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Abstract

Scientific epistemology is a topic that has sparked centuries of philosophical discourse. In particular, understanding the role that scientists play in the creation and perpetuation of scientific knowledge is a subject that continues to be hotly debated. A relative new-comer to scientific epistemology is the field of virtue epistemology, which positions knowledge creation as integrally linked to specific character traits held by the scientist. Positioning scientific research as a distinct practice, virtue epistemologists strive to understand what virtues foster robust knowledge creation. Examinations of current scientific virtue epistemology, however, reveal how framings of “the scientist” tend to be highly individualistic and position the individual scientist as an actor with a high level of agency and autonomy. Such approaches, while following more conventional scientific epistemology discourse, contrast significantly with a growing body of social science literature that emphasizes the group nature of scientific research and education. This paper makes use of this social science literature to critically examine current deficits in narratives of scientific virtue epistemology. It highlights the need for the prioritization of virtues that enable scientists to work and learn in social environments through social

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processes. In particular, it discusses how the virtue of docility, best understood as being “open to learning”, is a key virtue for training new scientists and for establishing robust processes of knowledge creation. By identifying current deficits in the manner in which science is taught, it demonstrates the considerable epistemic consequences of training scientists who do not embody docility in all aspects of their research activities. The paper concludes by discussing how docility may be considered a key factor in an alternate understanding of the current reproducibility crisis in modern science. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)