

## 2

# REASON, VIRTUE, AND KNOWLEDGE

Simon Blackburn

### 1. Setting the Scene

My aim in this essay is first to clarify what any position worth calling “virtue epistemology” ought to hold. I then want to explore some of the relations between such an approach to epistemology and two other doctrines. One is a minimalist or deflationist conception of truth. The other is a generally expressivist approach to values and virtues, and hence to rationality.

It is, I believe, a very attractive idea to take what can be said about moral virtue and see how it looks when applied to intellectual or cognitive virtues. If truth or perhaps knowledge or wisdom is the goal of intellectual endeavour, then it might be regarded as playing the parallel role to *eudaimonia* as the goal of living. And then we should expect any account of the traits necessary to achieve the one as quite strictly parallel to the account of the traits, the virtues, necessary to achieve the other.

Furthermore, there are some fairly immediate points of contact. Fair-mindedness, courage, judgment, and experience can be involved in the cognitive domain just as they are in the practical domain. We might reflect, as well, that faults in the cognitive domain, such as that of being too timid or too stubborn or insensitive or prone to fantasy, would directly reflect, or indeed be part of, wider moral faults. And on some accounts of ethics, all moral faults are at bottom not only analogous to cognitive faults, but are actually identical with them. If to know the good is to love it, then moral defect becomes a species of cognitive defect. And it could in return be suggested that many cognitive defects are at bottom moral and that only cognitive defects that are beyond our control, such as those caused by unavoidable external or internal obstacles to inquiry, fail to qualify as moral defects.

However, if virtue epistemology is modeled upon virtue ethics, then I think we need more than these relatively straightforward points of contact. In particular, I suppose that, like virtue ethics, if it really is a distinct approach to ethics, virtue epistemology will need to defend a certain kind of priority. Consider the following equations:

- (1) An action produces (or tends to produce, or is such as to produce) the greatest balance of benefit over harm of any alternative if and only if it is the action that would be performed by a virtuous agent.
- (2) An action is the right action to perform in the circumstances if and only if a virtuous agent would perform it in the circumstances.

Some people attached to these equations might advance them as undercutting anything distinctive about virtue ethics. The equivalences, in other words, give us a fix on what is true of a virtuous agent, and that is all. So the consequentialist critic would be supposing that we have, antecedently, a conception of the balance of benefits over harms, and in the light of that we can use the first equivalence to define what the virtuous agent does. We might suppose that we have an independent grip on what it is to be happy, just as we have with regard to pain and misery. Then the promotion of one and diminution of the other is indeed a self-standing aim, understood independently of virtue and available to act as at least one test for when a quality is indeed a virtue. The deontological critic would similarly say that we have, antecedently, a conception of the right action to perform in given circumstances, and read from the second equivalence that this is what the virtuous agent does. Thus we might hold that some such test as Kant's gives us an entrée into the notion of the right, after which we can indeed select as virtues traits that gain expression in right behavior. The *Oxford Dictionary* supposes this, defining virtue in the moral context as "Conformity of life and conduct with the principles of morality; voluntary observance of the recognized moral laws or standards of right conduct; abstention on moral grounds from any form of wrong-doing or vice." Here the concepts of wrong-doing and vice come first, and virtue is understood in terms of them.

The virtue ethicist can respond, of course, by denying the equations outright, either in these simple forms or in any more complex forms. The more interesting reaction is to accept them, but to read the equations the other way round, or "right to left." She will say that we have a conception of what virtue would have us do, and in the light of that we fashion our concept of the balance of benefit over harm, or a concept of what it is right to do.

So, for instance, when Hume says that personal merit, or virtue, consists in the presence of qualities "useful or agreeable to ourselves or others," this type of virtue ethicist need not disagree. But she has to insist that this does not amount to a definition or explanation of what a virtue is in terms that can be independently understood. She insists, instead, that our concept of what is useful or agreeable is partly or wholly derivative from our conception of what living virtuously requires. If Hume intended his formula as a consequentialist *account* of how some trait gets to be on this list of the virtues, then this virtue theorist disagrees, insisting instead that whatever truth there may be in the account presupposes an independent conception of virtue. A key element in the virtue ethicist's response will be that "usefulness" or "agreeableness" or, more generally, happiness itself is to be understood primarily in terms of living virtuously. If this seems too pious, then perhaps the claim will be that while false or hollow happiness may coincide with failures of virtue, this is what real

or true happiness consists in. This, supposedly, is why Aristotle's invocation of *eudaimonia* is not a consequentialist departure from single-minded virtue ethics.

