Do Epistemic Virtues Require a Motivation for Truth?

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Until very recently (Sosa 2015), virtue epistemology has tended to divide itself along fairly definite party lines (Axtell 1997).¹ So-called ‘reliabilists’—see, e.g., Goldman (1992); Sosa (1980, 1991)—base this subject on such cognitive capacities as visual acuity and excellence of memory; so-called ‘responsibilists’—see, e.g., Montmarquet (1993); Zagzebski (1996); Baehr (2011)—base it on such ethical qualities as open-mindedness or intellectual courage. Reliabilists, let us allow, have the advantage of appealing to characteristics of undeniable centrality to cognition but whose status as ‘virtues’—in comparison to the kind of qualities studied since Aristotle—is uncertain. By contrast, responsibilists appeal to undeniable virtues, but qualities whose importance might easily appear secondary in cognition.

Now, as a responsibilist (Montmarquet 1993, 2000), I will be favoring a truth-motivated view of the epistemic virtues and thus a ‘yes’ answer to the title question. Indeed, part of what distinguishes the ‘responsibilist’ virtues, on the view I present here, is their truth-motivation. These virtues, as I shall explain, are required both to account for moral responsibility and for knowledge. Although one must admit that epistemic capacities are not defined by their motivation and allow that these can certainly be truth-conducive, I will ultimately maintain that such capacities are only knowledge-conducive when they work against the background of suitable responsibilist virtues. We begin, though, with a short statement of the case to be made on the other side: on behalf of an unqualified ‘no’ to our question.

3.1 WHY DO EPISTEMIC VIRTUES REQUIRE A MOTIVATION FOR TRUTH?

3.1.1 Against a Motivational Requirement

What distinguishes the reliabilist virtues, one must allow, is their conduciveness to truth, their causal tendencies in this regard; and not, as we have already pointed out, that they must involve any particular motivation for truth. Thus, a well-functioning visual system tends toward the formation of accurate representations of one’s environment (thus, to true beliefs), without one’s having to be motivated in any particular way. To be sure, good
motivation could often help increase one’s accuracy, but that is not to say that it is necessary to yield truth in many, let alone in all, cases.

Next, we observe that in the case of such responsibilist favorites as open-mindedness or intellectual courage, the reliabilist need not deny that these are virtues or that they can be characterized in truth-motivational terms, but will hold that what makes them epistemic virtues has to do with their objective truth-conduciveness and not their subjective motivation. If, for instance, it were demonstrated that open-mindedness did not conduce to truth, the appeal to this quality as a virtue, or just as something that is good to have, would apparently lose its point. Open-mindedness would not be producing anything of epistemic value.

Nor, from the reliabilist’s point of view, is truth the sole end toward which the epistemic virtues might be thought distinctively to lead. Riggs (2003) and Kvanvig (2003) propose such potentially richer ends as wisdom or understanding. Of course, these ends are hardly unrelated to truth. The present point, however, would be that neither wisdom nor understanding require the subject to be motivated to seek these ends. It could be, for instance, that wisdom comes to those who do not seek it, as the greatest wisdom is said to have come to the Buddha, by receptivity, by passive acceptance rather than active motivation.

### 3.1.2 For a Motivational Requirement

On the account I have defended (Montmarquet 1993, 2000) epistemic virtues are various forms of truth-directed effort, distinguished from each other mainly by the different types of adverse motivations they help to overcome. So, for example, open-mindedness differs from intellectual courage in being struggles against quite different biases: one pridefully favoring our own beliefs; the other, fearfully bowing to the beliefs of others. Likewise, attentiveness struggles against such distractions as commonly block even the most necessary attention to our immediate situation and its possible perils and uncertainties. What unites these, however, as epistemic virtues is, first, that they consist in making suitable efforts. In that sense, they are directly responsive to the will. Thus, one can be asked, and even required, to ‘keep an open mind’ but also to ‘pay close attention’. By contrast, at any given time, I cannot be required to display excellence of memory or perception, but only to ‘try my best’ (which is a good responsibilist quality: again, making a suitable effort). What unites these virtues is, second, that they are efforts at something of epistemic value: namely, truth. Such epistemic vices as closed-mindedness or inattention are also, as I conceive them, subject to our control—but of course these are not efforts at truth, but failures in that regard. Otherwise put, they are marked by a culpable absence of truth-motivation—but not, I would suppose, a presence of falsity-directed motivation. As will emerge in the course of our discussion, on this view the truth-motivational character of the epistemic virtues is a consequence of what is more basic: that they are truth-directed expressions of the will and thus something for which one is responsible.

