

Part I

Critical Essays: Epistemology

Intellectual Virtue and Epistemic Power

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Virtue ethics is an old and venerable orientation in ethical theory. Virtue epistemology is a recent approach. Each is a kind of trait theory, by contrast with a rule theory. Virtue ethics construes moral action as action from moral virtue and has implications for the entire realm of practical reason, including rational action as the most general case in the domain of behavior.¹ Virtue epistemology, in the form in which it is closest to virtue ethics, construes both justified belief and knowledge as belief from intellectual virtue – as true belief in the case of knowledge. The theory has implications for the entire realm of theoretical reason, including rational belief as the most general case in the domain of cognition. There are now many philosophers developing one or another kind of virtue epistemology,² but the earliest epistemologically sophisticated statements of the position, and certainly as well-developed a version of it as there is now, have been constructed in a series of works by Ernest Sosa.³ His virtue epistemology, moreover, is informed by numerous connections with other kinds and aspects of epistemology and by decades of cutting-edge research in the general field. There is much to be learned from his recent writings in virtue epistemology. They illuminate both the elements and explanatory power of virtue epistemology itself and some central epistemological problems. My aim here is to explore this orientation as we find it in some of his major works and to bring out some of its distinctive features and some of the problems it raises for the tasks of general epistemology.

1 Some Major Elements in Virtue Perspectivism

The overall epistemological view developed by Sosa in recent years is *virtue perspectivism*. It will soon be plain why it represents not only a virtue epistemology but also a perspectival theory. If any single notion is central in the position, it is that of intellectual virtue. In an early statement of what constitutes such virtue, he said that “[a]n intellectual virtue is a quality bound to help maximize one’s surplus of truth over error,” to which he immediately added a forecast of theoretical elements to come and a qualification: “or so let us assume for now, though a more just conception may include as desiderata also generality,

coherence, and explanatory power, unless the value of these is itself explained as derivative from the character of their contribution precisely to one's surplus of truth over error."⁴

This opening characterization, forecast, and qualification are quite important for the development of the overall theory. The characterization is highly refined and extensively developed; the forecast proves, on analysis, to be correct at least for well-developed intellectual virtues; and the qualification gestures toward a major question that we must still address in order to understand Sosa's virtue epistemology: the extent to which the notion of intellectual virtue is externalist and reliabilist.

Later in the same paper he indicates the importance of justification for the notion of intellectual virtue. Of a man who, by good luck, is correct as a result of believing his horoscope, Sosa says:

S does not know in such a case. What S lacks, I suggest, is *justification*. His reason for trusting the horoscope is not adequate – to put it kindly. What is such justification?

A being of epistemic kind K is *prima facie* justified in believing P if and only if his belief of P manifests what, relative to K beings, is an intellectual virtue, a faculty that enhances their differential of truth over error.⁵ (*KP*, 239)

We now find that justification as well as knowledge is to be conceived as grounded at least in part in intellectual virtue. This in turn is conceived as a faculty, which is roughly an ability or power (*KP*, 234) or, better, a “virtue or a *competence*,” and virtue lies “in the general family of dispositions” (*KP*, 274).

The horoscopic belief, lacking as it does justification as well as reliable grounding, is not a candidate for knowledge even of the weaker of the two main kinds Sosa countenances. To see what the weaker kind is in contrast to the stronger kind, we must consider a distinction introduced late in this paper and figuring importantly in his subsequent work:

One has *animal knowledge* about one's environment, one's past, and one's own experience if one's judgments and beliefs about these are direct responses to their impact – e.g., through perception or memory – with little or no benefit of reflection or understanding.

One has *reflective knowledge* if one's judgment or belief manifests not only such direct response to the fact known but also understanding of its place in a wider whole that includes one's belief and knowledge of it and how these come about. (*KP*, 240)

Clearly, it is reflective knowledge to which we should aspire for much of our outlook on the world and which is crucial for the successful exercise of intellectual virtue. One way we achieve it (given favorable conditions) is quite natural: “A reason-endowed being automatically monitors his background information and his sensory input for contrary evidence and automatically opts for the most coherent hypothesis even when he responds most directly to sensory stimuli” (*KP*, 240).

