Ethical and Epistemic Belief Justification

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Abstract: This essay seeks to develop a new theory of intellectual virtue. It rejects the popular reliabilist account as a fundamental misunderstanding of the metaphysical nature of virtue. Namely, reliabilism reduces virtues to something akin to mere habits or tendencies when they are in fact normative, fallible capacities. Further work is needed to explain this, however, as the disjunctivist account of capacities suggests that capacities are only relevant when successfully exercised. This leads to the key insight of this new theory of intellectual virtue: the notion of ethical justification for belief as separate from epistemic justification. This notion is essential for explaining why we sometimes praise knowers for their false beliefs and why we can rightfully call these people intellectually virtuous. These knowers are achieving success of a sort which cannot be captured by reliabilist virtue epistemological theories. Armed with this new theory of intellectual virtue as directed at ethically justified beliefs, we are able to answer several problems which have vexed virtue epistemologists, and to which reliabilists have given particularly unsatisfying answers. We are able to explain how historical scientists such as Aristotle who were unreliable in their scientific theories can rightly be called intellectually virtuous, as they certainly seem to be. We are also able to answer Gettier and Gettier-type problems by clarifying that knowledge must be epistemically justified true belief and demonstrating that these cases always involve ethically justified true belief.
Virtue Epistemology in Context

The rise of virtue epistemology was driven by a dissatisfaction among many epistemologists with the standard object of study in epistemology, namely, the truth of beliefs. Early virtue epistemologist Ernest Sosa, for example, observed an irreconcilable dilemma between two general approaches to studying knowledge, which he called "The Raft and the Pyramid" (Sosa 1980). According to Sosa, foundationalists, who argued that certain fundamental beliefs such as those gained through perception ground other beliefs, and coherentists, who argued that all beliefs support each other equally, successfully refuted each other's positions but could not advance their own. Sosa and many of his contemporaries saw discussions such as this as unproductive, leading to dead ends rather than epistemological developments.

Rather than take the classic approach of studying truth directly, seeking to explain matters such as what makes a proposition true or how beliefs relate to each other, these epistemologists proposed to instead study knowers. They sought to give an account of intellectual virtues that would explain what exactly makes someone a good knower. Once the notion of a good knower was brought out, questions such as the structure of belief systems or the justification of knowledge could easily be answered, according to the theory. Just as a brave action, for example, can be defined as the action which is performed by a brave agent, a justified, true belief would be that which is formed by an intellectually virtuous believer. This radical shift yielded interesting results and led to new questions. Though the idea of intellectual virtue has existed since the time of ancient Greeks, found most notably in Book VI of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, its reintroduction into the modern analytic tradition was groundbreaking. Given the short time the field of virtue epistemology has had to develop and the drastic shift in perspective it entailed, however, it is understandable that this new movement has had its share of
difficulties and disagreements. One significant difficulty for the modern virtue epistemology movement is the inability to reach a consensus on exactly what sort of entity an intellectual virtue is. There is no widespread agreement on what sort of metaphysical or ontological category intellectual virtue belongs to, what determines what makes something an intellectual virtue, or how intellectual virtues interact with beliefs.

Though modern virtue epistemologists pay tribute to Aristotle’s original conception of intellectual virtue, their theories typically end up hardly resembling his. Aristotle’s theory of intellectual virtue involves language and ways of thinking which are alien to the modern analytic tradition. He divides up the rational part of the soul into two parts: “one part by which we contemplate the sorts of beings of which the governing principles are incapable of being other than they are, and one part by which we contemplate things capable of being otherwise” (Nicomachean Ethics VI 1139a6-8). These parts, which he names the “knowing part” and the “calculating part” (1139a11), each have their corresponding best active condition, and therefore their own corresponding virtues. These virtues are high-order cognitive capabilities such as practical judgment (1140a24), wisdom (1141b3), inquiring and deliberating (1142a31). Further intellectual virtues aid these higher level capabilities, such as astuteness (1142b39), quick comprehension (ibid.), and thoughtfulness (1143a19). Each of these virtues contributes in some way to the best possible intellectual life, which is in turn a component of the best possible human life, a life of virtuous activity in accordance with reason (Nicomachean Ethics I 1098a8).

A life lived in such a way is the most flourishing human life, a life of eudaimonia. Virtue epistemologist Wayne Riggs sums up Aristotle’s valuation of virtue as follows:

1. eudaimonia is the highest good for humans.
2. Whatever contributes to a life of eudaimonia is good by virtue of that fact.
(3) The members of the standard list of virtues (courage, justice, benevolence, etc.) contribute to a life of *eudaimonia*.

(4) So, the virtues are good because they contribute to a life of *eudaimonia*. (Riggs 2007, 205)

It is clear, therefore, that for something to count as virtue, it is necessary and sufficient that it contribute to a flourishing life. Though this notion may not be one with a widely-accepted definition in modern philosophy, the relevant aspect for this discussion is that the end goal of virtue must be a positive contribution to the overall life of a person. No other, lesser purpose will do.

Modern virtue epistemological theories often sound much more like the classical epistemological theories which they try to refute than like Aristotle’s original virtue theory. This is understandable, as to be in conversation with these theories, virtue epistemologists must speak the same language, using the same terms and providing answers to the same questions. This necessitates a shift away from a focus on a flourishing life to a focus on true beliefs. This can be seen in various virtue epistemologists’ definitions of intellectual virtue, which all ultimately tie intellectual virtue to true belief, placing true belief in the most prominent position, definitionally prior to virtue. They do not follow Aristotle’s logic for understanding virtue, as explained by Riggs above, but tie virtue to a different end, namely the acquisition of truth. Sosa, for example, seeks to develop a concept of intellectual virtue in order to explain justification for beliefs in a way which neither the coherentist nor the foundationalist are able to do. He calls intellectual virtues “stable dispositions for belief acquisition, through their greater contribution toward getting us to the truth” (Sosa 1980, 23). John Greco argues a slightly different position, known as responsibilism, wherein a person is considered intellectually virtuous if “the person is responsible for getting things right” (Greco 2007, 111). Linda Zagzebski argues a position which
she takes to oppose reliabilism, but which nevertheless involves reliability in a central way, stating that "what makes the thinking agent reliable is what is really valuable" (Zagzebski 2007, 154). In all of these theories, intellectual virtue plays an explanatory role not in determining what makes a good person or a good life, but in determining what makes a true belief. Each explanation places "getting us to the truth" or "getting things right" in the primary position, defining intellectual virtue only in reference to this.