### 3.2 EPISTEMIC AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

My strategy, next, is to argue that responsibilist, truth-motivated virtues get us something that reliabilist virtues do not: responsibilist, truth-motivated virtues help us explain epistemic responsibility, which in turn helps us explain moral responsibility. First, we point out that responsibility for one’s beliefs—praiseworthiness or blameworthiness in this regard—centrally involves exemplifying, or failing to exemplify, relevant qualities of responsibilist epistemic character. Thus, a culpable failure to listen to instructions, resulting in a mistaken belief (say) ‘that nothing was said about what we had to do if that red light started blinking’ would involve a blameworthy failure on the side of attentiveness. Insofar as the latter quality is subject to the
will, one can be blamed for failures regarding it. By contrast, failures in regard to epistemic capacities, like vision or memory, which are not immediately subject to the will, exhibit ‘deficiencies’, but nothing for which one can be directly blamed—intellectually or morally. If I am unresponsive to a command that I cannot comprehend, at most I am to blame for some earlier failure to prepare myself. However, unless we are to have some type of regress, at some previous point my intellectual failure must have been direct.

Now, one does not want to claim that all cases of morally wrongful conduct involve epistemic irresponsibility. For we need to allow, surely, that there are cases of morally culpable weakness of will: of failures to act in keeping with one’s relevant beliefs, failures whose culpability is not to be diagnosed in terms of other beliefs culpably held by the subject. The idea, rather, would be that when we are not weak, our moral culpability is rooted in some more fundamental epistemic blameworthiness. Thus consider what would not seem on its face a very likely candidate for epistemic irresponsibility: Iago’s destruction of Othello. For all Iago’s moral faults, it must still be acknowledged that Iago believes that his insidious acts are justified because he believes such things as that Othello has not given him the position he deserved. These beliefs, to be sure, are shaped by Iago’s bad moral character; yet ultimately, I think we must say, he is to blame not for that bad moral character itself, but for allowing it to shape his relevant, poorly grounded beliefs—which fault is in the first instance epistemic. It is a matter, at bottom, of Iago’s having a sufficiently weak regard for truth that he allows his vicious desires to shape and even determine his beliefs. Many of us harbor morally unpleasant desires, but have the epistemic responsibility (integrity) required to resist a least some of their worst influences. Nor, finally, can the claim be that even with his beliefs, Iago should have refrained from his hateful acts: without some change of belief, he has no apparent reason to so refrain.

3.3 FOR THE SAKE OF TRUTH

Before proceeding to the crucial case of knowledge, I want to clarify certain features of how the epistemic virtues are, and are not, ‘truth-motivated’ by considering stances taken by two leading epistemic virtue motivationalists: one emanating from Linda Zagzebski and one from Jason Baehr.

In her highly influential study, *Virtues of the Mind* (1996), Zagzebski characterizes the moral virtues as “acquired excellences” involving both a “characteristic motivation” to produce a given end, and “reliable success” in bringing about that end (1996: 137). The intellectual virtues will be, in her view, a subcategory of the moral virtues (1996: 203), distinguished in that way by their characteristic motivation for knowledge or for “cognitive contact with reality” (1996: 167). Finally and most importantly, we note that, for Zagzebski, this intrinsically good motivation for knowledge—and thus for truth—adds to the value of the true beliefs it helps one to attain. We have, then, another feather for the truth-motivationalist’s cap: at least the beginnings of an answer to the ancient question of how knowledge is superior to mere true belief (1996: 300).

