IN DEFENSE OF AN ACCOUNT OF DEGREES OF EPISTEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of degrees of epistemic responsibility by examining the debate between Michael Bishop and Katherine Puddifoot on the internalist perspective on epistemic responsibility. While Bishop's empirical evidence challenges internalism, Puddifoot argues it can be supportive. The author presents an account of degrees of epistemic responsibility, drawing inspiration from Martin Montminy's idea of moral responsibility. The central argument suggests that an agent is epistemically responsible only if her reasoning strategy aligns with her epistemic abilities, a concept referred to as *epistemic par performance*. The paper discusses how the Bishop-Puddifoot debate contributes to this perspective, presents Montminy's view on moral responsibility, and applies it to epistemic responsibility, emphasizing the importance of matching

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reasoning strategies with individual abilities. The article ultimately highlights the contextual, ability-dependent, and effort-inclusive nature of epistemic responsibility and offers a framework to recognize and credit agents based on their contributions and endeavors in expanding our epistemic horizons.

Introduction

Michael Bishop (2000) proposes that the empirical evidence related to human reasoning challenges the internalist perspective on epistemic responsibility. The internalist account asserts that achieving epistemic responsibility involves meeting criteria such as coherence, evidence-fitting, and reasons-responsiveness, collectively contributing to acquiring true beliefs. Based on his empirical study, Bishop claims that it's possible to maintain the responsibility-reliability connection even without satisfying the three internalist criteria of epistemic responsibility. Contrastingly, Katherine Puddifoot (2014) argues that Bishop's use of empirical evidence doesn't correctly undermine the internalist conception of epistemic responsibility. Instead, she believes that the empirical data can be used to support it. In this debate, I don't take sides at this moment. However, I believe both views help gain insight into degrees of epistemic responsibility. Accordingly, I argue that an agent is epistemically responsible only if she doesn't employ a reasoning strategy that falls short of being an instance of *epistemic par performance*.

To serve my purpose, I closely examine the Bishop-Puddifoot debate on the internalist account of epistemic responsibility. Based on this debate, I develop an account of degrees of epistemic

responsibility. Inspired by Martin Montminy's (2016)[1] idea found in the meta-ethical literature that one is morally blameworthy only if her action is a result of a belief that is incompatible with her ability, I later show how one's epistemic par performance saves her from being epistemically irresponsible.

The paper is divided into several sections. The first two sections deal with Bishop's and Puddifoot's views on epistemic responsibility. In the next section, I will discuss how the Bishop-Puddifoot debate contributes to the development of my perspective on the degrees of epistemic responsibility. After that, I will present Montminy's view of moral responsibility, which motivates meto develop an account of degrees of epistemic responsibility. I explain this account regarding epistemic par performance in the last section.

Bishop on Epistemic Responsibility

With empirical evidence, Bishop (2000) argues against the internalist perspective on epistemic responsibility. In this context, Bishop interprets epistemic internalism in the manner described by Plantinga, where the factors or states determining the warrant for a belief in an individual are considered internal to that person. (1993, p. 5) According to Bishop, internalists believe that our notion of epistemic responsibility concerns two distinct ideas.

Firstly, epistemic responsibility calls for epistemic virtues such as coherence, reasons-responsiveness, and evidence-fitting in human reasoning strategies.

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[1] I raise questions about this view elsewhere (Huda, ms.), though my view mostly remains Montminyan.

Secondly, epistemic responsibility has a *special* relation to truth, what Bishop (2000, p. 180) calls *the consilience assumption*. According to the consilience assumption, adopting the criteria of coherence, reasons-responsiveness, and evidence-fitting in our processes of belief formation is likely to result in the acquisition of true beliefs.

Bishop, therefore, thinks that his empirical evidence shows that being an epistemically responsible agent in one's reasoning strategies doesn't necessarily imply the need to ensure that her beliefs align with the evidence she has, are responsive to reasons, and exhibit coherence. Instead, she can even be epistemically responsible by having true beliefs that are not obtained the way the three criteria associated with epistemic internalism.

Bishop (2000) describes many empirically tested and evaluated human reasoning strategies. However, for convenience, I focus on discussions of actuarial prediction rules and heuristics and biases only, topics also covered by Puddifoot (2014).