In the recent literature, some philosophers seem to want to call themselves virtue epistemologists without accepting the priority I have identified. They may want to allow the priority of other notions, notably that of truth, and simply confine themselves to emphasizing the value of an alignment of belief and truth, or of the traits that contribute to that alignment. Or, they may want to insist that "everything comes at once," so that there is a circle of terms none of which can be understood antecedently to the others. For the purpose of this essay I do not want to legislate. We can simply distinguish strong virtue theories, which hold the "right to left" priority, from weak virtue theories that have no such commitment. The problem for weak theorists will be that of finding a distinctive voice, enabling them to distinguish themselves from simple reliabilists.<sup>1</sup>

The strong virtue theorist's priority is, of course, surprising to some. In the moral case, it might seem to face the disadvantage that it leaves no account of why a quality *does* get on the list of virtues. The standard Aristotelian move against this objection is to cite the parallel with flourishing in plants and animals. We know what it is for a primrose or a tiger to flourish, and the same is supposedly true of ourselves. The virtues then become those traits that make up or contribute to human *eudaimonia*. This flirts with the same danger as presented by utilitarianism, which is that all the work is done by the idea of promoting flourishing, with the virtues just tagging along. So in order not to collapse into a kind of utilitarianism the virtue theorist needs not only that human flourishing is strictly analogous to animal or plant flourishing, but also that it distinctively includes certain ways of acting (justly, charitably, and so forth). It is not at all obvious that the combination is stable.<sup>2</sup> Trees often flourish by making life impossible for other trees, and the same seems to be true of human beings. But this is not our present concern.

How does the parallel dialectic emerge in epistemology? What would the equivalences parallel to those above look like? I am going to suggest three. One is concerned with probability or justification, a second with knowledge, and the third with truth.

- (3) A proposition is probable (justified) in a circumstance *C* if and only if an epistemically virtuous agent in *C* would have confidence in it.
- (4) A true proposition is known to be true by an agent *S* in circumstance *C* if and only if *S* in *C* exhibits epistemic virtues in accepting it.
- (5) A proposition is true if and only if an epistemically virtuous agent would accept it, if he exercised the virtues appropriately.

Read right to left, these are in ascending order of ambitiousness. It is not so very radical to associate probability or justification with a virtue, such as rationality in distributing confidence. It is probably more radical to think of capturing knowledge in a similar way, and most radical to aim at the concept of truth itself.

Clearly, as they stand each of these is very rough and could be refined much further. For example, (3) could be given a more quantitative formulation, matching de-

degrees of probability to degrees of confidence. (4) would need refinement to protect against the fairly obvious counterexamples deriving from misleading circumstances in which virtue leads the epistemic agent astray and so on. (5) would need similar refinement, perhaps leading in the direction of Peirce's conception of what virtue (in his hands, scientific method) would lead to if pursued in some presumed long run. (5) would also need some work to make it relate satisfactorily to (4). The difficulty is that if truth is described in terms of what a virtuous agent would accept, knowledge cannot be similarly defined on pain of eliminating the distinction between the two. This can be seen because if we try substituting the equivalence in (5) for the occurrence of 'true' in (4), we seem close to collapsing knowledge and truth. There is some space, however, between what a virtuous agent *does* accept, which is what is mentioned in (4), and what he or she *would* accept, which determines (5). The combination would deliver the idea that truth is what you would get to by investigating virtuously, whereas knowledge is what you have got when you *have* investigated virtuously. Whether this is exactly the right gap between truth and knowledge is clearly disputable. Perhaps its only merit is that it does at least reflect the idea that there is normally no gap between aiming at knowledge and aiming at truth. A final qualification concerns the "circumstances" mentioned in (3) and (4): What a virtuous agent would accept will often not depend upon external or objective circumstances so much as upon her internal theories and beliefs, or the circumstances insofar as she is capable of appreciating them. Circumstances are, as it were, intentional.

However doubtful or attractive the equivalences are, there is still the lurking question of priority, and it is this upon which I want to focus. Just as with ethics, there will be theorists who suppose that even if the equivalences can be spruced up, they merely tell us what epistemic virtue requires, given antecedent conceptions of knowledge, probability, or truth. Virtue would be identified in terms of aligning our beliefs with the truth, which is why (5) is more or less plausible. Justification means adjusting our confidences to probabilities, explaining (3). And knowledge arises when we accept propositions in circumstances that require their acceptance, which explains what is right about (4). Read like this, the equivalences are too weak to suggest any distinctive approach to epistemology. A virtue epistemology this weak is only a fig leaf for reliabilism.

