



A Reading Group on Professor Michael Slote's Upcoming Book: "Sentimentalist Virtue Epistemology"

Professor Michael Slote, UST Professor of Ethics at University of Miami, will be our 2014 Distinguished Visiting Professor at the laboratory of Korean Philosophy in Comparative Perspectives in the fall semester. During his visit, he will hold a reading group to discuss his work-in-progress "*Sentimentalist Virtue Epistemology (SVE)*".

Venue: Conference Room 2, Blk 2, To Yuen Building, City University of Hong Kong

Time: 16:00-17:30 (Except 22 Sep from 10:00 to 11:30)

	Date	Content
1	15 Sep 14 (Mon)	Introduction to virtue epistemology (Introduction of SVE)
2	22 Sep 14 (Mon) 10:00-11:30	Discussion of how sentiment enters into the justification of ordinary perceptual and memory beliefs (SVE, chapter 1).
3	13 Oct 14 (Mon)	Discussion of how sentiment enters into scientific method and the justification of theories or inductive generalizations; I directly address Hume's doubts about induction and (ironically) give a sentimentalist but <i>very non-Humean</i> answer to the question of how we can be justified in making scientific inferences (SVE, chapter 2).
4	20 Oct 14 (Mon)	The discussion of Hume in chapter 2 leaves out of account what Nelson Goodman has said about the use of odd or non-standard predicates (like "grue") to make inductive inferences. Goodman's "New Riddle of Induction" appeals to such non-standard predicates, but my approach to his work involves an appeal to the Wittgensteinian thought of G. E. M. Anscombe. What Anscombe said in her book <i>Intention</i> about what we can and cannot sensibly be thought to desire applies to what we can think and infer, and a sentimentalist approach to virtue epistemology can sidestep Goodman's supposed problem (SVE, chapter 3).
5	10 Nov 14 (Mon)	Discussion of another fundamental aspect of scientific thought: methodological conservatism, i. e., the tendency to hold onto hypotheses in the face of a certain amount of counter evidence. My approach argues that such conservatism is built into belief as such and it does so by attempting to show that belief by its very nature has a positive emotional aspect that resembles the way we feel about people we like or love. Western thinkers tend to wall off belief from any affective or dynamic influences in the mind, but this is arguably incorrect, and if it is, then emotion has a place in science that we haven't suspected. Methodological conservatism reflects the fact that we have a positive attitude toward what we believe that deeply resembles the positive attitudes we have to friends and family (SVE, chapter 4).
6	17 Nov 14 (Mon)	Discussion of the role of empathy and imaginativeness in human knowledge and belief acquisition. Empathy not only tells us about the attitudes of others, but can put us in touch with what others have learned about the world. And speech acts theory needs to take empathy into account in a way it never has. The effectiveness of our communication with others depends on factors of empathy and also emotion in ways that speech acts theory and linguistic theory generally have totally ignored. Finally, imaginativeness characterizes the way young children put things together in acquiring skills or knowledge, and since empathy and imaginativeness are there in very young children and don't need to be cultivated, they are natural epistemic virtues analogous to the natural moral virtues discussed by Hume. It turns out that virtue epistemology can account for human cognitive success by casting its net more widely than it previously has (SVE, chapter 5).
7	8 Dec 2014 (Mon)	Discussion of the difference between justified belief and knowledge. The sentimentalist approach applies much more clearly to justification and epistemic rationality than to knowledge (SVE, chapter 6).
8	15 Dec 2014 (Mon)	Both virtue ethics and virtue epistemology have revived very strongly in recent decades, and our discussion will consider whether these forms of theory are likely to become even more prominent in philosophy's future. The fact that philosophical thought in India, China, and Japan has tended to favor something like virtue ethics over utilitarian and Kantian/rationalist approaches to ethics may be some indication that virtue theorizing, whether in ethics or in epistemology, may be the wave of our increasingly internationalized philosophical future (SVE, chapter 7 and Conclusion).

What is virtue epistemology?

Epistemology has traditionally contained two basic approaches: foundationalism (which holds that the justification of our beliefs requires foundations) and coherentism (which holds that coherence is sufficient for the justification of our beliefs). But in the last few decades a new approach to epistemology has emerged: virtue epistemology. And there have been two basic kinds: Responsibilists have held that epistemic justification is grounded in a kind of moral justification and they model their views on what Aristotle says about (the) moral virtue(s). By contrast, the Reliabilists have held that epistemic justification depends on the reliability or excellence of subpersonal cognitive systems like vision and memory. They borrow, not from Aristotle's ethics, but from what he has to say about the intellectual virtues.

Virtue epistemology is now extremely influential, but it has deep problems. The Responsibilists offer no way to justify ordinary perceptual and memory beliefs via moral virtue, and the Reliabilists only address such justification via the excellences not of people, but of their cognitive systems. It would be better if virtue epistemology could justify ordinary beliefs at the personal level, and this where my own new approach comes in.

It holds that we need to take in a broader range of person-level epistemic virtues than has previously been recognized. All the virtue epistemologists borrow from Aristotle in one way or another, but Hume is now often thought of as a virtue ethicist, and if we borrow Hume's idea of natural moral virtues (like benevolence) and apply it in epistemology, we can resolve many of the difficulties that face virtue epistemology. Hume was a sentimentalist in morality but not in epistemology, but I argue that there are sentimentalism-friendly natural *epistemic* virtues that characterize human beings at the personal level and that are the basis for the justification we have for most of our ordinary beliefs. These virtues are natural because they don't have to be cultivated, and they include natural childhood inquisitiveness and imaginativeness, but also certain kinds of decisiveness and receptivity that come naturally to us and that ensure the justification of various cognitive, including scientific, practices. That, at any rate, is what the book seeks to show in considerable detail. But I should also mention that my approach focuses to a considerable extent on the role of emotion and empathy in ordinary belief and knowledge acquisition. Emotion and empathy both have a much greater role to play, outside ethics, in the cognitive realm than the Western tradition and virtue epistemology in particular have ever recognized.

Please send an email to Ms. Ellen Yan at hiuyyan@cityu.edu.hk for registration. Reading materials will be distributed in advance of every meeting.