits of a narrow conception of rationality,[8] which is supported by empirical evidence in cognitive science as well, but also by the fact that perfectionism is a specific form of eudaimonism.[9] Enjoying the development of our inner capacity is for Kraut a necessary condition for the process, unless not sufficient. In fact, the point is to be engaged in the process of self-transformation as a well-integrated whole. For our topic, this means, that the cultivation of wisdom, as Aristotle insists [NE 10, 1178a19-20], involves the right emotional balance that is achieved through deliberation as the rational choice. Epistemic emotions are those affective powers, which being regulated within the pattern of de-

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[7] I cannot consider social powers here, unless they are crucial for self-transformation. Self-transformation is in fact other-oriented – just think about the function of dialogue for the generation of knowledge in the Socratic tradition – and emotions as well should be understood as inter-subjective properties. Cf. Candiotto 2016, and Candiotto forthcoming, 2018.

[8] A narrow conception of rationality is the one for which «humans are rational because they can form and act on sophisticated mental states, ones with extended contents and complex hierarchical relations» [Hurka 1993, 100].

[9] "The goal is one we can understand in objective terms, by looking at how an individual lives her life" [Besser-Jones 2016, 189].

cisions (and here, the main decision is to strive for wisdom) and being moved by the natural tendency toward the good,[10] initiate the agent to the process of self-transformation for flourishing.

4. Self-transformation and self-mastery

The process of self-transformation deals with the ethics of knowledge, and specifically, with epistemic agency. Epistemic emotions contribute to the constitution of the value of the actions performed by an epistemic character [Stoker 2004]. This ethical outcome underlies the value of emotions, as useful and beneficial, for the well and right development of the epistemic character, and the responsibility towards our emotions, which emerges here as a crucial issue. Regarding this point, I use the notion of "responsibility" towards our emotions and their positive development [Candiotto 2017] for pointing toward the fact that we should take care of the process of knowledge, because it is never neutral – the phenomenon of epistemic injustice is well-known nowadays – and it does not flow automatically. However, here, I will mention another reason. As Green [2004] has pointed out, developing our nature makes us moral agents. Being a responsible epistemic agent also means to actively undertake a process of self-improvement. Any moral agent is committed to valuing the development and exercise of their rational capacities; as moral agents, we are committed to the intrinsic value of that which makes us moral agents; what makes us moral agents will form the proper account of our good.

This argument makes the point – intellectual excellence should not be disjointed from moral self-realization within a perfectionist account – even more evident. The agent as a moral agent will seek to become what she responsibly has the possibility of becoming, rather than what nature has dictated that she will become. Thus, the essence criterion regarding the definition of human nature should be regulated by free-

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[10] Hadot [1995] – referring to Stoicism in this case – has explained that the process of transformation opens the subjective experience of joy to a transcendent level, the one that aims at the good as perfection. For the difference between joy and pleasure, please cf. Irrera 2010.

dom and autonomy, as crucial components of a meaningful process of self-transformation. Hence, self-transformation is understandable as self-mastery too. Rationality, in this case, serves the acquisition of the right choice for self-transformation and growth. In fact, for perfectionism, it is not simply having the capacities themselves that is good, rather exercising (developing) them well [Bradford 2016]. That is why *eudaimonia* pertains to the person as moral agent and to her way of life.

5. Being in the end

For Korsgaard [2008], who among others has developed the agency argument for perfectionism, human good is not merely a result of rational choice but consists in such choices. Perfectionism is not just consequentialism, i.e., the view for which what really matters are the consequences of our actions. Perfectionism requires the virtuous engagement of the agent throughout a virtuous process. Rational activity, performed well, is the one in accordance with virtue, and thus, it is the one performed by doing rational choices. The *telos* is not just at the end, but it is spread out throughout the process. Recalling the title of this essay, the route is not just directed *to* goodness, but it is the route *of* goodness. This means to challenge a narrow interpretation of the teleological argument for perfectionism. Being directed by the end does not mean that the end is external to the process, as the desirable and virtuous consequence of a process that may be sinful (as for the utilitarian consequentialism). The end is not an outcome disconnected from the activity that leads to it. However, the process, as a practice of self-transformation, is grounded in the good as *telos*, as the inner potency that already belongs to the agent, but that must be developed, freely and autonomously, through proper decisions and actions. These decisions and actions constitute the practical-active ground for the emergence of the good.