In his later, major statement of virtue perspectivism, published in *Knowledge in Perspective*, Sosa develops the ideas we have been sketching. One major element is an aretaic (i.e., virtue-theoretic) conception of knowledge:

We have reached the view that knowledge is true belief out of intellectual virtue, belief that turns out right by reason of the virtue and not just by coincidence. For reflective knowledge you need moreover an epistemic perspective that licenses your belief by its source in some virtue or faculty of your own. (*KP*, 277)

If this conception of knowledge is even roughly correct, then we can achieve a good epistemological understanding of the concept of knowledge if we can provide, as a basis for it, an illuminating account of intellectual virtue. This is precisely what Sosa goes on to do in this paper and subsequent work. Later in the paper we are given the following account of *having* an intellectual virtue:

S has an intellectual virtue $V(C, F)$ relative to environment E if and only if S has an inner nature I such that

- if
- (i) S is in E and has I ,
 - (ii) P is a proposition in the field F , and
 - (iii) S is in conditions C with respect to P ,
- then, (iv) S is very likely to believe correctly with respect to P , (*KP*, 286)

where F is the appropriate field (such as the realm of observables relative to a proposition ascribing color), C is the set of relevant conditions (for instance, normal lighting relative to a proposition ascribing visible properties at a distance), and believing correctly may be a matter not only of believing, but also of disbelieving or simply not believing. (Believing correctly with respect to P is not equivalent to believing P *truly*; the correct thing may be to disbelieve it or to withhold judgment.)

We are now in a position to see what it is to believe *out of* intellectual virtue:

S believes P out of intellectual virtue $V(C, F)$ iff

- (a) S is in an environment E such that S has intellectual virtue $V(C, F)$ relative to E ,
- (b) P is a proposition in F ,
- (c) S is in C with respect to P , and
- (d) S believes P .⁶ (*KP*, 287)

Since knowledge is true belief out of intellectual virtue, we can account for it by adding truth to these conditions and specifying that the virtue is “sufficient,” in the sense that the ratio of true to false beliefs based on it is at least “up near the average” for the relevant reference group, such as human beings (*KP*, 287–8). In this way, intellectual virtue is relative. Visual acuity for human beings need not, for instance, be as great as for birds, and our virtue in forming visual beliefs may reflect this. Such *species-relativity* is not, however, the only kind for which Sosa’s position allows. The reference group in question can, for instance, be a sub-species as well.

From the case of horoscopically based belief, we can already see that the inner nature appropriate to achieving knowledge cannot be possessed by people who, upon believing in accordance with their nature, are not likely to be correct. There the believer, if correct, is simply lucky; the person’s norm would not be to believe truths in the relevant domain. Sosa uses the contrast between an ordinarily near-sighted person aware of the limitation and Magoo, who is comparably near-sighted but unaware of it, to bring out other elements in the notion of intellectual virtue. Perceivers of the former kind have an inner nature (perhaps as a matter of having achieved epistemic balance and caution) that determines them (at least for the most part) to believe, on the basis of vision, only those propositions that meet the conditions in question: roughly speaking, they believe, on the basis of visual sensations, only in appropriate environments and within the limits of their visual acuity.

There is an important distinction central for understanding Sosa's epistemology here. It is needed to account for the broadly "internalist" intuition that, epistemically, one might be highly responsible yet, in a world controlled by a Cartesian demon, likely to be incorrect in a majority of one's beliefs. Here it is crucial, for Sosa, to distinguish justification from aptness:

The "justification" of a belief B requires that B have a basis in its inference or coherence relations to other beliefs in the believer's mind – as in the "justification" of a belief derived from deeper principles. (*KP*, 289)

By contrast,

The "aptness" of a belief B relative to an environment E requires that B derive from what relative to E is an intellectual virtue, i.e., a way of arriving at belief that yields an appropriate preponderance of truth over error. (*KP*, 289)

Summarizing the former point, Sosa says that "'justification' amounts to a sort of inner coherence, something that the demon's victims can have despite their cognitively hostile environment" (*KP*, 289). Aptness is quite different: "Justification of a belief that *p* requires the (implicit or explicit) use of reasons. A belief can be apt, however, without being thus justified" (*KP*, 290). Indeed, aptness is exhibited by "animal knowledge," which need not be constituted by justified belief, and "[v]irtue perspectivism accepts a sort of reliabilism with respect to animal knowledge, and with respect to unreflective knowledge generally" (*KP*, 291).

For reflective knowledge, by contrast, more is required than reliabilism demands as a constitutive condition for knowledge: "For the exercise of virtue to yield [reflective] knowledge, one must have some awareness of one's belief and its source, and of the virtue of that source both in general and in the specific instance" (*KP*, 292). In his later "Reflective Knowledge in the Best Circles,"⁷ the same distinction is stressed, with a similar willingness to allow that reliabilism, as opposed to virtue perspectivism, may account for some animal knowledge. Here Sosa holds that

(a) our broad coherence is necessary for the kind of reflective knowledge traditionally desired; and (b) such broadly coherent knowledge is desirable because in our actual world it helps us approach the truth and avoid error. This is not to deny that there is a kind of "animal knowledge" untouched by broad coherence. It is rather only to affirm that beyond "animal knowledge" there is better knowledge. This reflective knowledge does require coherence, including one's ability to place one's first-level knowledge in epistemic perspective. (*RK*, 67)

The distinction between animal and reflective knowledge is, in this later work, paired with Descartes's distinction between *cognitio* and *scientia*, but freed of the theological dependency of the Cartesian distinction and its associated infallibilism (*RK*, 71).