The Metaphysical Status of Reliability

The most prominent error of the modern virtue epistemology movement is its widespread embrace of reliabilist theories such as Sosa’s. This widely-supported version of virtue epistemology must be incorrect, as it fundamentally misunderstands what is meant when we say of someone that they possess a virtue. A statement that someone possesses a virtue cannot be a statement about the results of their actions. To make such a claim ignores the significant role of external circumstances. A virtuous person may fail to achieve their goal due to unfortunate circumstances; a vicious person may likewise succeed due to fortunate circumstances. They do not succeed in acting virtuously, but they do nevertheless succeed in performing the action the virtuous person hoped to perform, albeit in the wrong manner. It is clear that success alone does not determine whether or not someone is virtuous.

Virtue ethicist Julia Annas describes the relationship between virtue and the results of individual actions as follows:

Virtue ethics is concerned with a person’s life as a whole, with character and the kind of person they are. The right perspective on an action, therefore, will for virtue ethics be the one which asks about success in achieving the overall goal, rather than success in achieving the immediate target...To the extent that success in achieving the immediate target depends on factors over which the person has no control—moral luck of various kinds—it will be of less interest to virtue ethics. (Annas 2007, 25)
Defining virtue with respect to the success or failure of individual actions therefore misses the point and is bound to lead to misconceptions. Virtue is not tied so explicitly with individual successes, as individual scenarios involve a multitude of factors which Annas considers “moral luck.” This can include factors such as unforeseen circumstances, one’s historical time period, opposing agents, or simple luck. The proper perspective on virtue will therefore take a much wider lens, forgiving an agent for individual failures and evaluating instead their overall life and character.

Reliabilists, however, do exactly what Annas argues should not be done, stating that a person is intellectually virtuous if they reliably get the truth. This gets the analysis exactly backwards, starting with success in a given instance and arguing that what makes a person successful must be a virtue. In a way, reliabilist theories cannot help but make this mistake, due to the scenarios in which they appeal to intellectual virtue. Sosa, for instance, first invokes intellectual virtue to explain how true beliefs are justified (Sosa 1980, 23). This presupposition of the truth of a belief before intellectual virtue can even be considered erroneously binds virtue to success in achieving immediate targets. It is therefore susceptible to errors due to epistemic luck.

This flaws in theories of this type are easiest to see in the case of historical figures valued for their extraordinary intellects whose theories are today considered out of date. Scientists from previous eras such as Aristotle, Newton, or Galileo are rightly praised as great scientists, despite the fact that a great many of their scientific beliefs turned out to be inaccurate or have at the very least be greatly improved upon today. Virtue epistemologist Wayne Riggs writes that it would obviously be correct to praise the intellectual virtues of these thinkers, stating that, “any theory of intellectual virtue that does not clearly and definitively count the likes of Aristotle, Newton, Galileo, etc. as being intellectually virtuous does not capture what we mean by ‘intellectual
Attributing intellectual virtue to these thinkers cannot be simply tied to a set of true beliefs they possessed, since, as Riggs puts it, “a great deal of Aristotle’s science and philosophy was mistaken. It may even be that he was wrong about more of these things than he was right. It is, of course, impossible to take such measurements now, but the mere significant possibility will suffice for our current purposes” (ibid.). We cannot say, for example, that Aristotle reliably got the truth regarding the nature of elements, as his theory of four elements turned out to be incorrect. Similarly, we would not want to hold many of the beliefs Aristotle held about the physical health of the human body, such as the notion of four humors. A doctor who ascribed to such a theory today and tried to prescribe treatment based on it would be rightly looked down upon. Nevertheless, we praise Aristotle for his work in developing these theories. How can this be?

The answer lies in the fact that the notion that a praiseworthy knower is one who reliably gets the truth is metaphysically mistaken. Reliability itself is not a normative quality and therefore cannot be the reason for our praise of these knowers. Ascribing a virtue to someone does not indicate a mere reliable correlation between their actions and some fact about the world. Rather, it praises them for having a normatively good capacity or power. When we consider someone charitable, for instance, this does not indicate merely that their actions reliably result in aid being given to those in need; instead, it indicates that the person possesses some internal quality which gives rise to charitable actions. A correct virtue epistemological theory of knowledge, therefore, will likewise not appeal to a reliable correspondence between one’s beliefs and the world. It will instead describe the praiseworthy capacities which being a good knower

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1 It is important to understand that this essay does not make the claim that there is necessarily anything false about Aristotle’s philosophical theories, nor that his theories contain more false propositions than true ones (if such a thing were even measurable). Instead, the example of Aristotle is intended to stand for a hypothetical knower who would obviously be called intellectual virtuous despite forming many false beliefs. As Riggs suggests, the mere possibility of such a character is enough to drive the argument.
entails, which may or may not lead to the acquisition of true beliefs, depending at least to some
important extent on the knower’s epistemic luck.