## 2. Justified True Belief

Clearly the equivalence (4) is close to the familiar "justified true belief" (JTB) account of knowledge, and with some versions of the refining I suggested in the last section, would quickly turn into it. And then the question of priority is certainly on the table, with classical JTB theorists claiming that knowledge is what you get when your true beliefs are justified, and rivals claiming that justification is only identifiable as that which turns true belief into knowledge. Here, the JTB theorists are the virtue theorists, since they take the notion of virtue or justification as prior to that of knowledge, which is to be described or defined in terms of it. The rival priority sees

justification as itself only identifiable in terms of a prior conception of “whatever it takes” to turn true belief into knowledge, here taken as the primitive.

But (4) need not be refined in just that way, and there are issues at stake in so treating it. Everything will depend on how the notion of a virtue maps onto the notion of a justification. It is indeed epistemically virtuous in some cases to be able to *produce* justification for a particular proposition *p*, by citing supporting propositions *q*, *r* . . . And it is virtuous in more cases to be able to *recognize* such justifications when they are provided. But it ought to be highly contentious to claim what I would regard as false, namely that epistemic virtue is *exhausted* by such abilities. One thread in the meaning of “virtue” is just that of a power or efficacious quality, and it is quite open to us to privilege other powers than sensitivity to relations of propositional confirmation. One virtue we like in guides and informants is the ability to *get things right*, or sheer reliability. And reliability cannot be reduced to sensitivity to confirmation relations, for two reasons. First, such sensitivity is not sufficient for reliability: At the very least, it presupposes that the evidential propositions are reliably believed. And second, it is not necessary, because reliability given by perceptual mechanisms and memory is not a matter of sensitivity to evidence and inference.

I suspect that philosophers have been slow to recognize the need for both elements because of combative labels like “externalism” and “internalism,” with the implication that there is a single choice to be made. The externalist then insists on the way knowledge or justification depends upon whether, perhaps fortuitously, we have the right relations to the realities we are describing. The internalist stresses the need for right reason in handling the inferential relations among the descriptions. The obvious, peaceable remark is that the well-tuned agent needs both. It is absurd to see a happy relationship to the reality as any kind of *rival* to sensitivity to propositional confirmation. It is a complementary part of what makes up epistemic virtue. At first sight reliability is of more concern in cases like direct perceptual awareness; sensitivity to confirmation relations is more immediately visible in the scientist or the detective or the judge.

In his exploration of the concepts of experience and justification, McDowell cautions us against a tempting dualism at this point. “Experience,” we might think, is one thing; propositional justification, or justification “within the space of reasons,” is another. If we think like this, he warns us, the contribution of the world to our thinking will be a “brute impact from the exterior,” and such brute impacts, while they may *exculpate* our arriving at some beliefs, cannot *justify* those beliefs: “in effect, the idea of the Given offers exculpations where we wanted justifications.”<sup>3</sup> The idea, I take it, is that we are not to blame if, as the recipients of some brute impact from the exterior, we end up thinking whatever we do, under the causal influence so provided. But neither have we entered the realm of justification: McDowell’s comparison is with someone swept to a place by a tornado, who is then neither justified nor to blame if significance attaches to his being there. But, if it is essential to our self-conception that we are justified even when we form simple perceptual beliefs, an account of what is going on that cannot deliver that is thereby refuted.

Whatever may be wrong with talk of a “Given,” it is hard to believe that this diagnosis reveals it. Responding to a causal impact by coming to believe something about its origin, it seems to me, is not just something that could stand as an “exculpation” when things are going wrong. Done as a habit, it shows the agent to have a virtue, a power or ability to get things right (being swept along by tornadoes shows no such virtue). Consider the familiar case of proprioception. Here, under the “brute impact” of postures of our bodies, themselves causing signals in muscles and nerves, we acquire the ability to judge, unhesitatingly and rightly, where our hands or feet are. That ability is a virtue—someone without it suffers from a lack or deficiency, and one that could imperil their health or survival. We may, if we wish, say that the belief that my hand is at the back of my head “lacks justification,” meaning that I can offer nothing to say why I believe it, except that it is true. But that does not stop us from saying that in forming it as I did, I exercised a distinctive virtue, indeed arguably the cardinal epistemic virtue, namely that of getting it right.