Actuarial Prediction Rules: Bishop refers to Paul Meehl (1954), who reports twenty empirical studies suggesting that non-experts outperform experts in making actuarial predictions, given that the latter are provided only with actuarial formulas and inputs. This shows that non-experts can obtain truths even after being epistemically irresponsible, as defined by epistemic internalists. Internalists argue that experts behave responsibly because they use more labor-intensive strategies that yield new beliefs consistent with their entire belief systems, as well as beliefs that are suggested by their evidence. In contrast, novices are epistemically irresponsible because they blindly apply the mechanical procedure they are provided with. They are 'lazy,'

but still, they obtain true beliefs that are not coherent, evidence-fit, or reasons-responsive. This example, Bishop believes, works as a counterexample to the consilience assumption.

Heuristics and Biases: In many cases involving uncertainty, we employ heuristics and biases to addressvarious reasoning problems. (see Tversky & Kahneman, 1974, for instance) However, since these are shorthand and quick solutions, they draw conclusions from a small information set. For example, it is observed that we often use the recognition heuristic to choose between two alternatives. Bishop mentions an empirical study undertaken by Goldstein and Gigerenzer (2002), which shows that German students who can recognize only one option between 'San Diego' and 'San Antonio' can answer the question correctly: "Which city, San Diego or San Antonio, has a larger population?" Conversely, American students who can recognize both cities come up with fewer correct answers.

Referring to the recognition heuristic, Bishop argues that true beliefs can be maximized even without following the criteria attached to epistemic responsibility. Accordingly, the recognition heuristic maximizes true beliefs gathered from a small amount of information without being coherent, evidence-fitting, or reasons-responsive. So, by employing the recognition heuristic, one can obtain more true beliefs despite being ignorant of a large amount of information than one who employs alternative reasoning strategies.

Puddifoot on Epistemic Responsibility

According to Puddifoot (2014, pp. 3300-3301), experts in formulating actuarial prediction rules employ labor-intensive

strategies demonstrating epistemically responsible features in the internalist sense. This is because the individual sdeveloping the rule strive to align their beliefs withthe available evidence, be responsive to reasons, and maintain a coherent belief set. Moreover, due to their extensive experience, experts, as per Puddifoot, develop intuitive responses, which often lead them to trust their judgments on different cases. This suggests that the difference in the level or type of labor-intensiveness between the use of actuarial prediction rules and expert reasoning can be misleading. Thus, in both cases – lazy novices making actuarial predictions and experts employing labor-intensive strategies – considerable effort is needed before arriving at a prediction. This effort involves forming beliefs that align with one's evidence and existing beliefs, along with being responsive to reasons. (Puddifoot, 2014, p. 3301)

Puddifoot doesn't believe that Bishop offers any compelling reasons to undermine the internalist perspective on epistemic responsibility. According to her, it is feasible to uphold the internalist conception of epistemic responsibility without disconnecting responsibility from truth, as a person who acts responsibly by employing reliable reasoning strategies, likely resulting in true beliefs, will fulfill the criteria associated with internalist conceptions. (2014, p. 3299) She thinks that the empirical data provided by Bishop, in fact, support the internalist account of epistemic responsibility because they demonstrate novel approaches to obtaining true beliefs by satisfying the internalist criteria of epistemic responsibility.

Puddifoot (2014, p. 3303) presents the following argument to show that Bishop fails to provide any convincing undermining reasons against the internalist account:

(A) A person employing a heuristic reasoning strategy either knows the strategy is reliable or does not.

(B) If she lacks knowledge about the reliability of the reasoning strategy, then she cannot credibly be labeled as responsible.

(C) If she knows that the reasoning strategy is reliable, then she will act responsibly and meet the criteria outlined by the internalist conception of epistemic responsibility.

(D) Thus, whenever a person responsibly utilizes a heuristic, they adhere to the internalist conception of epistemic responsibility. Therefore, the internalist concept effectively captures what it means to responsibly employ heuristics.

Degrees of Epistemic Responsibility

The debate on the internalist perspective on epistemic responsibility between Bishop and Puddifoot can be used to develop an account of degrees of epistemic responsibility. If one strives hard for an exam and still performs poorly, she may not be esteemed as highly by the professor as someone who didn't study much but still excels. This demonstrates that (the nature of) one's efforts to achieve a desired outcome also plays a crucial role in determining one's standing. This supports the claim that epistemic responsibility involves reliable reasoning strategies that tend to produce truths.As Bishop (2000, p. 182) suggests, "The more responsible a reasoning strategy, the more reliable it will tend to be, and the most responsible reasoning strategy will typically be the most reliable." Therefore,the issue of degree becomes important in cases of epistemic responsibility.