Next, we take note of Jason Baehr’s distinctive approach to the responsibilist epistemic virtues, in which their primary role lies in a characterization of “personal intellectual worth”—itself an aspect of something more general, “personal worth simpliciter” (Baehr 2011: 96). According to the latter, a person is judged ‘good’ depending on whether she is “positively oriented” toward what is good. This positive orientation, he adds (2011: 99), requires that one must be concerned with what is good “for its own sake.” One possessed, then, of “personal intellectual worth” will be oriented toward what is “intellectually good” for its own sake. Thus, it turns out that an intellectual virtue—as distinctively contributing
to its possessor’s intellectual worth (2011: 102)—will have to involve not just some form of orientation toward truth, but a valuing of this end (again) for its own sake.

However, if this means that one is less epistemically virtuous for not pursuing truth ultimately for its own sake, I find it questionable. If a Copernicus seeks to know scientific truths concerning the structure of the cosmos, ultimately to ‘glorify God’, does that make him epistemically less virtuous? I think not. Even if the Assistant Royal Astronomer is motivated to do excellent work, hoping for a promotion, it is not clear that his good work—which does exemplify the various epistemic virtues—is any the less virtuous for that. What would detract, of course, is when his aims lead him to ‘cut corners’, to exhibit some other notable shortfall in epistemic virtue—whatever his ultimate purposes may be. If the Assistant spends his time not doing astronomy at all, but simply ingratiating himself at the royal court, hoping for promotion by those means, that is different.

Let us try to extend the present argument a bit. Suppose that the Assistant Astronomer’s ultimate motivations are not just careerist, but epistemically vicious: he does good work, hoping to get a position from which he can impede the future progress of the field (perhaps he believes astronomical progress a threat to his religion). Now, the main difference this makes is that the subject, in his final motivations, goes from being epistemically indifferent to downright vicious—but the immediate structure of what he is doing remains virtuous and well motivated; for he acts, whether for careerist or vicious motives, in the immediate interests of truth. If great care is needed, great care he supplies; if he must be tireless in searching the skies, tireless he is. These qualities he exhibits in the immediate interests of truth—as much as does the careerist. Both, I want to say, are epistemically virtuous in their acts and their immediate motivations—but not of course in their longer-termed goals.

### 3.4 KNOWLEDGE, VIRTUE, AND EPISTEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

We turn to this important question yet facing us. If we grant that suitable epistemic motivation (as effort) is required for epistemic responsibility—will it also be the case that such responsibility, and thus such motivation, is required for knowledge? Here a convenient starting point is afforded by the mostly reliabilist account of knowledge given by John Greco in *Achieving Knowledge* (2010). Now, for us, Greco’s most relevant concern is with cases such as that of Laurence BonJour’s (1980) “Samantha” whose exceedingly reliable powers of clairvoyance reveal to her that the President of the U.S. is in New York City, despite abundant news reports to the contrary. These reports, unbeknownst to Samantha, are actually very unreliable. She (reliably) believes that the President is in New York, but may be judged epistemically irresponsible in doing so. By Greco’s lights, then, her belief’s irresponsibility disqualifies it as knowledge: epistemic irresponsibility is able to defeat otherwise acceptable claims to knowledge (2010: 167). In short, for Greco, knowledge requires that one’s belief both be reliably and responsibly formed (2010: 42)—which means, in the case of the latter, formed in a “properly motivated” way—i.e., one resulting from “intellectual dispositions” one manifests when one is “motivated to believe the truth” (2010: 167).

Any such claim, however, is likely to excite either of two quite different responses. Hardcore reliabilists may protest that it is ad hoc, that it introduces an alien element, and thus theoretical incoherence, into an otherwise non-responsibilist account. At the same time, non-reliabilists may wonder how one restricts such a fundamental notion as epistemic responsibility to this apparently limited role; for even though epistemic responsibility has been nominally made a requirement for all cases of knowledge, it only seems to make a telling difference, for Greco, in this one type of case. Thus Greco (2000), we know, argued...
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strenuously against Zagzebski’s (1996, 2000) account of ordinary perceptual knowledge, which had required that the knowing subject display suitable truth-motivation. Moreover, in his (2002: 300) he treats the kind of epistemic motivation required for knowledge as something quite minimal, common to cases not just of perception but to the knowledge-claims made on behalf of children and non-human creatures, both of which he supports.