If we take teleology in its narrow meaning, I agree with Hurka [1993, 24-25] in saying that teleology is just an "accretion"[11] of perfectionism.

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[11] A non-necessary conjunction with the thesis. For Hurka [1993, 23-36], the other accretions are the theological argument, for which we were created by an omni-benevolent being, who would not make us so that the general development of our natures

However, if we accept that teleology informs the same process that leads to the end, and hence, that the good is already in the process,[12] we should say that teleology is a necessary component for a perfectionist account of self-transformation. Accepting this meaning, we will also be able to reply to the "evil geniuses objection" for which it seems that we could use our capacities for good and for evil. Since the end is included in the action that is worth doing for its own sake, you cannot choose such an action for an evil end. Thus, the strategy is grounding human function in the good and conceiving, with Korsgaard [2008, 130-150], an agentic perspective to the function. This also means, in agreement with Green [2004], that the epistemic agent should responsibly choose for the good and thus, take part in the process as a free and autonomous moral agent. Therefore, being in the *telos* means to be actively engaged in the development of what we already are, transforming our character, our perception of reality and our way of living. Wisdom is not just an epistemic success [Grimm 2009], but what lies in the same process of development of capacities.

This teleological account of self-transformation has important consequences for the development of epistemic emotions too. The development from epistemic emotions to intellectual virtues and affective abilities is, therefore, efficiently dynamic and infused by wisdom. Thus, affective ability is the virtuous side of affectivity and its excellence. It is what emotions should become through the development of wisdom. Excellence is not existent naturally and it should be trained. Therefore, epistemic emotions are not only subject to the refinement of reason, but also are already possessed as natural powers by the epistemic agent who responsibly chooses to initiate a process of self-transformation. They are not a natural power that *a priori* leads to wisdom, but the agent should responsibly choose to be on the route of goodness.

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was incompatible with the achievement of the good; the reality and freedom argument, for which with the development of our natures (doing the right choices) we become "more real"; the natural tendencies doctrines, for which desires and pleasures lead humanity (and history, as well) to the better.

[12] The Aristotelian notion of *entelecheia* (*en-telei-echein,* literally: to be in the end) is meaningful here, because it depicts the actualisation of the inner capacity that is already inscribed, even only potentially, in every living being as its intrinsic nature. Thus, it also means the potential perfection of every living beings.

6. Conclusion

In this essay, I developed the meaning of self-transformation as self-improvement. I took self-improvement as the process of responsibly developing humans' capacities, epistemic emotions included. Epistemic emotions are regulated within patterns of decisions, and thus, self-mastery appears to be an important component of this picture. Finally, I depicted the perfectionist route that brings the epistemic agent to wisdom as prudential value, explaining why being in the route of goodness matters for the agent's happiness through the notion of way of life and spiritual exercises [Hadot 1995].

To conclude, I want to reinforce the idea that what makes the difference for this perfectionist perspective on self-transformation is not just the possession of certain capacities that properly defines our human nature, but their development. This process of self-transformation is not becoming other than what we are, but it is the responsible choice to develop our nature. That is why we need to engage in what Hadot [1995] has called "spiritual exercises": goodness already belongs to our inner nature, but it should be developed in the route of goodness, thus, transforming ourselves. Wisdom is more than knowledge, but for the philosophical path, it is achieved through knowledge. However, this is a form of knowledge that resonates in the agent's way of life and that makes self-transformation the route of goodness.

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Keywords

Abstract

The aim of this essay is to detect the role of epistemic emotions in the development of rationality as human perfection. I take the development of excellence as a process of self-transformation, broadening the notion of rationality to include affective powers, and discussing the eudaimonic value of wisdom. Thus, I depict the perfectionist route that brings the epistemic agent to wisdom as prudential value, explaining why being in the route of goodness matters for the agent's happiness. In doing so, I refer to the account of epistemic emotions as building blocks of intellectual virtues [Candiotto 2017], arguing for one of its tenets, the one for which epistemic emotions have the capacity to transform the character of the epistemic agent beneficially.