More work needs to be done to demonstrate that reliability is not a praiseworthy capacity,
as it may seem to some to be a normatively valuable quality. Reliability alone is in fact not a
capacity at all, but merely a way in which one can describe capacities or habits. To speak of
someone or something as “being reliable” in and of itself is misleading. It would be more
accurate in these situations to say that someone or something is reliably exercising some
capacity, rather than exercising reliability itself. Reliability, therefore, cannot itself be a virtue, as
it is the capacity which is reliably exercised which gives reliability its value. We value a clock
that is reliably on time, for example. But clearly what we value is its “on-time-ness”, not its
reliability, as we obviously would not value a clock which is reliably three hours and eleven
minutes late, nor one which reliably read 5:27 no matter the time of day. This example
demonstrates that reliability alone is neither good nor bad, but gains its value from the value of
the quality which is reliable.

Instead of being a capacity itself, reliability is best portrayed as a disposition or
propensity. As such, reliability does not have an aim in the way in which capacities or powers
do. As a disposition, reliability merely indicates a tendency to do something, without being
essentially directed at any particular end. Additionally, capacities allow for self-reflection by
self-conscious agents, allowing action from capacities to be adjusted in order to achieve its goal.
Dispositions are not intentional in this way. They are merely a way of being, rather than a way of
being directed at something. This distinction can be seen by comparing so-called “natural virtue”
to true virtue. Consider, for example, two people: one truly possesses the virtue of friendliness,
while the other has instead an innate sunny disposition. The virtuous, friendly person is actively
and intentionally directed at friendly actions. She is able to modify her actions in the face of unexpected events in order to meet this goal. The person with the naturally sunny disposition, however, lacks this ability. Her disposition does not direct her towards any goal, but merely represents a tendency to act in a certain way. Thus, though she may reliably act in a friendly way, she is not able modify her behavior to achieve a goal, as her disposition does not provide her with any such goal. Though the two people may often act similarly and are both reliably friendly, the nature of their friendliness and its intentional character are quite different.

It is important to note that this distinction need not lead one to conclude that reliability has nothing to do with virtue. In fact, in many cases, reliability and virtue are closely linked. The point of this discussion has been to demonstrate that reliability is not always linked to capacities in this way. Reliability, as a non-goal-oriented disposition, can attach just as easily to habits as to capacities. Someone may reliably tie their left shoe before their right, for example, though we would not praise them for their reliability in this instance. Others may reliably smoke six packs of cigarettes a day, though we would hardly praise them for exercising the capacity to smoke. Instead, we would likely pity them for being in the grips of a damaging habit which they had little control over. When someone’s reliability is praiseworthy, on the other hand, it is always because what they reliably do is praiseworthy. One who is reliably friendly towards new acquaintances, for instance, is valued for their friendliness, not their reliability. It is their consistent exercise of the capacity to be friendly which results in their reliability. In a way, therefore, it does seem that it is their reliability that is praiseworthy. We do prefer someone we can trust to be friendly (in a situation where friendliness is called for) over someone who has friendly tendencies which are not always exercised. But, as earlier examples have shown, reliability is valuable only if that which is reliably done is valuable. In this example, it is purely
the friendliness which is valuable in and of itself. This friendliness then confers value onto the reliability. Someone reliably friendly is certainly more praiseworthy than someone who is merely occasionally friendly, though this should be no surprise. The added value must come from the fact that they do something valuable more often, which is clearly more praiseworthy than doing something valuable rarely. Reliability is simply one way of describing someone who exercises a praiseworthy capacity very often.

The mistake of those who cite reliability as the source or explanation of intellectual virtue is therefore understandable, but ought not to be supported or repeated. Reliabilists equate intellectual virtue with the qualities of a knower that allow him or her to reliably form true beliefs. While this often successfully picks out the correct qualities in a knower as virtues, it does so through misguided means. It fails to capture what makes a virtue praiseworthy, focusing on immediate success rather than overall contributions to a good life. In so doing, it misunderstands the goal of a virtue, making the exact mistake Annas cautions against. It may by a bit of good fortune end up identifying a set of character traits and agents which line up very closely with the set which a good theory of intellectual virtue would give us. The fact that possessing intellectual virtue would typically make one reliable (in good enough circumstances) makes this likely to often be the case. However, by starting with true belief, it goes about explaining intellectual virtue in a backwards manner.

Most importantly, reliabilism mistakes the ontological status of virtue, through a mistaken understanding of the status of reliability. It mistakes reliability for a capacity, which the above discussion has shown it cannot be. Reliability instead can just as easily apply to habitual behavior which has no normative qualities, or is even normatively bad. It must therefore be understood as a second-order quality which gains its value from the qualities it is attached to. We
praise reliably good eyesight, for example, because of its good eyesight, not its reliability. This

   can be seen from the obvious fact that we would not praise reliably bad eyesight. We would even
   prefer eyesight which is unreliably, though occasionally, good over eyesight which was reliably
   bad. Reliability, therefore, is clearly only considered praiseworthy when attached to something
   which is itself praiseworthy.

Intellectual Virtues as Capacities

   What we must be saying when we say of someone that they possess a virtue is, therefore,
   as hinted at above, that they possess some normatively good capacity or power. Virtues cannot
   be habits, as habits are not properly under the control of those who possess them. They are
   instead simply acted upon automatically and thus cannot be considered praiseworthy. Sebastian
   Rödl distinguishes between powers and habits as follows:

   A power is the cause of the existence of its acts in such a way as to be, at the same time,
   the cause of their conforming to a normative measure, which thus is internal to these acts.
   A habit, by contrast, does not bring its acts under a standard. (Rödl 2007, 141)

   An act of a power, therefore, is an act which can be done well or poorly; an act of a habit simply
   happens. Because virtue is something praiseworthy, it must be something which conforms to a
   normative measure. Therefore, it must fall under the concept of a power, not a habit.