Sosa's epistemic perspectivism, then, combines elements from reliabilist externalism, epistemic internalism, Cartesian higher-level foundationalism, and the epistemological analogue of virtue ethics. The result is an account of knowledge that roots it in traits

of the knowing subject and distinguishes the natural, animal cognitions that come with our elemental responsiveness to the world from the higher-order beliefs we form when, as in achieving scientific knowledge, we believe what we do in the light of suitable self-understanding. I want to explore this epistemology mainly in relation to two questions: Why is intellectual virtue as Sosa conceives it *virtue*, and, assuming that reflective knowledge is indeed knowledge from virtue, is the ideal it indicates too demanding for normal knowers?

2 Virtue and Power

In the works I have discussed so far, Sosa does not devote much space to the general notion of a virtue operative in ethical literature and in everyday appraisals of persons. He does, however, cite two passages from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the first, Aristotle says that "[When] thought is concerned with study, not with action or production, its good or bad state consists [simply] in being true or false. For truth is the function of whatever thinks (1139a27–30).⁸ In the second he says, "Hence the function of each of the understanding parts is truth; and so the virtue of each part will be the state that makes that part grasp the truth most of all" (1139b11–13). Here, however, Aristotle is speaking of the virtue of "parts" of the mind, not – or not directly – of the virtue of a person or of overall character. Compare some passages in which he is describing overall virtue:

Virtues, by contrast [with the senses] we acquire, just as we acquire crafts by having previously activated them . . . we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions. (1103a31–1103b2)

If it were not so, no teacher would be needed, but everyone would be born a good or a bad craftsman. (1103b11–13)

To sum up, then, in a single account. A state [of character] arises from [the repetition of] similar activities. Hence we must display the right activities, since differences in these imply corresponding differences in the state. (1103b21–3)

None of these claims of Aristotle's is inconsistent with construing what Sosa calls intellectual virtue as virtue in Aristotle's sense, but there are at least two points of apparent contrast. I take them in turn.

First, contrary to the picture we have in Sosa's work, the notion of virtue in Aristotle seems *historical*: it appears (in at least some passages from Aristotle) to be part of the concept of a virtue that it is acquired by repetition. This applies even to intellectual virtue: "Virtue of thought arises mostly from teaching" (1103a15). For Sosa (as for most contemporary epistemologists, I think), the notion of a virtue is not essentially historical, however commonly virtues are acquired in the way Aristotle described. The second point is related to the first: in part because, for Aristotle, virtues are conceived as acquired by proper habituation or by internalization of standards or practices one is taught (or from both), the Aristotelian virtues all seem to be the sorts of things for which one deserves praise. This may be mainly because having them reflects success in what is normally a series of effortful activities. Another reason may be that they constitute a source of desirable conduct. For Sosa, presumably a duplicate of me created at an instant would

have whatever intellectual virtues I do at the time; and similarly, a being with certain powers to acquire true beliefs would have such virtues whether any credit is due for their possession or not. In “Virtue Epistemology,” for instance, he contrasts his own view with a historical version of reliabilism and stresses, in characterizing virtue, not its developmental history but its stability.⁹ That is not essentially a historical characteristic.

It may be, however, that the contrast with Aristotle here is not deep. Perhaps Aristotle can be read, not as conceiving the very notion of a virtue as historical, but as not clearly distinguishing his genetic account of virtue from his conceptual one. If we then distinguish retrospective praiseworthiness – roughly praiseworthiness for *acquiring* the virtue in which a belief is grounded – from contemporaneous praiseworthiness, which is roughly praiseworthiness for *having* this trait, Sosa’s view can account for both, nor need he deny that Aristotle is right about the normal path to acquisition of (at least many) virtues. To be sure, contemporaneous praiseworthiness may be essentially *forward-looking*, since one ascribes it partly in anticipation of good conduct in the future; but it could be possessed at the last moment of a life when no such future conduct is in prospect.