Although he makes much of it, I do not think the issue over justification is central to McDowell’s overall project of showing that conceptual capacities are drawn on “in” experience. So far as I can see, the point that the right kind of receptivity to “brute impacts” shows a virtue is quite compatible with saying that even the most primitive level of experience or consciousness is already partly the work of conceptual capacities. This larger doctrine has its own attractions, although it gets into notorious difficulty with animal experience. It is certainly plausible to think, in the case of proprioception, that the first thing, as it were, that enters consciousness is an awareness *that*, rather than some more basic experience that just sits there waiting to be taken one way or another. But the attractions of the doctrine will have to be put a different way. For there need be nothing wrong with the idea that a correct response to a “brute impact” or a brute given exhibits virtue. This is so whether or not the impact or the given is now thought of as itself determining an element of consciousness, or regarded simply as a causal element reliably giving rise to the (conceptual) denizens of consciousness, such as judgments.

When an agent exhibits virtue we can perfectly well say that *she* is justified. It is not that her *belief* is justified by a different belief. It is just that this sensitivity to the way of things is exactly what justification amounts to; for example, when you respond correctly to your hand being behind your head. The same is true when you recognize your friend or a voice, or the spatial configuration of the landscape around you, or in any other simple perceptual case.

I should mention as an aside that once this point is taken, it becomes quite unclear what is achieved by the chorus of complaints about “the myth of the given.” There are, we know, causal processes that end up with my thought that there is a cardinal in the garden, because I can see it; that the cat is at the door, because I heard it; or that dinner is curry tonight, because I can smell it. Modern critics of the given want to insist that the causal process does not work by intruding into consciousness an unconceptualized sensation, a kind of qualia, that is then interpreted or understood, ending up with the belief or thought.<sup>4</sup> They may be right. But why is it so *important* whether it works that way, or in the other way, whereby the first element of consciousness is itself conceptual? Do we know enough about consciousness to re-

gard this question as so utterly seminal? In terms of the familiar metaphor, the question is whether the field of consciousness is entirely “the space of reasons” or whether it may be the space of reasons and something else, such as traditional sensations or qualia. I can see that the question has its own interest, and part of that interest is that it is surprisingly difficult to pronounce upon. But it is not really at all plain what difference it makes to epistemology, nor even that it is pivotal in destroying empiricism or foundationalism.

In fact, so far as foundationalism is concerned, “qualia” do not help, for even if we countenance them, there is no reason to suppose that they compel belief and judgment. The art of recognizing a smell, for example, might be best thought of in coherentist ways even if smells themselves are elements of consciousness that are indeed just given. I mention this only as an aside.

Reliability, then, is an epistemic virtue, just as knowing his way around is the cardinal virtue in a guide. But McDowell’s comparison with being swept away by a tornado nicely illustrates the discomfort some people feel here. It introduces an element of externality: How reliable we are may not be entirely under our control, but partly a gift of, for example, a friendly and familiar environment. And being out of control strikes us as unworthy and bad. This is parallel to the familiar idea in ethics that our moral virtue must be entirely within ourselves—a matter of how we will—and not a matter of external relations, or brute happenstance or luck, whereby our actions turn out well. I am not impressed by this thought, which seems partly to depend on an unsustainable metaphysics of free will. But more important in this context, it depends on forgetting that our external relations are themselves matters that we can register and control, and matters that we may be blameworthy for mishandling or neglecting, however well-meaning we may be. In epistemology, reliability is *partly* a gift of nature (the blind are not reliable over colors) and may *partly* be a gift from a friendly and familiar environment, but it is also something we can monitor and improve and manage, and therein lies our responsibility. The comparison with being swept away by a tornado is quite wrong. The reliable perceiver exercises his virtue partly by knowing which causal impacts to put himself in the way of. You can control where you go and whether you open your eyes when you go there, and you can exercise judgment partly by recognizing that your situation is too impoverished for judgment to be warranted.

A difficulty now confronts our epistemic virtue theorist. If, as I believe, reliability sits firmly in the center of cognitive virtues, then the priority she needs to defend seems to be reversed. For there *is* an account of how a trait gets to be on the list of epistemic virtues. It will be there because it promotes an alignment of belief and truth. This is parallel to the criticisms of virtue ethics displayed above; it is like saying that a trait counts as a virtue because it promotes utility or wards off loss, where utility and loss are independently understood. Yet it seems difficult to imagine epistemology without this account.

### 3. Truth and Virtue

Reliability is naturally defined in terms of truth. The virtue is that of cleaving to the true and avoiding confidence in the false. So it is natural to worry that only a robust or thick conception of truth will sustain our sense of the virtue.