3.5 ANIMAL KNOWLEDGE

Let us pursue the line of thought suggested by Greco’s overall position—an attempt to allow for both ‘animal knowledge’ and ‘epistemic irresponsibility defeaters’. Suppose that I am a night watchman on break, preoccupied with my smart phone and oblivious to the red, blinking warning light that has just gone off. Fritz, my canine assistant, who has been trained to respond to that same light, is paying no more attention than I, being preoccupied with the dinner he is greedily devouring. I am, let us stipulate, epistemically irresponsible in my failure to recognize the alert signal; Fritz, let us say, is guilty of a ‘lapse’—but cannot be found ‘blameworthy’ or ‘epistemically irresponsible’.

For his part, Greco will allow that since Fritz can be ascribed minimal motivation for truth, Fritz’s knowledge-claims are not in general impaired by his incapacity for ‘irresponsibility’. The first problem with this stance, however, is that it proves too much, for it would imply that human agents (such as BonJour’s “Samantha”) are not irresponsible after all; for they do exhibit minimal truth-oriented motivation—even when seemingly they are being irresponsible. If this motivation, in Fritz’s case, is implied by the very formation of belief, so it should be for Samantha.

Of course, Greco could still claim that whereas minimal motivation for truth is normally enough to support knowledge-claims, the latter can be defeated in the case of beings sophisticated enough to be judged epistemically irresponsible. My reply is this. Consider two Samanthas, one whose knowledge-claims are defeated by epistemic irresponsibility, the other whose powers of critical reflection and the like have been taken away by a sudden, unperceived brain event. Again, both arrive at the same belief based on the same clairvoyance; but it is surely counter-intuitive to suppose that the second Samantha ‘knows’ what the first only correctly believes. Can an unused capacity put one at an epistemic disadvantage relative to one who simply lacks that capacity altogether? If Samantha-I fails to know because she has ignored available contrary evidence, why should we not suppose that Samantha-II likewise fails to know because she is (excusably) ignorant of this same contrary evidence? Are they not, so to speak, in the same ‘epistemic position’, both with respect to the President’s location and the evidence apparently contradicting this fact? The view I take here—that epistemic responsibility, grounded in suitable responsibilist virtues, is a necessary (even if it not a sufficient) condition of knowledge—differs from my 1993, which mainly argued that such responsibility is not enough to support the kind of objective justification knowledge requires. What that work did not adequately consider was the role of epistemic irresponsibility as a knowledge defeater.

3.6 PERCEPTION

The case of perception, however, has long been a stumbling block for defenders of anything like our responsibilist/truth-motivationalist view of knowledge. What, specifically, does our view have to say about this perilous subject? I begin with what is often a safe strategy, trying to put the other side on the strategic defense. Why is it, I will ask, that not every ‘representational state’ (however accurate; however truth-indicative, however reliably formed) can be termed
‘virtuous’, let alone a case of knowledge, without seriously over-extending the reach of these terms? Rain in a rain gauge (or just the state of the overhanging clouds) may accurately reflect the recent rainfall—without speaking of the gauge, its state, or the clouds, as ‘epistemically virtuous’. Information, as one might put this, is everywhere and in all sorts of places ready to be extracted by human cognizers. But the mere existence of such sources—whether in rain gauges or within human perceptual systems—only becomes knowledge, or a candidate for knowledge, I want to say, when they are in some sense ‘taken up’ by an epistemic subject.

