Review of the book Virtue and Moral Fiction by Mark Alfano

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Alfano (Univ. of Oregon), a relatively new contributor to the increasingly busy intersection of ethics and epistemology, works to unpack the empirical work in psychology and articulate the full weight of its challenges to virtue ethics and virtue epistemology. The thread that runs throughout (excepting the final chapter, which perhaps should be viewed as an appendix) is the novel conception of "factitious virtue." Drawing on the chimerically real placebo effect and self-fulfilling prophecies (believing makes it so!), factitious virtue integrates these epistemically counterintuitive effects into norms for behavior. In short, when plausible, one should publicly attribute moral and intellectual virtues to others as a means to produce something like virtuous individuals. The book will be valuable for serious students of philosophy looking for a better-than-average integration of empirical work with philosophical reflection. The reference list is also a valuable resource for any serious student of epistemic or moral virtue and the challenges to these paradigms. Nonetheless, the book has a few shortcomings: most notably, Alfano casts reliabilism as a kind of virtue epistemology, an unusual choice that is not explained; at times he takes readers' fluency in a number of wide-ranging philosophical debates as given. Summing Up: Recommended. Upper-level undergraduates through researchers/faculty.

--A. P. Schwab, Indiana University--Purdue University Fort Wayne