Now, the question is: who should be regarded more favorably regarding epistemic responsibility: someone who employs labor-intensive strategies but fails or who succeeds without employing such strategies? Many people often think the hardworking student is more responsible,even if she fails. Likewise, in cases of epistemic responsibility, an agent who uses labor-intensive strategies but fails to obtain truths may be considered more responsible than one who behaves lazily. Thus, it's clear that we have degrees of epistemic responsibility, including truth-maximizing[2] labor-intensive strategies, truth-neutral[3] labor-intensive strategies, truth-maximizing lazy strategies, truth-neutral lazy strategies, and so on.[4]

Moreover, like Puddifoot, I think that Bishop's support of the recognition heuristic as truth-conducive doesn't exclusively denyadherence to three internalist standards of epistemic responsibility. However minimal it may be, users of the recognition heuristic still follow principles of coherence, evidence fittingness, and reasons-responsiveness. Recognizing one option as true from two alternatives demonstrates an effort to maintain coherence with previous beliefs. In doing so, the evidence she relies on is the similarity or dissimilarity with the prior beliefs, and she does this by being responsive to reasons,

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[2] Here, I'm using 'truth-maximizing' in a consequentialism-neutral way. By 'truth-maximizing' strategy, I only intend to mean a strategy that helps obtain true beliefs.

[3] By 'truth-neutral,' I mean a state in which one's reasoning strategy doesn't contribute to her true beliefs; they neither increase nor decrease. They remain as they are.

[4] Coates and Swenson (2013) present an account of degrees of moral responsibility based on Fischer and Ravizza (1998).

albeit quickly and dirtily. We may not label these behaviors as *professional* attitudes, but they aim to align with the three criteria of the internalist conception of epistemic responsibility. In real-life situations, whenever we recognize p and $p \rightarrow q$, we generally recognize also q. This often happens via a recognition heuristic.

Consider the study from Goldstein and Gigerenzer (2002). Students who correctly select an option based on recognition tend to believe that whatever they recognize is a correct answer to a question. They recognize 'San Diego,'concluding that'San Diego' is the correct answer. You can question their reasoning process, the quality of evidence, and so on. Still,you shouldn't conclude that they obtain true beliefs without meeting the three internalist criteria of epistemic responsibility. You can only argue that they may misapply or use the criteria partially or wrongly. You could also argue that they might have developed an intuition that recognizing something makes it more likely to be true, possibly as a result of the labor-intensive strategies they may have employed thus far.

This line of thought also speaks to degrees of epistemic responsibility. The three epistemic criteria that internalists emphasize may be considered matters of degree. We can assert that if a person uses the recognition heuristic and follows the three criteria less proficiently, she is less epistemically responsible than someone who employs an alternative reasoning strategy that demonstrates more consistent professional epistemic responsibility because the latter embodies the internalist virtues of epistemic responsibility.

Before delving further into the point I'm defending here, which concerns the degree of epistemic responsibility, I briefly

discuss Montminy's (2016) viewon moral responsibility. His work inspired me to develop my own perspective on the degree of moral responsibility (see Huda,ms.),which is connected to my view on the degree of epistemic responsibility. Therefore, his discussion also provides additional insight into the issue of degrees of epistemic responsibility in the final section.

Montminy on Moral Responsibility

Gideon Rosen (2004)[5]contends that an individual bears moral blame only if her action is an episode, or an upshot of an episode, of clear-eyed *akrasia*, meaning the deliberate performance of an action she knows to be wrong.In contrast, Montminy (2016) argues that an agent is blameworthy only if she underperforms. By *underperformance*, he means that the action is a consequence of one's belief that is incompatible with her ability or she fails to exercise her capacities successfully.

Both Rosen and Montminy believe that there are certain procedural epistemic obligations (PEOs) that an agent needs to meet to satisfy certain epistemic precautionary requirements. They contend that PEOs are challenging to codify and are agent-relative. As Rosen (2004, p. 301) asserts, procedural obligation entails the responsibility to take measures to guarantee that, when the moment for action arrives, one possesses the necessary knowledge about what one ought to know.