What, then, do I suppose is this ‘taking up’? Knowledge, it is natural to reply, minimally requires belief, something rain gauges apparently quite lack. But, then again, what is belief? For David Armstrong—a founding father of reliabilism (1968, 1973)—belief is modeled precisely by devices like thermometers—not a far cry, certainly, from rain gauges. So there is a problem yet to be worked out, here for reliabilism, but also potentially for responsibilism as well. As we have already seen regarding Greco’s view, it is not clear that giving a mechanism some kind of minimal subjective orientation toward truth or accuracy makes a significant difference—if that is all one is adding. Most importantly for me: if a rain gauge were capable of such motivation, even if this meant it now had ‘beliefs’, this would not mean that it could be judged irresponsible when it ‘ignored’ relevant evidence.

We are back, then, to familiar ground. Minimally, ‘taking up’ must involve the use of such capacities as would characterize being responsible for her beliefs. More accurately, insofar as it is contributory to knowledge, ‘taking up’ must involve the responsible employment of these capacities. But now let us consider in this light a counterexample proposed by Christopher Gowans (2010), in criticism of Napier’s 2008, which had stressed the importance of virtuous motivation even in perception. Gowans imagines a group of people who are stunned to observe a bolt of lightning striking and destroying a tree. He remarks that surely these observers have “just acquired some perceptual knowledge to the effect that something very bright and loud just struck that tree, and this will be the case whether or not they have epistemic motivations to be aware of their environment” (2010: 590).

For my part, I will certainly allow that the lightning-witnessing subject, first, has certain information, that he is in a certain representational state concerning relevant features of his environment. I will also allow that he can access this information much in the way that one might access any other such state, including the level of a rain gauge. But I will then submit that it is only when he ‘takes up’ this information that he enters into a genuine state of knowing. In the present case, it seems that he has been asked what he ‘knows’ has just happened, and answers—with suitable caution, a virtue—that “something very loud and bright” has occurred. This, then, can be judged a case of knowledge precisely because and insofar as it involves suitable responsibility.

Nor are such cases unusual. Experience leads one to store quite specific informational contents. Queried, and anxious not to be in error, we report something fairly cautious like ‘I feel in some pain’. To estimate the extent or exact quality of the painfulness would be difficult, and apt to produce considerable chance of error. So, seeking not to have one’s claim to knowledge defeated by such inaccuracy, one ‘takes up’ the stored information rather carefully.

3.7 RESPONSIBILITY AND TRUTH-MOTIVATION: REFINING THE POSITION

I have defended the general ideal of truth-motivational epistemic virtues, but in the context of a broader commitment to epistemic responsibility. Here, I try to pin down my theoretical commitments a little more definitely, first, by way of sharpening the difference between
my ‘responsibilism’ and Greco’s ‘motivationalism’. On this score, I emphasize that, for me, what stands in the way of Fritz’s knowledge-claims is the insufficiency not of his motivation, but of his underlying lack of capacity to control the extent and direction of that motivation. Certainly, it is owing to that presumed insufficiency that even the most alert of canines cannot be viewed as an epistemically responsible being. My epistemic responsibility differs from Fritz’s, however, also in this marked way. Mine is fundamentally global—or, as I prefer to say, ‘executive’—I am responsible, first and foremost, for taking overall stock of my situation, assessing what (if any) special efforts need to be put forth, and also for assessing possible changes to that situation. Fritz responds to his environment, but he has no such executive capacities—or none, at least, that are sufficiently developed or subject to his ‘control’—that we can hold him responsible for their use or misuse.

I turn, next, to a theorist whose position is significantly closer to the one taken here. Recall that one of Linda Zagzebski’s continuing concerns (1996, 2000, 2013) has been to justify what is in effect a ‘truth-motivational’ requirement on knowledge. In her 2014, she expands on this idea:

What I mean by epistemic conscientiousness is the reflective awareness of the desire for truth, and the reflective attempt to satisfy that desire as well as one can. I suggest that knowledge, in at least one of its senses, is the conscientious satisfaction of the desire for truth. I have argued that this definition does not rule out easy knowledge obtained from perception, memory, or testimony, but it does rule out true belief that is unconscientiously acquired through the exercise of intellectual vice or disregard of the rules of conscientious reasoning.