Whatever we say about the extent of the suggested contrasts, there seems to be a distinction between a virtue and a *power*. The former is perhaps a species of the latter, but not every power, even to do or achieve something desirable, is a virtue. In the intellectual domain, this can be seen by noting that someone could have the power to come to know the weather upon simply considering what it will be tomorrow without thereby having a virtue – or at least, in saying that one of the person’s “virtues” is an ability to foretell tomorrow’s weather just by considering the matter, we would be using ‘virtue’ in a sense that does not imply any praise for an accomplishment or any positive attitude toward one’s character as distinct from the set of one’s characteristics. The person might have no idea how the belief arises or why it should be true, and may be puzzled by holding it.¹⁰

Sosa’s perspectivism has a resource for dealing with this kind of case without unduly stretching the notion of a virtue. The kind of characteristic in question (a kind of epistemic power) can be considered a capacity for animal knowledge and hence taken not to be a virtue. If this line is the solution, however, then (as Sosa realizes) knowledge in general cannot be considered to be true belief grounded in virtue – unless perhaps we distinguish what might be called *animal virtue*, which would be a kind of epistemic power, from *reflective virtue*, which would be a trait for which one merits a measure of praise.

That there might be something plausibly called animal virtue is consonant with an idea Sosa has put forward in arguing that knowledge entails “credit” for true belief.¹¹ Credit is not the same as praise, but it is a positive attribution that shares with praise at least a presupposition that the action or other element in virtue of which a person merits credit is non-accidental. We might then say that virtues are creditable characteristics, but allow that there are creditable powers that are not virtues – even if we also allow that some of these are animal virtues. We might certainly allow that there can be epistemic credit for a belief that is not strictly grounded in an epistemic virtue. If we think in Aristotelian terms, we might add that in the normal course of developing virtue, creditable responses come first. It is only when one has achieved a *pattern* of credits that bespeaks a virtue of character – whether epistemic or moral or of some other normatively important kind – that one may be said to have a virtue.

So far, I have been mainly exploring Sosa's virtue epistemology and how, in the light of a conception of intellectual virtue, it accounts for one or another kind of knowledge or justification of interest to him. It is also instructive to consider what, independently of the theory, seem intuitively to count as intellectual virtues and to explore Sosa's resources for accounting for them so conceived. The paradigms are traits whose successful exercise issues in knowledge of certain kinds, for instance, perceptiveness, insightfulness, discernment, imagination, and rigor. Some of these are, to be sure, more "methodological," others more substantive, and all can be limited, as where one is insightful in psychological matters but not in philosophical ones.

Some of these traits overlap Aristotelian "productive" virtues; for instance, imagination can lead to creating artworks as well as to arriving at knowledge through framing intuitively plausible hypotheses that one then establishes. But consider being critical. This might lead to withholding belief as often as to forming it in a certain way. Being logical, moreover, might be possible for someone who is very poor at finding true premises from which to draw logically valid inferences. This deficiency could thus lead to multiplication of falsehoods more often than to finding truth or avoiding error. It is only when we have truth to begin with that using good logic guarantees our arriving at truths.

Sosa's epistemology has resources to provide an account of these cases. For one thing, he has distinguished between traits that produce true belief and traits that simply lead to believing appropriately, where this may entail withholding belief. He can thus applaud critical habits of mind that often lead to suspending judgment, provided they do not lead to overzealous skepticism. He can also note that some virtues, such as logicity, require as one of the conditions for their proper operation, combination with other virtues that give them appropriate *inputs*. His theory is in no way epistemically *atomistic*; it can be developed in an aretically holistic direction. This does not imply a version of the Aristotelian thesis of the unity of the virtues. To say that some virtues operate only, or best, in combination or interaction with others is not to imply that having any of them entails having them all.

There are, however, at least two problems we should consider here. First, there is some question of how to conceive the environment appropriate to explicating the notion of believing "out of intellectual virtue" (characterized by Sosa in the quotation from *KP*, 287). Second, some of what Sosa says concerning epistemic virtue leaves open how internal the notion is on his view. Let us take these in turn.

On a quite natural understanding of the notion of an environment in which one believes something, the environment is roughly the physical surroundings of the believer. But this notion will not do justice to what Sosa has in mind (indeed, his notion is not sharply separable from that of the conditions appropriate to believing the kind of proposition in question from the virtue, as he indicates on *KP*, 284–5). For one thing, in a given physical environment one has many beliefs, and for many of them, such as many that are stored in memory, one's physical environment is irrelevant. Recall the case of Magoo; here we are focusing on a visual belief, to which his physical surroundings are relevant, not on an arithmetic belief, to which they are not. Indeed, I would speculate that in characterizing intellectual virtue, Sosa has in mind mainly features of one's physical *or* psychological surroundings pertinent to one's justification for or reliability in believing, the proposition in question.