This worry can be illustrated. Indeed, perhaps it is all too obviously illustrated by the entire climate of “post-modernism,” which, having convinced itself that talk of truth could only be some kind of fraud or mask for power or whatever, rapidly lost any respect for any particular way of conducting historical or intellectual or perhaps any other kind of inquiry. Intellectual processes become evaluated in other terms. The virtues of the inquirer are no longer those of reliability or accuracy or ability to marshal evidence and compel belief, but other things entirely. In light-hearted versions, the virtue becomes that of cutting an agreeable figure in the carnival. In more sombre versions, it becomes that of pursuing one or another political or religious agenda.

We can illustrate the problem by considering Peirce’s conception of truth as that which would be agreed upon in the limit of scientific investigation. For this to work, it seems, we need a satisfactory conception of the value that attaches to scientific investigation, other than that it is the midwife to the truth. Without that, we lose any conception of the respect such investigation deserves, or of the difference between conducting it properly or improperly. If we cannot conceive of a process as organized in a virtuous direction, we cannot respect any point on which it might converge. In other words if the end product, truth, does not confer value upon the processes that reveal it, then the processes themselves must carry a merit that they confer upon the end. Yet it will be difficult to say just what is good about some methodology or another except that it makes for truth. Compare, for instance, the virtues of the historian with that of the novelist. How could we sustain any conception of how it is *right* for each to conduct themselves, and why it is right that in some respects they conduct themselves differently, without recognizing that the historian is answerable to real events in a way in which the novelist is not? Each may be doing something enjoyable or political or difficult or imaginative or gripping, but the historian is doing something else as well, and without understanding that we cannot understand the virtues of the process. And it seems impossible to imagine an understanding of that “something else” that does not explicitly or implicitly identify it as the concern to find truths about the past. Without knowing that, we would not know what game is being played.

If this is indeed the situation then, as just threatened, virtue epistemology will not be able to defend its priority. And it may look as though we need a robust or thick conception of truth if we are to justify the alternative priority, where truth is valuable and intellectual traits are classified as virtues insofar as they lead to it.

I believe, however, that this second point at least will not stand. For I take it that a minimalist or deflationist theory of truth can, perhaps surprisingly, deliver the requisite sense of the value of truth. The deflationist I shall consider believes that our understanding of truth is simply manifested in our disposition to accept instances of the schema “proposition  $p$  is true if and only if  $p$ .”<sup>55</sup> He adds an account of the value

of the term, given that modest role, which is typically in terms of framing generalizations and disjunctions. Thus, “something Fred told me was true” comes out as summarizing the open-ended disjunction of conjuncts: “either Fred told me  $p$  and  $p$ , or Fred told me  $q$  and  $q$ , or . . .” I shall not describe further the development of deflationism, since it has been admirably done in the work cited.

How is the *value* of truth expressed given deflationism? Consider the schema:

- (D) It is good that, if  $p$  then I believe that  $p$ ; and it is good that if I believe that  $p$ , then  $p$ .

If we are disposed to assent to instances of this schema, then we hold, for example,

- (D<sub>1</sub>) It is good that, if cheese is in the refrigerator then I believe that cheese is in the refrigerator; and it is good that if I believe that cheese is in the refrigerator, then cheese is in the refrigerator.

The good is described in terms of two conditionals. But neither of them mentions truth. Yet, it may plausibly be claimed, the disposition to assent unrestrictedly to these conditionals is just the disposition to value truth.

Of course, that is consistent with holding that it is more important to satisfy some instances of the conditionals than others. When the  $p$  in question is highly significant, it is more important than when it is not. More merit attaches to some discoveries than others. Some truths are more important to the historian or the scientist than others. But this does not stop truth from being a value. It just means that it is not the only value.

If we go on to ask why we should be disposed to hold these conditionals, a variety of approaches may be tried. Pragmatism and adaptive explanations take us some of the way. Some philosophers, notably Stephen Stich, have doubted these explanations, pointing to individual cases in which false belief stands you in good stead: Mistaking the time of your flight, you avoid the airplane crash.<sup>6</sup> This kind of argument is not very compelling. We might suppose that such cases are necessarily exceptional, parasitic upon a general alignment of belief and fact. And in any event one prophylactic for the calamity that true belief in the airplane’s time would bring upon you is to have even more true belief, including belief about whether the plane is in danger. Such true beliefs on the part of the mechanics and the pilot would have worked even better.

More interesting examples come from the adaptive advantage of systematic distortion. The animal that constantly overestimates the chances that a rustle is a predator may survive better than one that estimates the chances rightly. In such situations, “quick and dirty” habits of belief formation may work better than precise and discriminating ones. While I think there is more to be understood here, I don’t see there as being scope for a general critique of the value of satisfying instances of (D). In any event, the fact is that we are curious, we dislike ignorance, and we dislike living in fools’ paradises. We value satisfying (D) as often and as fully as life permits.