(Zagzebski 2014: 9)

For my part, I would not disagree with any of these contentions—so much as want a change, at the very least, of emphasis to include not just virtuous motivation but epistemic responsibility. Now, if there is a second difference to be noted here, it would be this. Epistemic responsibility, for me, is less a ‘search for truth’—I accept this, but as an ideal—than something quite restricted and closely tied to our moral and other practical responsibilities: it is in the first instance a matter of being sufficiently alert, sufficiently attentive to one’s situation to avoid the kind of ignorance and deficient regard for truth (recall Iago) as are apt to produce some very nasty results. The achievements of an Einstein answer to our ideals; the failures of an Iago, to our responsibilities—both moral and epistemic.

3.8 ACTION, KNOWLEDGE, AND RESPONSIBILITY

We even have a fallback position, which is this. Even if knowledge were somehow compatible with epistemic irresponsibility, such knowledge would not be ‘actionable’. One would not be entitled, morally or epistemically, to act upon it. Thus, it would be greatly deprived of value—whether or not we choose to elevate its status to ‘knowledge’. Suppose that, other things being in place, knowledge ought to be a sufficient basis for (human) action. That is to say, if I know that a certain gun is not loaded, that is a sufficient basis of my performing some given act—say, letting a child hold it—supposing that there is no other objection to it (e.g., an objection even to letting a child handle an unloaded gun).

We consider once again, in the light of the above, BonJour’s Samantha case, but now view this as a case of knowledge that is compatible with epistemic irresponsibility. Thus, we suppose that Samantha attains a kind of automatic perceptual knowledge, based on the
normally reliable operation of her clairvoyance. But the question is whether she is entitled thereafter to act on this knowledge, as long as she is continuing to ignore seemingly relevant counter-evidence. Suppose that the President’s being in New York would have signaled that he is going to prevent a merger of companies Acme and Bell, making immediate sale of their stock very advisable. If Samantha is a fund manager, responsible for many people’s life-savings, should she sell her holdings? Does her ‘knowledge’ entitle her to take that kind of action? I would simply contend that if she cannot responsibly believe in the veracity of this finding, she cannot responsibly act on it. So even if what she has is ‘knowledge’, it is not actionable knowledge.

It may be replied that sometimes one must act without the luxury of further thought and perhaps the present situation qualifies as such an ‘emergency’. But what that means is that sometimes knowledge is not necessary to entitle one to suitable action—not that knowledge would fail to be sufficient.

Of course, the reliabilist’s last line of defense might be to maintain that knowledge is not a sufficient basis of action, to allow that, depending on the circumstances and context, more than knowledge may be required. This, however, is surely a major concession. For if knowledge without epistemic responsibility is not, by concession, actionable—this seriously undercuts its value. Without the responsibilist, motivationally driven epistemic virtues, we remain, it could be said, normatively paralyzed.

3.9 SOSA ON KNOWLEDGE, TRUTH-MOTIVATION, AND EPISTEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

Ernest Sosa has been one of the founders of virtue epistemology (Sosa 1980), but not usually a friend (1991) of the kind of motivationalist, responsibilist approach taken here. In his more recent work (2007, 2009, 2011, 2015), Sosa has continued to explore the issues running through the present study, challenging the responsibilist with ever more sophisticated forms of reliabilism; perhaps one could even say: tantalizing responsibilists with views ever closer to their own.

Here, we begin with his classic distinction between ‘animal’ and ‘reflective’ knowledge. The former, let us recall, is comprehended by this triad: it requires (2007: 24) the truth or “accuracy” of one’s belief; its “adroitness” (whether it manifests suitable epistemic abilities—i.e., virtues); and its being “apt” (whether it has the first of these because it has the second). Such knowledge, however, Sosa admits to be fundamentally limited in its value, comparing it to getting something right in the dark, but hardly knowing that one has (2009: 142). We overcome, or begin to overcome, this limitation in moving from animal to “reflective” knowledge—which engages one’s higher faculties. In reflective knowledge, one’s belief is both apt and aptly believed to be so (2009: 75). Thus, Samantha may have animal knowledge that the President is in N.Y.C., but lack reflective knowledge that this is so, supposing that she does not aptly believe in the reliability of her clairvoyance. However, Sosa there (2009: 138) maintains that such “reflective knowledge” would not have to involve anything more than reliabilist virtues. We may wonder whether mere reliabilist virtues can ever yield epistemic responsibility (whether, for instance, Samantha might not have a reliable mechanism for determining the reliability of her clairvoyance but not know that she did)—but let us defer judgment, awaiting treatment of Sosa’s most recent (2015) attempt to fashion a “new” virtue epistemology in which notions of “judgment” and thereby “agency” are central.