According to Montminy, an agent may end up being blameworthy though she fulfills all her PEOs. Her evidence may not as well support her belief as she thinks. She might be responsible for performing a wrong action despite believing that

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[5] Zimmerman (1997) holds a similar view.

she is acting in the right way. For instance, consider Dr. Singh, who, despite being aware of the harm antibiotics can cause to bronchitis patients, inadvertently prescribed them to a bronchitis patient. This memory lapse doesn't indicate a memory deficiency or cognitive malfunction; instead, it represents a momentary cognitive lapse. A few hours later, Dr. Singh recognized his error and experienced embarrassment. Montminy believes Dr. Singh's performance in prescribing antibiotics to bronchitis patients is subpar. Therefore, Montminy argues, "An agent S is directly blameworthy for her wrongdoing A only if S lacks an epistemically reasonable belief that her doing A is morally permissible." (2016, p. 60)

I don't entirely agree with Montminy (2016) that underperformance always makes one morally irresponsible because the connection between reasonable belief and moral responsibility is not necessary, and underperformance doesn't always make agents blameworthy.[6] However, I agree with Montminy (2016) that his view has some merits. One of the main advantages of his perspective is that it absolves children and individuals with cognitive disabilities from moral responsibility. According to this viewpoint, acting to the best of one's abilities is a moral requirement. Anything one does that falls below her ability is considered morally culpable. I also argue that we can develop an account of the degree of moral responsibility based on Montminy's understanding of moral responsibility.[7] According to my account of moral responsibility, which I elaborated elsewhere as below:

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[6] I argue against Montminy (2016) in Huda (ms.).

[7] I developed, albeit roughly, such an account in Huda (ms.).

> An agent S is directly culpable for her wrongdoing A only if S lacks an epistemically reasonable belief (dependent on the situation, i.e., the situation will determine what sort of belief one should form) that his doing A is morally permissible. But the more consistent he is with his epistemically reasonable belief, the less culpable he is (Huda, ms.).

In the context of this paper, the relevant idea in my account of degrees of moral responsibility is that the more consistent we are with our epistemically reasonable beliefs, the less culpable we become. The main idea of my account of degrees of epistemic responsibility is the central theme of the next section, largely inspired by Montminy's account of moral responsibility, briefly explained above.

Epistemic Par Performance and Degrees of Epistemic Responsibility

Following Montminy's (2016) insights on moral responsibility, I argue that an agent is epistemically responsible only if her epistemic actions (i.e., uses of reasoning strategies) align with her *pistemic parperformance*. By epistemic parperformance, I mean adopting a reasoning strategy that matches one's epistemic ability related to belief acquisition. If one's epistemic abilities yield more reliable judgments, then she is considered more epistemically responsible. Bishop's critique of the internalist account of epistemic responsibility contributes to this understanding, emphasizing the importance of aligning reasoning strategies with one's epistemic abilities.

Epistemic par performance occurs when an agent's reasoning strategy consistently produces more reliable judgments by

adhering to required PEOs, such as responding to relevant evidence, forming new beliefs about a reasoning strategy, and having good reasons for following that strategy. Conversely, *epistemic underperformance* involves using a reasoning strategy that does not align with the cognitive agent's epistemic ability, resulting in less reliability and fewer or no truths.

If an agent's epistemic action constitutes epistemic par performance, she fulfills all required PEOs compatible with her epistemic abilities. She follows relevant epistemic rules to enhance epistemic goodness or reduce epistemic badness. For example, when students are asked which city, San Diego or San Antonio, hasa larger population, a prerequisite PEO involves knowing the population figures for these cities. Simply recognizing a city's name and answering correctly does not fulfill this obligation, as it does not align with their epistemic abilities to produce more reliable judgments.[8] To be epistemically responsible, their reasoning strategies should incorporate coherence, reasons-responsiveness, and evidence-fitting. Failing to do so constitutes epistemic underperformance because their responses are quick and dirty and do not match their epistemic abilities.

Engaging in PEOs or acting epistemically responsibly ensures that when needed, an agent will employ a reasoning strategy consistent with her epistemic abilities. If an agent's epistemic abilities allow her to maximize truth through labor-intensive strategies, opting for a lazy strategy that fails to maximize truths constitutes epistemic underperformance, as she could reliably produce truths with effort.

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[8] I assume that all students involved have 'regular' cognitive, volitional, and motor abilities.

Consider Bishop's (2000, p. 179) example of serving on an undergraduate admissions committee. Picture yourself as a member of an undergraduate admissions committee. There are various approaches available for predicting the future academic success of applicants. One method entails a comprehensive review of all relevant evidence, including GPA, test scores, letters of recommendation, and the quality of the high school attended. The objective is to synchronize judgments with the available evidence, a process that might involve in-depth discussions with colleagues. Alternatively, there are less arduous strategies to contemplate. For instance, predictions could be made randomly or based on a single piece of evidence, such as applicants' GPAs, test scores, or the overall weight of their application portfolios.