How do cognitive virtues look on this picture? A virtue will be a trait or dispo-

sition that, when exercised, typically increases the chances of these conditionals being true. Thus, compare three policies for forming confidence that there is cheese in the refrigerator. One is to consult memory and remember buying cheese, say, a week ago. Another is to discount memory but to go and look. A third is the joint policy of going and looking in light of what you remember. Given the nature of human perception and memory, it is plausible that the third maximizes your chance of satisfying the conditional. Unaided memory may mislead you, and in any case someone may have eaten the cheese in the interim. Unaided perception may glance over the place the cheese is hiding. Perception exercised in reasonable confidence that there is cheese there to be found, that is, the third strategy, may lead you to do more than barely glance and thereby minimizes the chance of  $D_1$  being false.

Consider now a different cognitive trait. Suppose someone whose background experience gives her very quick intuition in some area: Imagine a doctor quick at diagnosis, or a judge of character quick at reading it from visible gesture or facial configurations invisible to others. Is such intuitive speed a cognitive virtue? Surely the question hinges entirely on whether the diagnoses are borne out. The doctor can be as intuitive as she likes, but if she constantly misdiagnoses patients her speed and sureness become vices. The judge of character may have an enviable speed and certainty, but not if she constantly misreads the signals. Again, the question of whether a trait is classed as a virtue or a vice hinges centrally on the extent to which it promotes or hinders satisfaction of (D).

But now even with a deflationist approach to truth, we have been able to identify a value that intellectual virtues exist to promote. We have put the virtues in the position of handmaidens to enable us to satisfy instances of the schema (D). In other words, they are handmaidens to the truth. And, by the standard of the debate in ethics, this is to throw in the towel on behalf of anything worth calling virtue epistemology.

#### 4. Virtue and Reason

There is, I think, only one way in which these conclusions could be resisted. The priority of truth in the assessment of traits as virtues would need to be admitted, at the level at which we have been considering it. But, it would be maintained, this is only superficial. At a *deeper* level, it is the virtues that *give* us our conception of truth. This is, in effect, to return to the priority that we initially criticized in Peirce. Truth itself will be understood in terms of the upshot of virtuous inquiry.

But we have already said, on behalf of minimalism, that truth is not to be understood in any such grand way: The involvement of truth only came as a way of generalizing the desirability of satisfying the (D) schema. Individual instances of this schema gave individual goods; talk of the value of truth merely serves as a way of summing them up.

So the suggestion has to be that something Peircean is *concealed* within (D), or within its instances. And there is one obvious place to look, which is where the idealist tradition has always looked, namely, at the nature of judgment itself. (D) takes

the proposition that  $p$  for granted. But suppose, as seems plausible, that propositions are a kind of abstraction from the nature of judgment, and that judgment is an activity somehow constituted by what counts as exercising virtue in doing it, just as chess is an activity defined by what counts as winning. Then, even given minimalism, we have the necessary set of priorities: Virtues give us judgments which give us truth.

There are individual spheres in which this kind of suggestion may work especially well. Color perception, and secondary qualities in general, are perhaps the favorite. Here it is plausible to suggest that truth is somehow constituted by good practice in judgment. The variety of “response-dependent” analyses on the market give ways of filling out this thought. The truth that there is a smell in the room is not something further or over and above the truth that good receptors find it smelly. The truth that a surface is red is not a distinct fact from the fact that good practice in the way of color-judgment certifies it as red. Here practice is identified as good in terms of virtues: close attention, restriction to a privileged kind of light, ability to generate consensus, and so on (there are fewer marks of good practice in the case of smells). Anyone essaying a color “judgment,” but who did not realize that the correctness or incorrectness of his verdict was hostage to satisfying desiderata such as these, would be convicted of being not part of the practice, not really, therefore succeeding in making the judgment at all.

Notice that this kind of thought does not stand in the way of the relevant example of schema (D):

- (D<sub>c</sub>) It is good that, if the lights are red then I believe that the lights are red; and it is good that if I believe that the lights are red, then the lights are red.

For there is sufficient distance between the lights being red and my believing it for there to be a chance of these conditionals failing, and it is better if they do not. But that is consistent with the truth that the lights are red being constituted by the fact that best judgment would determine them as red. And here “best” can be filled out by the other virtues that govern the practice: sustained, repeatable, consensus-generating, and so on. The gap that closes, but rightly on this approach, is any between what best practice would have us believe and the truth.