   Furthermore, unlike a habit, a capacity is necessarily fallible. Rödl writes:

   a fallible power is one whose exercise is liable to be thwarted by unfavorable
   circumstances...Consider first a practical power such as the ability to juggle five balls.
   Someone who is able to juggle five balls may still on a given occasion fail to keep the
   balls in the air if there is, say, strong wind. Shall we say, then, that she does not possess
   the power to juggle five balls, but rather the power to: juggle five balls, if the wind is not
   too strong? This is nonsense because...there is no end to the list of circumstances that
   may be unfavorable to juggling. If we made it our principle to include circumstances
   unfavorable to its exercise in the description of the object of a power so as to render it
immune to being frustrated by unfavorable circumstances, we would never arrive at a description of a power. (ibid., 151)

For something to be a power, therefore, it cannot always be successfully exercised, but requires a certain set of circumstances and effort from the actor. It is constitutive of the definition of a power that it is only relevant within certain limits; cases outside these limits do not represent failure of the power but rather situations where the power is inapplicable. However, as Rödl points out, the list of circumstance in which the power will fail is infinite. This means that we need not begin to attempt to list them all when defining a power. Rather, we need to simply build into the definition of a power that it essentially requires certain conditions in order to be exercised.

With this notion of a power, we can understand that in the correct circumstances, an agent’s powers will lead to actions from these powers; in other circumstances, the power will simply be irrelevant, as there is simply no way the power could ever be exercised. Consider, for example, a doctor who has the power to heal his patients. When he successfully heals a patient, we can say that this healing is a manifestation of his capacity to heal. When he fails to heal a patient, however, we do not say that it is qua his capacity as a healer or doctor that he failed. We would instead attribute the failure to the fact that this particular disease is incurable, or perhaps manifested in some unconventional way which led the doctor to prescribe one treatment when in fact another was called for. It may be qua his power as a doctor that he gave his best effort in an attempt to heal his patient, and qua his power as a doctor that he prescribed some reasonable treatment which unfortunately ended up not working. But if the disease is incurable (by the methods available to the doctor in his specific time and place), the actual healing of the patient is out of the question, and thus the case cannot be one on which the doctor’s healing powers are judged.
This definition of a power fits the notion of a virtue far better than the reliabilist notion of a habit is able to fit. When we say, for example, that Aristotle was a good scientist, we are not claiming that he habitually and automatically acted in such a way that he could not help but get the truth. Rather, we praise him for exercising certain capacities, such as judgment or critical thinking, which he conceivably could have not exercised. In fact, our praise is far stronger because it was possible that he not exercise his capacities, like many lesser men in his surroundings, but he nevertheless did, and to great extent. In ascribing intellectual virtue to Aristotle we also recognize that these capacities he possessed cannot always be used, but require certain conditions to be acted upon.

Problems with Virtues as Capacities

At first glance, however, this picture of capacities appears equally insufficient to explain the value of historical figures such as Aristotle as virtuous knowers. The disjunctivist account of capacities is particularly worrying in this case. Alex Byrne and Heather Logue sum up the central disjunctive claim in the introduction to their volume on disjunctivism is perceptual cases, stating, “the good case and the...bad case have no common mental element” (Byrne and Logue 2009, xi). Disjunctivism thus argues that cases of success and failure require entirely different explanations in evaluating an agent’s capacities. This disunity is easiest to see in the case of the power of perception. When an agent succeeds (in performing an action or acquiring a belief), the correct explanation of their mental state involves the exercise of a power. When I see my desk in front of me, for example, this is to be explained by appeal to my power of sight and to the fact that circumstances were such that my power of sight could be correctly used (i.e. there is sufficient light). This veridical perception of my desk is therefore understood as a manifestation of my power of sight.
If I am merely hallucinating, however, no appeal to my power of sight is possible. It is not the case that my power of sight is defective in this instance; rather, my power is entirely inapplicable, as the hallucination does not involve my eyes in any way. The correct explanation will have its source somewhere else, perhaps in my lack of sleep, or in some chemicals which I have unknowingly ingested. In other words, nothing one could say about my power of sight would bear any relevance to the fact that I am hallucinating, as hallucination is not a manifestation of my power of sight in any way. The problem becomes more difficult in the case of illusion. Take, for example, the Müller-Lyer illusion, in which two lines of equal length appear incorrectly to be different lengths due to the opposite-facing arrows placed on each end. Here, we are not able to refer to something completely external to vision to explain what we see, as was the case with hallucination, as we clearly would not be able to see the illusion in the first place without our power of sight. However, the disjunctive account still applies. It is by our power of sight that we explain why we are able to see anything at all in this instance. But the power of sight need not be invoked to explain why we suffer an illusion. Instead, reference must be made to some other fact about our cognition, perhaps that we have developed a tendency to see such shapes as evidence of depth as part of our ability to detect perspective. In any case, the power of sight need not be invoked to explain the incorrectness of this visual experience. Therefore, we can maintain that any reference to a power in the case of failure will be entirely incorrect. A similar analysis can be given of any power, such as the powers of knowledge which make up intellectual virtue. If a belief truly stems from a power of knowledge, it must be successfully formed. If it is not successful, then it must merely seem to stem from a power of knowledge, but instead be attributable to some other cause.
This account should worry us if we are relying on the notion of capacities to explain why Aristotle and other great historical scientists are rightly considered virtuous knowers. It seems, on first glance, that a capacity account leaves us with hardly anything to say about Aristotle’s intellectual virtues (as a scientist). Rödl writes that “it is analytic that a belief that springs from a power of knowledge is true, so that whether a belief manifests such a power is not independent of whether it is true” (Rödl 2007, 141). When Aristotle has false beliefs, such as his theory of four elements or of the four humors, it would seem that according to this account we can say nothing about his capacities, as his failing to hit the truth indicates that his belief is not a manifestation of his intellectual capacities at all. On the disjunctivist account, the proper explanation for his incorrect belief will make no reference to his capabilities as a scientist, but fall under the second disjunct, requiring an entirely different explanation. This explanation could make reference instead to outside circumstances, such as, say, the fact that the microscope had not yet been invented, or that the millenia of development of scientific theory which have occurred between his time and ours had not yet occurred. On this account, it may appear that we cannot even begin to speak about Aristotle’s virtues as a scientist, as so many of his scientific theories are incorrect and thus do not involve the exercise of a praiseworthy capacity in any way. Even if we do not fault him, due to the differences between his circumstances and ours, the account nevertheless rules out ascribing any virtue to him in these instances, as he did not perform acts which manifest his powers of knowledge. Though we would like to praise him for his reasoning, the disjunctive, fallibilist account of capacities suggests that without successfully forming good scientific beliefs, we cannot do this, as he did not perform any actions which manifest his powers of knowledge.
But this clashes strongly with our intuition. We have a firm (and, as Riggs argued, uncontroversially correct) intuition that Aristotle was a man of exceeding intellectual virtue, even with regards to his scientific theories which were later discovered to be inaccurate, often wildly so. How can this be, given that we are convinced both that virtue must be a power, and that disjunctivism is correct that nothing can be said about powers in cases of failure? What is the way out of this inconsistent triad?