One might now wonder why, for very simple arithmetic beliefs, environment is relevant at all: if the propositions in question are self-evident, why should environment matter? I have two suggestions. First, if it does not, the environmental condition can be deemed to be trivially satisfied, in the sense that any environment will do. Second, Sosa treats a demon world as a special kind of (epistemically hostile) environment (see, e.g., *KP*, 289, where he speaks of a “demonic environment”). This environment would matter for whatever beliefs are grounded in a way that makes them epistemically vulnerable. True perceptual beliefs would not, for instance, count as knowledge (though they might still be justified, for reasons suggested above and extended below); but the relevant virtue is not “designed” to operate in a demon environment, whereas a belief of a self-evident proposition might remain untouched. The matter of how internal the notion of a virtue is is more difficult to deal with. In “Virtue Epistemology” he sympathetically explores the idea that

If it is believed of a certain process that it would yield a high enough preponderance of truth over falsity in the actual world when employed, that process is allowed into the list of virtues, and if it is believed that it would yield a low enough ratio of truth over falsity, then it is placed on the list of vices. (VE)

He has in mind such processes as forming beliefs on the basis of perceptual experience, and I take it that the corresponding virtue is the related stable disposition to form beliefs given appropriate visual experiences in the right kind of environments (and with the other restrictions quoted from *Knowledge in Perspective*). The formulation is qualified in the succeeding pages, but Sosa does not specify that the processes in question or the grounds of beliefs formed through those processes are internally accessible: roughly, of a kind the person can be conscious of through introspection or reflection. Suppose we discover a process of belief formation that operates on the basis of exposure to surrounding air and is such that the person in question always forms a true belief about the percentage of carbon dioxide content, but has no idea why the belief arises (and later forgets forming it, so that there is no memory of a track record that might yield inductive justification). Do we want to speak of an epistemic virtue here? I think not, and if Sosa were to countenance knowledge here, I believe that he would rightly consider it “animal knowledge.”

There is no reason, however, why he cannot make use of a distinction suggested earlier, between an intellectual virtue and a mere intellectual power. He could then treat the notion of intellectual virtue just cited as capturing a concept of virtue as power and build in an internalist requirement to capture the more ordinary notion of intellectual virtue. Making the suggested kind of distinction between virtue and power indeed comports well with his emphasis on reflective knowledge as the proper goal of intellectual activity so far as the grasp of truth is concerned. In suggesting we make use of this distinction, I am not implying that powers as such cannot be admirable; the point is that not every epistemically good power is happily considered a virtue. It seems intrinsic to a virtue as opposed to a power that the *person* is in some way admirable, even praiseworthy, on account of possessing it. If one wants to retain a generic notion of virtue in the intellectual domain that encompasses mere epistemic powers as well as traits we intuitively consider intellectual virtues, I suggest that the technical term ‘epistemic virtue’ might

serve for this purpose. For the connection with knowledge that it implies does not obviously entail (and I think does not entail at all) the element of merited praise for the subject that is commonly implicit in ‘virtue.’ The same would hold, of course, for what I suggested could be called an “animal virtue.”

We can better understand Sosa’s epistemology and can also see some problems it raises for any epistemology if we consider reflective knowledge in relation to intellectual virtue. This will be the main task of the next section.

3 Reflective Knowledge, Intellectual Virtue, and Skepticism

A natural hypothesis to pursue given the distinction between an intellectual virtue and a mere intellectual power is that the former is largely or perhaps wholly constituted by the latter together with the kind of second-order understanding Sosa requires for reflective knowledge. There are, however, different formulations of this requirement in Sosa’s work. In one passage quoted above from *Knowledge in Perspective*, he speaks of reflective knowledge as embodying “understanding of its place [the place of that knowledge, I take it] in a wider whole that includes one’s belief and knowledge of it and how these come about.”¹² In “Reflective Knowledge” he says that “reflective knowledge does require coherence, including one’s ability to see one’s first-level knowledge in epistemic perspective.” These conditions may be plausibly considered different. The first seems stronger, especially if we take it to include (as it seems to) detailed causal knowledge. The second emphasizes cognitive ability rather than possession of actual knowledge. On that score, at least, it seems to me preferable.¹³ Neither actually specifies *reflection*, in the standard sense requiring a temporally extended consideration of some of the elements in question. That is important, since plainly Sosa does not take actual reflection to be a requirement for achieving reflective knowledge. If this were required, one could not acquire it instantaneously no matter how good an understanding one had of the relevant variables.