In this scenario, I, unlike Bishop, argue that labor-intensive strategies align better with epistemic abilities and are more epistemically responsible. Committee members should employ labor-intensive reasoning strategies that incorporate coherence, reasons-responsiveness, and evidence-fitting,as lazy strategies may produce incorrect results regarding undergraduate admissions, failing to meet the relevant PEOs.

Can an epistemic agent be deemed epistemically irresponsible despite meeting all her PEOs and exhibiting coherence, evidence-fitting, and reasons-responsiveness? Take Bishop's case of actuarial prediction rules. Can experts be considered epistemically irresponsible despite meeting all internalist criteria? The answer is no. Even though experts may be less successful than non-experts while using labor-intensive strategies, they are not irresponsible; their efficiency and resources may vary. Similarly, novices who succeed in predicting are also not epistemically culpable because their

reasoning strategies align with their epistemic abilities. Both experts and novices employ reasoning strategies compatible with their epistemic abilities.Experts may not be as successful as non-experts despite engaging in labor-intensive reasoning strategies. It happens in our daily lives. Despite putting all our efforts into something, we come out as losers for reasons we don't control. Such is the role of luck.

Why are these two groups still considered epistemically responsible despite differing results in obtaining true beliefs? According to my concept of epistemic par performance, epistemic responsibility is rooted in one's ability, influenced by both the agent and the circumstances.[9] Among experts and non-experts, only the former, given their ability, can use labor-intensive strategies, although they may be less efficient at times. At times, experts provide valuable, nuanced explanations that only they can offer. Therefore, having labor-intensive strategies in one's repertoire is advantageous, making an individual not epistemically irresponsible.Epistemic culpability arises when one fails to follow all necessary PEOs, even when in a position and possessing the ability to do so.

In contrast, novices may not be familiar with complex reasoning strategies, yet they exhibit epistemic responsibility by adhering to PEOs aligned with their abilities. While exerting effort may or may not significantly contribute to obtaining truths, it undeniably absolves individuals from epistemic blameworthiness. Both results and the means of achieving them hold importance. Novices are doing what they are supposed to do. So, they are epistemically responsible agents as well.

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[9] An account of such relativity is found in Morton (2013), the main topic of which is how to manage our limitations.

One may ask if experts are epistemically culpable if they leave labor-intensive strategies and use one of the lazy strategies. I believe contexts and relevant epistemic abilities may dictate which strategies should take priority: truth-maximizing labor-intensive strategies, truth-neutral[10] labor-intensive strategies, truth-maximizing lazy strategies, truth-neutral lazy strategies, etc. The determination of epistemic responsibility and its degrees depends on the situation and one's epistemic ability.[11]

Conclusion

The primary intention of this paper is not to discredit Bishop's empirical objection to the internalist conception of epistemic responsibility. Rather, my main interest is to develop an insight that integrates both internalist and reliabilist accounts of epistemic responsibility. This insight allows me to provide an account of epistemic responsibility based on our individual epistemic abilities. When we employ a reasoning strategy that aligns with our ability to obtain true beliefs, we can be said to meet three internalist criteria: coherence, evidence-fittingness, and reasons-responsiveness. Hence, such epistemic actions qualify as instances of epistemic par performance. When we (endeavor to) fulfill these criteria, and if our endeavor is consistent with our ability, our performance can be called epistemic par performance.

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[10] By 'truth-neutral,' I mean a state in which one's reasoning strategy doesn't contribute to her true beliefs; they neither increase nor decrease. They remain as they are.

[11] I believe another version of degrees of epistemic responsibility can be developed if one holds a 'pluralistic' approach regarding justification. One good example of a pluralistic approach is Riggs (1998).

Drawing insights from the Bishop-Puddifoot debate on the internalist account of epistemic responsibility and from Montminy's view on moral responsibility, I develop an account of epistemic responsibility that argues that an agent must use a reasoning strategy to obtain true beliefs to the extent of her abilities, where anything consistent with her ability is considered epistemic par performance.

One of the advantages of my account of degrees of epistemic responsibility is that it saves agents with limited cognitive abilities from being labeled as epistemically irresponsible. It also supports the division of epistemic labor, providing a framework for recognizing and crediting those who contribute to our epistemic resources or to whom we are epistemically dependent.

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