Should we generalize the secondary-quality case? Some philosophers believe that all concepts are “response dependent” in the way that colors plausibly are.<sup>7</sup> But perhaps we can think of the color case as illustrative, while preserving some difference between primary (or tertiary) qualities and concepts and secondary qualities and concepts. For it is not clear that the assertibility conditions in question need always to mention our responses. We could talk of the circumstances in which the virtuous are warranted in confidence, without thinking that it is the responses of the virtuous that in any way constitute the concept or property in question. So, for instance, the proposition that a shape is circular has its verification conditions. The virtuous only make such a judgment in the light of successfully completing or contemplating the completion of quite determinate procedures. But it need not follow that the responses of the virtuous themselves “constitute” the shape in the way that,

arguably, the responses of the virtuous constitute the fact that something is red. Clearly there is much more to be chewed over here: For the moment I am only interested in gesturing at what seems to be a possible theoretical space rather than arguing that we ought to inhabit it.

The standard way of generalizing would be to identify truth with warranted assertibility. But the difficulties of that proposal are formidable and well canvassed. Philosophers who have at various times promoted “warranted assertibility” accounts of truth have tended to diminished enthusiasm as time goes on.<sup>8</sup> I think a more plausible line would be to accept the gift offered by minimalism and refuse to work in terms of any kind of reduction or analysis of truth itself. Instead, *propositions* or *judgments* would be located in terms of their evidential relations. This is, I think, the way Horwich himself counsels us to look at it. In his terms, we locate judgments first by a use theory of meaning, and second by identifying the fundamental feature of use, the “basic acceptance property” that governs a speaker’s overall use of the terms involved in making the judgment.<sup>9</sup>

The picture that this presents is quite in line with a strong virtue epistemology. Each judgment (or perhaps constituent of a judgment) has its own conditions of acceptance. Epistemic virtue will require conforming your own disposition to accept the judgment to those conditions for acceptance. In other words, anyone essaying a judgment is in a space of acceptance conditions that will dictate norms for proper acceptance, and hence the virtue or vice involved in accepting the judgment in particular circumstances. But Putnam is also right in supposing that this development of minimalism carries verificationist costs; whether those costs are bearable is clearly too big a question to settle now.<sup>10</sup>

Horwich himself believes that use is a purely factual concept, albeit one that has normative implications. That is, the “basic acceptance properties” attach to terms because of the use we actually make of them, not any more idealized concept of what the virtuous use of them requires. Nevertheless, just as other facts have normative implications (not entailments) so does this kind of fact. I think for present purposes we also do not have to solve whether Horwich is right about this, or whether normativity is more integrated with concepts of meaning and reference than he allows. Either way, to make a judgment is to be susceptible to criticism as epistemically virtuous or not. And, it seems, a strong epistemic virtue theory can be defended on this picture. For truth is no longer standing as an external, independent goal to which virtue tries to conform. Rather, each judgment comes with its own “virtuous acceptance conditions”: the basic conditions governing what situations allow for proper confidence in it.

In “The Folly of Trying to Define Truth,” Davidson attacked minimalism not on the grounds that a definition of truth is available, but on the grounds that there is a circle of terms such as judgment, proposition, truth condition, of which we need *some* philosophical account.<sup>11</sup> This is indeed the position that I arrived at in *Spreading the Word*.<sup>12</sup> But the Horwich of *Meaning* is not, it seems to me, a proper target of Davidson’s attack. For here there is a philosophical account of meaning, and it purports to enter the entire circle of meaning terms as a whole, just as Davidson (and Putnam) suggest.<sup>13</sup> This is, so far as I can see, the only way in which a strong virtue

epistemology could be pursued. And we might suggest that seeing it like this will deliver one substantial benefit. The verification theory of meaning had an extremely limited view about what *kind* of virtuous acceptance conditions judgments could possess. They had to relate to experience in a particularly direct, stodgy kind of way, and that was all. Whereas with a more generous conception of what makes for virtuous acceptance, a more generous conception of meaning and meaningfulness opens up. There is no obstacle to bringing in virtues of reason and of theory, reinstating, perhaps, a priori propositions and certainly theoretical propositions. And this must be counted a substantial gain. Insofar as virtues are heterogeneous and subtle, so can judgments be.