If, however, the later conception of reflective knowledge is modest in not requiring a process of reflection or any detailed causal knowledge, it seems strong in requiring an “awareness of *how* one knows, in a way that precludes the unreliability of one’s faculties” (RK, 426). Perhaps we can easily be aware of whether our knowledge is, say, visual or inductive or *a priori* – at least where we intuitively deserve credit for “reflective knowledge.” But what does it take to be aware of this in a *way* that rules out the unreliability of the relevant faculties? I do not see how to answer this question *a priori*. But I also cannot see any bar to there being something in the way in which we are aware of how we know, in such “reflective” cases, that rules out the unreliability of the faculties in question. We could, for instance, be simply built this way by God or evolution (the ‘or’ is of course inclusive). Our awareness of how we know might be connected in a lawlike way with the reliability of the relevant faculties.

It should be stressed that a way of being aware of how one knows that “precludes the unreliability of one’s faculties” does not entail an awareness of how this way of knowing does that. This point should help to make Sosa’s requirement appear satisfiable in the kinds of cases where it is plausible to attribute knowledge in a full-blooded sense. Still, granting that this higher-order cognitive requirement *can* be met, we might ask whether

it *need* be, either for genuine knowledge or for knowledge conceived as resulting from an exercise in intellectual virtue. One motivation is plain in Sosa's earlier apparent sympathy, regarding reflective knowledge at least, with a "principle of exclusion": "If one is to know that p then one must exclude . . . [i.e., know not to be the case] every possibility that one knows to be incompatible with one's knowing that p " (RK, 425). Clearly the knowing is characteristically dispositional here: one need not have in mind or bring to mind all of the competing propositions (even supposing one actually could). One need only have dispositional beliefs constituting the relevant kind of knowledge.¹⁴ This condition may seem to invite skepticism, since many of us know that our present perceptual knowledge is incompatible with a certain kind of deception by a Cartesian demon, but seem not to know that there is no such demon. However, some philosophers think we do know that; others hold that we do not need to know it.¹⁵

I cannot pursue this difficult issue here. Skepticism and even the narrower question of the status of closure principles important for it are very large topics. I prefer to pursue two questions more pertinent to virtue epistemology as such. First, does knowledge grounded in intellectual virtue require such second-order knowledge? Second, is the cognitive state constituted by overall reflective knowledge a unitary kind of knowledge at all?

On the first question, I have already noted that Sosa grants that a kind of justification is immune to the deception that a Cartesian demon can induce in our framework of beliefs. I have also pointed out the element of praiseworthiness appropriate to virtues in general as admirable traits of persons. Sosa himself speaks of "praise" in connection with virtues and aptitudes, and says that "[t]o praise a performance as skillful or an action as right, or a judgment as wise or apt, accordingly, is to assess not only the action or the judgment but also the reflected aptitude or character or intelligence" (RK, 420). Now granting that there are intellectual success terms like 'perceive' and 'intuit' that, in some of their uses, require true belief or knowledge, it is surely possible for a person who is intellectually rigorous to achieve justified belief, to construct imaginative theories, and to frame rigorous arguments, without achieving even first-order knowledge, much less the kind of second-order knowledge required for what Sosa counts as reflective knowledge. If one is hallucinating in a situation in which one has no way of figuring this out, and on that veridical-seeming sensory basis one comes up with an ingenious plausible explanation of phenomena one seems to see, this can be a case in which one has justified belief grounded in the kind of faculty that would, under "normal" conditions, yield knowledge. Consistently with hallucinating, one might even take steps to see that one is not doing so, but be fooled there too! Another person in the same situation might come up with nothing but foolish conjectures. Might we not find intellectual virtue in the first case – ill-fated, to be sure – and intellectual laxity in the other case?

Some intellectual virtues, by contrast, seem external in a way that precludes this internally grounded possession, where unavoidable falsehood in a belief manifesting them is compatible with that same belief's having a kind of intellectual merit; but surely some intellectual virtues are internal, or largely so.¹⁶ It is true that *perceptive* people must have an appropriate proportion of true beliefs in the right situation; and *logical* people must make valid inferences and at least be disposed to know, within a certain range, which are valid and which not. But (intellectually) *imaginative* people can be factually mistaken in a great proportion of their beliefs. I suggest, then, that Sosa's framework

might be extended to accommodate the contrast between external and internal intellectual virtues. Both may be essentially connected with truth, but the kinds of connections in question seem to be different in the two cases, and there may also be differences in the kind of reflective understanding required. Perceptiveness may require less in this respect than, say, analytical rigor.

However the framework might take account of the contrast between what it seems natural to call internal as opposed to external virtues, our second question remains: Is reflective knowledge unitary, in the intuitive sense in which it is if knowledge that p is constituted by a certain kind of well-grounded true belief of that proposition? Or is reflective knowledge more nearly a compound consisting of knowledge together with – indeed integrated with – other elements, perhaps including, but not limited to animal knowledge?