The answer must be that Aristotle is in fact exercising his virtuous intellectual capacities correctly, even when he does not successfully form a true belief. He must be using these capacities correctly, because we can certainly talk about him using them, and the disjunctive argument rules out such talk unless capacities are used correctly. We are thus forced to conclude that intellectual capacities are judged to be used correctly not necessarily in the case where they lead to a true belief, but when they achieve some other end. Rödl must be wrong in his assertion that a belief resulting from a power of knowledge must be true. Intellectual virtues must therefore have some end other than truth; otherwise, we lose our ability to credit great thinkers of the past with intellectual virtue, thus making the obvious failure which Riggs warned us against. Replacing the account of intellectual virtues as reliable means of acquiring truth with the notion of praiseworthy capacities has not proven to be enough to solve this problem. It remains to be discovered what these capacities are directed at. We have thrown out the most obvious answer, truth, but have not yet suggested a new end to put in its place. Establishing what this end must be is the subject of the remainder of this paper.

**Good False Beliefs**

In order to sustain the view that intellectual virtues have the metaphysical status of capacities rather than mere reliability, something must be found which allows us to describe
beliefs as successful even when they are false. There must therefore be a concept of a belief which is normatively good yet not true. Beliefs such as Aristotle’s theory of four elements or four humors should fit into this category. It seems correct that we rightly praise Aristotle for coming up with such theories, even though they do not accurately describe their subject matter. How can this be praiseworthy? For what are we praising him? It must be that he did something normatively good, or, we might say, ethically praiseworthy, to earn this praise. He must have successfully exercised some praiseworthy capacity. This success is certainly not epistemological, as we praise him even in cases where he did not say anything true or possess any knowledge. It is likely better framed as an ethical success: he did what we would have wanted him to do.

How then ought we to characterize “what we would have wanted him to do” without requiring him to have achieved the truth? We could start by listing some qualities of beliefs which we value even when these beliefs are false. Many such characteristics are easy to find, especially in the case of a scientific theory. We value beliefs which are convincing, intuitive, groundbreaking, interesting, or compelling. Such beliefs can be useful in terms of moving a conversation forward or making us think even when they are not in fact correct. We also praise their explanatory value, preferring theories which explain the most possible phenomena with the fewest possible conjectures. We also value them in terms of their relation to other theories in the history of science. We praise a theory for being an improvement on past theories, or for being an important step in the development of later, more accurate theories.

None of this, however, precisely captures the reason why we value Aristotle for his scientific work. He is valued not merely for the results of his labors, but for his labors themselves. Even if his theories did not contribute to scientific progress as much as they did, the mere way in which Aristotle went about the intellectual activity of belief formation would make
him an admirable character. What is praiseworthy about his beliefs, therefore, is that they are examples of intellectual creativity, diligence, rigor, and so on. It is therefore not the result of the belief which is valuable, but the means by which it was achieved. This fits nicely with the account of virtue given by Annas which was discussed earlier in this essay. If intellectual virtue is to be a subset of ethical virtue, it must be evaluated not with regards to individual successes but rather long-term goals having to do with a person’s character and quality of life. In this way, we ought to consider Aristotle’s beliefs to be a successful exercise of his capacities regardless of the belief which is eventually formed, so long as the belief is the result of virtuous intellectual activity.

**Ethical Belief Justification**

This account successfully captures that it is Aristotle’s process, not his product, which leads us to call him a good knower. This is consistent with the classical account of what a virtue is. Ancient Greeks, for example, praised a brave warrior for his bravery, regardless of whether or not this bravery resulted in victory. Bravery is a way of being, and therefore an end in itself, rather than a tool for achieving something else. For this reason, the Greeks could value the bravery of warriors on both sides of the Trojan War, for example, even though only one side’s bravery ultimately resulted in victory. This suggests that it would be mistaken to analyze the bravery of soldiers based on whether or not they reliably won battles, as this is not the goal of bravery. Analogous issues appear when erroneously attributing the wrong goal to intellectual virtue. Only when intellectual virtue’s goal is properly understood can we attribute intellectual virtue in the right way.