## 5. Epistemology with an Attitude

So far I have said little about what it is to deem a cognitive trait a virtue. Our concern has been simply to explore the relationship between so deeming it, on the one hand, and thinking of it as conducive to the maximization of truth, on the other. I have concluded, although tentatively, that we need not suppose that this relationship undermines moderately strong epistemic virtue theory. But the ingredients we had to bring on board to secure that result may not appeal to everyone. They include minimalism about truth, and a “use theory” of meaning in a version in which use is primarily identified by virtuous verification or assertibility conditions. And these are sinister allies. Furthermore, even they do not enable us to reverse the priority of truth over virtue, as the strong program demands. At least in the Davidsonian form, they can at best give us the “virtuous circle” account, whereby judgment, truth, and epistemic virtue come as in a rush. This may be progress, at least compared to very weak virtue epistemology, but it is not a vindication of the strong program.

However the chips fall here, there is a question of what else is involved in deeming a cognitive trait to be a virtue. Here, I would argue, the way is a little clearer. To deem a trait a virtue is interchangeable with deeming some situations to be ones in which a judgment is certain or reasonable. The virtuous person is simply the person who discriminates such situations rightly and forms his confidence in conformity with them. So the question is in effect identical with that of what it is to discriminate what reason requires in different circumstances.

Profiting from work in ethics, we can see it like this. Being responsive to reasons means adjusting confidence in the *right* way, just as acting on reason means adjusting action in the right way. Distinguishing a circumstance as one that *calls for* such an adjustment is a matter of privileging it. And this is a matter of practical attitude. It is a matter of endorsing one kind of movement of the mind, or of ruling out other putative movements of the mind. This endorsement can come in different degrees, from something rather weak, like regarding an inference as permissible but not obligatory, up to something very strong, like regarding an inference as obligatory and dissent as crazy.

When we talk of our reasons either for believing or acting, we could be simply reporting on the causal background for our ending up as we are. But normally we

are doing more: we are in a normative space rather than a purely descriptive space. This means endorsing what has moved us as the kind of thing that can permissibly or obligatorily move people. But of course selecting something for that privilege is itself something that we do. It is expressing an aspect of our stances toward intellectual or practical movement.

Some philosophers cannot comprehend this. They want to keep the “ought” of reason free from contamination by the natural world.<sup>14</sup> But there is no contamination, and nothing supernatural needed to fend it off. As Kantians are fond of pointing out, we can indeed notice that something moves us and then stand back and ask whether it ought to be moving us as it does. The “is” does not settle the “ought.” But is’s settle what we will take the oughts to be. That is, when we do end up privileging one movement, and endorsing it as reasonable and either permissible or obligatory, this will be a matter of our own psychologies: of the movements with which we can feel comfortable. And of course, at the bottom of things we may be sadly aware that comfort is about all we have. That is, suppose the last word about induction is that it is just custom and habit, or the last word about theory is that it strikes us (now) as compulsory, or the last word about the a priori is that we cannot imagine it otherwise. Then we will be left realizing that our powers of critical reflection are at best limited compared to the grip of natural habits. We might fantasize about standing at a greater distance from ourselves, but here, perhaps even more than in the case of ethics, we are condemned not to do so.

#### Notes

1. My impression is that many writers do not notice or care about the difference. Zagzebski quotes Kvanvig, Armstrong, Nozick, Goldman, and Sosa as writers who have, in effect, identified virtue epistemology with reliabilism. See her *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 10–11.

2. The latest attempt to hold this ship together is that of Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): chapters 9 and 10.

3. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996): 8.

4. I say modern critics because it is not at all plain to me that this was Sellars’s own problem. He seemed more concerned to argue against the idea that any given, qualia or not, could be the basis of an infallible inference to a piece of propositional knowledge that is thereby rendered incorrigible.

5. This is the formulation given by Paul Horwich, *Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

6. Stephen Stich, *Deconstructing the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

7. Philip Pettit, *The Common Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), espouses a version of this Coming from quite different considerations, so does Jerry Fodor, *Concepts: Where Cognitive Science Went Wrong* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 137. For criticism of Fodor’s position, see Fiona Cowie, *What’s Within?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 93–111.

8. I am thinking especially of Hilary Putnam Michael Dummett never came out wholeheartedly in favor of such theories, although he clearly recognized them as immensely attractive.

9. Paul Horwich, *Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 44.

10. Hilary Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 51.
11. Donald Davidson, "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth," *Journal of Philosophy* 93 (1996): 263–78.
12. Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984): 264–81.
13. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord*, 70.
14. I should say that Tom Nagel, Barry Stroud, Chris Korsgaard, and Jean Hampton are each afflicted with this dualism, but it is really the common property of Aristotelians and Kantians.