One might agree with Sosa that reflective knowledge is needed if the skeptical threat is as serious as it seems to many to be and is to be met. It does not follow – and I do not think he is suggesting that it does – that reflective knowledge is unitary, in virtue of being constituted by a certain kind of well-grounded true belief. Much of what he says, however, creates the impression that it is unitary, for instance the characterization of knowledge as true belief out of intellectual virtue, and his use of the standard way of referring to knowledge as if it is constituted by belief of the proposition said to be known. It appears to me that reflective knowledge “that p ” is not unitary in this sense, but is better conceived as knowledge both of and *regarding* p . It consists of knowledge that p , *together with* appropriate second-order capacities, including dispositional beliefs that themselves constitute knowledge (or at least of knowledge together with suitably grounded dispositions to believe, where the beliefs that would be formed will at least normally constitute knowledge).

So viewed, reflective knowledge seems both to occur quite commonly and, at least some of the time, to bespeak intellectual virtue. But if we can find a way to rebut (even if not refute) the principle of exclusion, we need not hold that such knowledge is required to manifest intellectual virtue (perhaps we need not hold that in any case). It would seem that intellectual virtue can be manifested when, despite our making every critical effort that can be expected of us in seeking evidence in the situation, we lack the knowledge needed to guarantee the reliability of our faculties, i.e., knowledge whose content, or at least existence, guarantees this (which is not to say we know that it does so). Indeed, unless some internal requirements are imposed on the second-order components (as I think Sosa intends to do for at least some cases), I do not see that their presence is sufficient to render an instance of knowledge an exercise of intellectual virtue either. Logically speaking, we could be gifted with animal knowledge having the right higher-order content just as easily as cursed by the deceptions of a Cartesian demon. We might, to be sure (as I suggested earlier) distinguish between ordinary and animal virtue, much as we distinguish reflective and animal knowledge. If, on the other hand, satisfactory internal requirements are imposed, then even if skepticism remains a threat to the common-sense view that we have knowledge of the external world, Sosa could cogently claim that external world beliefs out of intellectual virtue can be amply justified. Justification might be, as it were, largely up to nurture even if knowledge is largely up to nature.

Despite the brevity of this sketch of Sosa’s virtue epistemology, we can discern some of its major features. It makes use of a series of essential distinctions – among kinds of

trait, between internal and external criteria of justification, between justification and aptness, and between kinds of knowledge. Its explication of knowledge as true belief out of intellectual virtue is well developed; it incorporates the ideas of a faculty, of its field of application, and of conditions of its operation. The treatment of skepticism is resourceful and represents a reconstruction of what is best in Descartes's higher-order approach to dealing with the possibility of error. Sosa captures the elements of internalism, of reflexivity, of reliabilism, and of epistemic responsibilism in Descartes's epistemology without endorsing the elements of infallibilism, deductivism, skepticism, or voluntarism that we also find in parts of Descartes's writings. I have stressed a distinction between intellectual virtue and epistemic power, argued for what seems a stronger internalist conception of intellectual virtue than the dominant conception one finds in Sosa's works, and suggested that skepticism may be resistible without the exclusion principle. These points might perhaps be adapted to Sosa's virtue perspectivism without radical changes on either side; but even if we incorporate them into a quite different virtue epistemology, we will have to use the kinds of basic conceptual materials he has provided and explicated. Anyone wanting to develop a virtue epistemology must take careful account of his contribution.¹⁷

Notes

- 1 I have provided a detailed account of action from virtue, with special attention to the character of the 'from', in "Acting from Virtue," *Mind* 104 (1995): 449–71.
- 2 For a variety of approaches to virtue epistemology, see, e.g., Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992), James A. Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and John Greco, *Putting Sceptics in Their Place* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For an approach premised on the idea that "[t]he focus of our 'epistemic lives' is the activity of inquiry," see Christopher Hookway, "Cognitive Virtues and Epistemic Evaluations," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2 (1994). These approaches differ much from one another, as well as in the extent to which they take moral virtue as a model for epistemic virtue and in how they do so.
- 3 A number of Sosa's writings will be cited below, and many further references to his voluminous works in epistemology will be listed in this volume. There are also volumes appearing that contain many papers discussing his work in virtue epistemology. See, e.g., Guy Axtell, ed., *Knowledge, Belief, and Character: Readings in Virtue Epistemology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski, *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), and Abrol Fairweather and Linda Zagzebski, eds., *Virtue Epistemology: Essays on Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). All of these volumes contain work by Sosa himself, and in one of the papers in Axtell's collection (pp. 99–110) Sosa replies to criticism by Laurence Bonjour and Jonathan Dancy.
- 4 "Knowledge and Intellectual Virtue," originally published in *The Monist* (1985), reprinted in Ernest Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective: Selected Essays in Epistemology* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) (cited as *KP*), p. 225. Page references to this paper and, unless otherwise specified, to others of Sosa's writings, will hereinafter be parenthetically included in the text.