Bravery’s immediate goal is, rather tautologically, to act bravely, though in unpropitious circumstances even this may not be possible. Other virtues can also be thwarted by circumstance
in the same way. Take the following example of two people: the first has the means to be magnanimous, and indeed ends up giving away much wealth, though out of a desire for honor or perhaps to avoid taxes rather than out of a desire to help others; the second longs to give away money and possessions to those who need it, and would if they had the means, but is unfortunately far too poor (and perhaps even works far too long hours to volunteer his time instead). Whose qualities would we value? Quite clearly, we would value the second person’s desire to help others. We do not fault them for not giving away money. We simply attribute this to unfortunate circumstances. We assume quite confidently that in the right circumstances, this person would do much to help the people around them. We praise them for having this disposition, independent of any results. Similarly, we do not praise the wealthy person with no desire to help their fellow man, even if in fact their actions do end up helping others. (A Kantian may at least praise them for acting in accordance with, if not out of, duty, though this falls far short of virtue.) This person cannot be said to be virtuous because they lack the desire to help others, and magnanimity consists of this desire, independent of the results.

This is not to say that if we were in need of money we would prefer to go to the poor but generous person. In regards to the actual actions performed, we would certainly prefer to be on the receiving end of the gifts of the wealthy person. Similarly, while we may praise Aristotle for his intellectual virtues, and even count his beliefs as normatively valuable in many ways, they are not beliefs we wish to have. We ought not hold that the Earth goes round the Sun, nor that there are only four elements, nor would we be happy to learn that our doctor planned to treat us in accordance with the doctrine of the four humors. In praising Aristotle and the beliefs he formed we are not saying that we in our circumstances wish to have them. Instead, we are saying that in his circumstances they are quite good beliefs to have. Many of his scientific beliefs were
more right than others before them, or perhaps more reasonable (though still incorrect) explanations of events. Others contributed in important ways to better theories by other scientists in later areas. Even if they did not advance science, however, there still is some way in which they are normatively valuable, simply because they are the result of intellectual activity conducted in accordance with intellectual virtues.

In praising Aristotle despite his false beliefs, we are also saying that any (or most) errors in Aristotle’s beliefs is attributable to his poor circumstances, specifically his time in history, rather than to him himself or any bad quality he might possess. This indicates that we would expect his same capacities to yield a true belief in better circumstances. Riggs agrees, saying:

Aristotle was hindered in his theory construction by the absence of the kinds of technological and theoretical innovations that we have the benefit of in our own time. Had Aristotle had a microscope, a telescope, a better understanding of human psychology, and so on, we are confident that those very same intellectual character traits that led him astray in his own time (we are assuming for the moment) would have led him to theories much more like the more accurate (we hope!) theories of today. (Riggs 2007, 211)

This is what we mean when we praise Aristotle’s scientific beliefs as stemming from his intellectual virtue. Simply put, he possessed capacities which would have led to accurate theories if not prevented by poor circumstances. Therefore, as Aristotle’s actual beliefs and theories were formed by these very same capacities, they can be held praiseworthy yet false. They are praiseworthy because only the best thinkers, the most intellectually virtuous, would have come up with them; the best scientists in history would be expected have formed similar beliefs if placed in Aristotle’s time period and circumstances. It is in this sense that we call these beliefs a success: they are the beliefs we would hope he would hold, given his circumstances, or the
beliefs which only the most intellectually virtuous knowers would hold, and they are beliefs formed through a process which would yield true beliefs in better circumstances.

This success is what I have called ethical, rather than epistemic. He believed as he ought, even when he did not believe the truth. We do not blame anything within Aristotle for the errors in his theories; rather, we blame his lack of tools or, perhaps more importantly, the lack of millennia of theoretical developments in the scientific world which we enjoy but he did not. While Aristotle's scientific theories may have been epistemologically useful, in that they were important steps in a chain which led to modern scientific theories, they would be considered ethically praiseworthy even without this fact. We call Aristotle intellectually virtuous simply because he used his capacities to come up with the beliefs we would want him to come up with given the situation he found himself in, beliefs which are manifestations of his praiseworthy intellectual capacities.

The use of terminology such as "ethical justification" or "ethically praiseworthy" still requires some more justification. It may not yet be clear that the issues at stake here are correctly classed as ethical; one might suppose that epistemological terminology is sufficient. However, epistemological terminology alone fails to capture the active component of belief formation. In cases where intellectual virtue is truly at stake, the belief which is formed does not come naturally or passively to the believer, but instead requires real intellectual work. This work or activity is clearly active and thus is susceptible to the norms which govern human action, namely, some system of ethics, just as any other action. As we are working with a virtue theory, we will of course be analyzing this intellectual activity in accordance with virtue, though the activity could easily be analyzed by any other ethical theory. There should therefore be no problem with using the phrase "ethical belief justification" or "ethically praiseworthy belief" as
long as these phrases are understood in the right way, as applying to the active believing or belief formation process which leads to the belief, rather than as applying to the belief alone, independent of any intellectual activity.

**Ethical Belief Justification in Gettier Problems**

The notion that epistemic virtues, when successfully exercised, lead to ethically (though not necessarily epistemically) praiseworthy beliefs yields valuable insight for common problems in epistemology, such as Gettier and Gettier-type cases. In these cases, authors present what they take to be cases of justified true beliefs which intuitively do not appear to count as knowledge. The account presented in this paper suggests two types of justification involved in belief: epistemic and ethical. Epistemic justification involves that which determines that a proposition is true; ethical justification involves that which ought to be believed or that which one would be expected to be believe, with reference to the way in which one comes to believe what is believed. In normal cases, these two types of justification may appear identical. What Gettier and Gettier-type cases show us, however, is that this need not be the case. In cases of this sort, the subject is ethically justified in forming the belief which they hold, but they are not epistemically justified. They form the beliefs that any sensible, rational, epistemically virtuous person would form, and form them in an intellectual virtuous way. They would in fact have to perform actions which are not ethically justifiable, such as jumping out of their car to go take a closer look at a barn to prove that it is indeed a barn and not merely a facade, in order to be truly epistemically justified. Such actions are clearly not part of the overall healthy, flourishing life which is virtue’s ultimate goal, so they ought not be considered ethically justified even if they help the subject get the truth in specific instances. This conflation of epistemic and ethical justification leads to confusion in
Gettier cases, but, if the account of intellectual virtues which is presented here is correct, this confusion need no longer remain.