Now, judgment, for Sosa, differs importantly from merely opting for the truth of a given thing—as when one guesses, hoping to express what is true, but is not at all sure. Judgment, in a strict sense, involves affirmation in the endeavor to respond “aptly” (2015: 66). Thus,
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Judgment will be an intentional act whereby one sets out to have, or express, one’s knowledge. Otherwise put, it is an act of conscious knowing (when successful) and at least consciously attempted knowledge (when not).

Judgment, then, will be truth-motivated—but not, I think, necessarily epistemically responsible (consider, for instance, many a learned but highly prejudicial judgment rendered at the witch trials of the seventeenth century). A more challenging case, however, is provided by what Sosa calls the “lodestar” (2015: 65) of his account: that of a fully apt judgment (performance). This draws on his (2011) notion of “knowing full well” which means undertaking to arrive at an apt belief, through the ‘guidance’ of an apt belief in the reliability of one’s relevant powers. Such knowledge Sosa instructively compares (2015: 69) to a basketball player not just making a shot based on his ability (the analogue of animal knowledge); not just based on the latter plus a reliable confidence in that ability (reflective knowledge); but choosing that place to shoot based on the latter knowledge (knowing full well). Using this concept, Sosa goes on to claim that such knowledge as Samantha and BonJour’s other clairvoyants would lack is not animal knowledge, but knowledge full well (2015: 74).

We now ask a fundamental question of our own, however. Will fully apt performances (ones of “knowing full well”) necessarily exhibit epistemic responsibility? If so, we welcome Sosa to our club. Knowledge in its fullest sense will require, as I have been contending, epistemic responsibility. If not, if even knowing full well does not rule out epistemic irresponsibility, then it cannot do the job Sosa wants it to do in BonJour-type cases of epistemic irresponsibility: namely, explain our intuition that the subject lacks knowledge.

3.10 SUMMARY

Sosa’s more recent work, then, may argue in favor of something closer to a truth-motivational approach to virtue epistemology—at least insofar as it highlights notions of “judgment,” “agency,” and “full aptness.” But, of course, insofar as Sosa remains committed to strictly reliabilist accounts of animal and reflective knowledge, this would not be true. I have, at any rate, argued my own case that both knowledge and moral responsibility require the truth-motivational account of such epistemic virtues. To be sure, there remain truth-conducive epistemic capacities that are not motivational. Such capacities, however, if I have been at all right in my discussion of knowledge and epistemic responsibility, are only exercised in a knowledge-conducive way when they are exercised in what would be judged as a responsible way. These capacities, in other words, are only knowledge-conducive when exercised through the responsible, truth-motivational virtues.

(Related Chapters: 1, 2, 4, 8, 22.)

NOTES

1 Aspects of Sosa’s ‘new virtue epistemology’ are discussed near the end of this chapter.
2 In his (2014), Baehr argues that knowledge is consistent with epistemic viciousness. He imagines, for instance, a scientist who sees (knows) evidence as disconfirming his theory, but still (unvirtuously) would like this evidence to be false. In part, I can agree: knowledge does not require one’s ultimate ends to be virtuous; but in part I do not agree, for these ends do not detract from the virtuousness of the scientist’s perceptual beliefs. Perception itself I treat in section 3.6.
3 Here I pass over Sosa’s earlier (2001) objections specifically to a truth-motivated virtue epistemology, noting only that his later work, to some extent, moves closer to a truth-motivationalist position. For critical discussion of Sosa’s earlier view, see Fairweather (2001).
REFERENCES