- 5 The notion of the differential of truth over error is not meant to be merely quantitative, referring simply to a favorable proportion of true to false beliefs. One dimension of intellectual virtue is a kind of wisdom regarding what truths are, in the way appropriate to the person and context in question, important. Sosa discusses the nature of such importance in more than one place; for a valuable detailed treatment see his “For the Love of Truth” in Fairweather and Zagzebski, eds., *Virtue Epistemology*.
- 6 This formulation contains no element that clearly captures the causal character of ‘out of’, but much that Sosa says in this and other papers indicates that he intends that character to be reflected in his conception of believing out of intellectual virtue.
- 7 “Reflective Knowledge in the Best Circles,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 94 (1997): 422 (cited as RK). In *Knowledge in Focus, Skepticism Resolved* (Princeton University Press, forthcoming), which Sosa has kindly given me for a fuller perspective, the same range of issues is considered in more detail in ways that – in the May, 1999, version, at least – are compatible with the approach attributed to Sosa here.
- 8 The translation is by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985). Other citations of Aristotle are also to this edition.
- 9 “Virtue Epistemology,” unpublished manuscript (cited as VE).
- 10 That such non-inferential, apparently “wired in” knowledge is possible is argued in ch. 7 of my *Epistemology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).
- 11 See Ernest Sosa, “Beyond Skepticism, to the Best of our Knowledge,” *Mind* 97 (1988). The idea that knowledge entails credit for the belief in question is developed and defended by John Greco in “Knowledge as Credit for True Belief,” in DePaul and Zagzebski, *Intellectual Virtue*.
- 12 To avoid an apparently vicious regress, Sosa would presumably not require that the needed higher-order knowledge is reflective. How plausible is it, however, to conceive it as animal knowledge? This is perhaps a contingent matter; the answer, I suppose, depends on how we are built, particularly on how much self-understanding is a natural, “direct” response to our belief formation processes and other epistemically relevant elements of our cognitive system. I assume that higher-order knowledge can in any case be construed as a kind of knowledge that can become reflective, whereas animal knowledge *need* not meet that condition.
- 13 Still another interesting passage in which Sosa discusses the requirement in question occurs in a reply to BonJour, in which he says,

VP [virtue perspectivism] requires that one’s first order beliefs be placed in “epistemic perspective,” where one takes note of the sources of one’s beliefs (or the first order ones, at a minimum) and of how reliable these are. Thus one’s epistemic perspective would classify a typical perceptual belief as a perceptual belief of some relevant sort, and would combine that with an assessment of the reliability of beliefs of that sort.”

See “Perspectives in Virtue Epistemology: A Reply to Dancy and BonJour,” in Axtell, *Knowledge, Belief, and Character*, p. 103. What is required to take note of such a thing? In the minimal case, surely no reflection is needed. A telling phrase here is ‘one’s epistemic perspective would classify,’ which suggests to me that the process can be automatic and may indeed be accomplished through the acquisition of dispositions to believe as opposed to the formation of beliefs or – especially – that of classificatory thoughts.

- 14 John Greco makes a plausible case that only dispositions to believe, which are not themselves beliefs, as opposed to dispositional beliefs, need be posited by Sosa here. See *Putting Skeptics in Their Place*, pp. 187–90 (this book contains much discussion of Sosa’s position and a well-developed, complementary alternative, which Greco calls “agent reliabilism”). I have developed this distinction in “Dispositional Beliefs and Dispositions to Believe,” *Nous* 28 (1994), but have been assuming here that Sosa intends to include what I prefer to call dispositions to

believe under his term “implicit belief.” If that is his intention, then the suggested revision can be made without major substantive change in his theory.

- 15 Peter D. Klein’s *Certainty: A Refutation of Scepticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981) makes a case for our knowing such skeptical hypotheses false; Fred Dretske, in, e.g., “Epistemic Operators,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970) has argued that we do not need to. For my own case that we do not need to see, e.g., *Epistemology*, ch. 6.
- 16 This is argued in my “Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief,” in Zagzebski and Fairweather, *Virtue Epistemology*.
- 17 This paper is dedicated to Ernest Sosa, from whom I have learned a great deal over many years. There are many aspects of his epistemology which it has been impossible even to begin to address here, and I am well aware that even his virtue perspectivist theory may have undergone major developments by the time this essay appears. For helpful comments on an earlier version I thank John Greco.