Putting this new version of virtue epistemology to the test will reveal the benefits of emphasizing the ethically praiseworthy exercise of intellectual capacities over the reliable success in hitting the truth espoused by reliabilism. If the theory is indeed useful, it will provide satisfying answers to problems which have long bothered virtue epistemologists. Analyzing Gettier-type problems will show that this is the case. These problems challenge the standard account of knowledge as justified true belief, as they provide examples of beliefs which are justified and true yet do not appear to count as knowledge. This has led many philosophers to redefine knowledge as justified true belief plus an unknown fourth condition which explains why Gettier cases are not cases of knowledge, though what exactly this fourth condition should be is up for debate. Virtue epistemologists of various types have proposed that intellectual virtue provides this fourth condition. Zagzebski, for instance, argues that “Knowledge is a state of true belief (cognitive contact with reality) arising out of acts of intellectual virtue” (Zagzebski 1996, 271). This formulation is intended to rule out cases where intellectual virtue is used, but the truth is gained by other means, such as good epistemic luck. Greco argues similarly that “S’s believing $p$ is the result of dispositions that S manifests when S is trying to believe the truth...[and] the dispositions that result in S’s believing $p$ constitute intellectual abilities, or powers, or virtues” (Greco 2007, 127). Again, this requires that for something to be considered knowledge, it must be acquired by means of intellectual virtue. If some other factor is more salient, the true belief cannot count as knowledge.

According to the theory laid out in this essay, however, no fourth condition is necessary. The problem instead is that the justification condition is insufficiently understood. As stated
throughout this paper, there are two types of justifications for beliefs: ethical, and epistemological. Ethical justification is that which makes the belief praiseworthy. It requires the use of intellectual virtue and demands that one use their capacities to the best of their abilities in the given circumstances. It does not, however, require that the resulting belief be true. Aristotle's scientific theories, for example, are ethically justified, as they are a manifestation of difficult intellectual work diligently performed. His beliefs are the ones we would hope would be formed in his circumstances, and are the beliefs we would assume any virtuous scientist would form in his position. The fact that his beliefs are ethically justified tells us that they are good. It is only epistemic justification which indicates that a belief is true. In fact, an epistemically justified belief cannot be false, for epistemic justification indicates that a belief fulfills the necessary and sufficient conditions for being true. It indicates that a belief is a valid conclusion based on true premises. No belief based on false premises will be epistemically justified, nor will any belief based on an invalid inference.

Another way of making this distinction involves distinguishing between belief formation and the belief itself. Belief formation, as mentioned earlier, is an active process, requiring intellectual activity. The active aspect of belief formation requires evaluation as an action, which requires an explanation based in ethics, not epistemology. A virtue explanation will seek to understand the justification of the intellectual activity of belief formation by appeal to intellectual virtue. Just as any activity can be evaluated based on its concordance with ethical virtue (noting whether or not the activities result from praiseworthy capacities), intellectual activity can be evaluated by its concordance with the special subset of ethical virtues known as intellectual virtues. Beliefs themselves, considered independently of the history of their formation, require an entirely different explanation. They are thus judged by their accordance
with epistemological norms, namely, their truth values. But we ought not focus so much on the end of the activity of belief formation that we lose sight of the active character of the belief formation itself.

What makes Gettier problems difficult is a confusion between epistemic and ethical justification. The beliefs formed in these problems are indeed justified and true, but to count as knowledge, this justification must be epistemic. The justification for the belief in every Gettier and Gettier-type problem is only ethical. The believers in these problems certainly form the beliefs we would expect and hope that they would form, and no amount of intellectual virtue would lead them to form any different belief. Their intellectual activity is therefore as good as we could possibly hope it would be. Their belief formation process conforms to the norm of ethically praiseworthy intellectual activity; it is action which follows from the exercise of a praiseworthy capacity. By holding that the successful exercise of an intellectual virtue leads to a good belief rather than a true belief, as argued earlier in this paper, we can deny these believers knowledge without suggesting that they should or could have done anything differently. We need not however to conclude from the fact that their beliefs are true and ethically justified that these beliefs count as knowledge. Each belief involves a faulty premise and therefore cannot count as epistemically justified. With this new understanding, Gettier cases cease to be mysterious, as they are revealed not to be cases of epistemically justified true belief, and thus we have no reason to suspect they would count as knowledge.

Analyzing Gettier-type cases in detail will show the explanatory power of this new theory. Take the case of "Barn Facade County" presented as follows by John Greco:

Henry is driving in the countryside and sees a barn ahead in clear view. On this basis he believes that the object he sees is a barn. Unknown to Henry, however, the area is dotted
with barn facades that are indistinguishable from real barns from the road. However, Henry happens to be looking at the one real barn in the area. (Greco 129-130) Henry’s belief here is clearly both justified and true. However, this justification is merely ethical, not epistemic. He forms the belief we would expect him to, exercising his intellectual virtues of accurate perception and faith in his senses (under presumed normal conditions) successfully. There is nothing about his belief formation process which we would wish to be different, as he acts normatively correctly. All of his intellectual activity is entirely in conformity with intellectual virtue, and thus he is clearly ethically justified in acting exactly as he did. Assuming there was no obvious indication that the area was dotted with barn facades, which would indeed be quite an odd thing to suspect without good reason, we would not want Henry to get out of the car and examine the barn in detail to ensure that his senses were not deceiving him. To do so would not be ethically justified as it would not be intellectually virtuous. It would instead display an intellectual vice of radical skepticism and distrust of the senses. One who lived a life dominated by this trait would be unable to flourish, as they would never be able to form even the most simple beliefs about their surroundings without an inordinate amount of work. Their daily life would be constantly interrupted by a continuous double-checking of their sensory experiences, leaving no time for all of the activities which make up a good life. Having an accurate assessment of one’s perceptual capacities is therefore undoubtedly an intellectual virtue, and is one Henry clearly exhibits.

Unbeknownst to Henry, his circumstances are so unusual that exactly this sort of intellectual vice would be required for epistemic justification in this instance; it is in fact his intellectual virtue which leads him astray. Though his belief that he sees a barn in front of him is ethically justified, as his intellectual activity which leads to the formation of the belief is a manifestation of his intellectual virtue, it is not epistemically justified, as it is based on a false
premise. His reasoning, if he were asked to spell it out, would most likely look something like the following:

1) I see what looks like a barn in front of me.
2) In normal circumstances (i.e. sufficient lighting, no chemical imbalances in the brain, nothing strange in my environment, etc.) things are what they appear to be.
3) I am in normal circumstances.
4) Therefore, I see a barn in front of me.

It is clear that in this example the third premise is false. As Henry’s belief relies on a false premise and could not be formed without this premise, it is not epistemically justified, even though it is in fact true. This is easily seen from the fact that Henry would form the exact same belief if he were looking at one of the many barn facades in the field. His reasoning would be identical, but would in this case result in a false belief. As this reasoning therefore does not always lead to a true belief, he cannot be said to be epistemically justified. However, we would value him just as much as a believer in this instance, as his belief would be equally ethically justified. It must be equally ethically justified, as the intellectual activity would be identical to this case in which his belief was true; if his intellectual activity is ethically praiseworthy in the first case, it must remain equally praiseworthy, as the activity itself does not change. Without any reason to suspect that we are in odd circumstances, it is intellectually virtuous to believe the third premise stated above, and all that follows from it, even if it turns out to be false. Understanding that this is a case of a true belief which is justified ethically but not epistemically dispels any reason to believe it counts as knowledge, and thus the case need no longer confuse us.

Relationship Between Ethical and Epistemic Justification

The exact relationship between ethical and epistemic justification has thus far not been
stated. In part, the relationship is difficult to elucidate because the two types of justification exist in seemingly dissimilar realms. Epistemic justification has been described in logical terms, as befits an epistemological theory. As stated above, a belief is epistemically justified if it consists of valid inferences drawn from true premises. Validity and truth are measured not according to something in the speaker but according to the belief and its relationship with an actual state of affairs in the world. Ethical justification has thus far been described in more vague terms. We have said that a belief is ethically justified if it is reasonable, if it is the belief we would want the believer to have in the given circumstances, or if it stems from ethically justified intellectual activity. This may strike the reader as too far detached from the vital notion of truth for something intended to be part of an epistemological theory.

Perhaps this concern is valid, which would indicate that virtue epistemology may not be an epistemological theory at all. The things a virtue theory can tell us may not be about beliefs, truth, or states of affairs in the world at all, but rather purely about ways we ought to or strive to be or act. Everything it has to say may be normative with respect to norms of action alone, placing it therefore as a subset of ethics dealing with belief formation. Furthermore, its mandate appears to be not “form true beliefs” but rather “form reasonable beliefs.” Can virtue epistemology really be properly cast as an epistemological theory, if it does not even direct us at truth? What good are intellectual virtues in the epistemological realm if the successful exercise of these capacities is not immediately directed at truth? Are they even properly considered intellectual virtues, given that they seem accountable to norms of reasonableness rather than truth?

This worry seems to go too far, and it is likely that ethical and epistemic justifications can be tied together in a manner which will reassure the worried reader that the theory described in
this paper remains an epistemological one. In fact, were it not for this paper’s focus on strange and confusing corner cases in which ethical and epistemic justifications are most different, necessary in order to make out the distinction between the two, one could be forgiven for assuming that they are identical. Indeed, in so many circumstances the two are more or less indistinguishable, and it is this very fact which has confused virtue epistemologists and led to improper treatment of Gettier cases and misguided theories such as reliabilism. To demonstrate this, consider any of the multitude of basic beliefs which one forms every day: say, the belief that today is Wednesday. What is the epistemic justification for this belief? This could be any number of things, though the simplest would look something like this:

1) The calendar on my computer tells me that today is Wednesday.
2) I know (from past experience) that my computer’s calendar is accurate.
3) Therefore, it is Wednesday.

Any similar simple syllogism will suffice for epistemic justification in this instance, as long as no false premises or flawed conclusions are used. Ethical justification in this case will look nearly identical. As usual, it will entail going about the act of belief formation in the correct way. In this instance, all that is necessary in order to form a belief in the right way is quite simply to check a calendar (and perhaps verify that the calendar appears to be a good one). Such an action is not at all difficult, though it nevertheless conforms to norms of action in ways which can be described by intellectual virtues, specifically those which involve gathering information and checking that this information appears reasonable.

As there is nothing at all odd or difficult in this case, ethical justification will be analogous to epistemic justification. The belief is justified epistemically because the calendar which led to the formation of the belief was accurate; the belief is likewise justified ethically.
because the belief formation process involved looking at an accurate calendar. For ordinary, everyday, easily-acquired beliefs, this similarity will always be present. An account must therefore be given which explains the relationship between ethical and epistemic belief justification in such a way which allows for them to be tightly related in this way in most everyday circumstances but nevertheless allows for them to differ dramatically in the cases discussed in this article.

How then should the relationship between ethical and epistemic justification be characterized? Sebastian Rödl provides an account of justification, in his case referring to justification of action and belief (which maps nicely to the distinction in this paper between active belief formation and belief itself), which may be of some use:

There is *epistemic* justification of belief and *practical* justification of action; justifying an action is revealing it, or taking a step toward revealing it, to conform to one’s practical life-form, while justifying a belief is revealing it, or taking a step toward revealing it, to be an act of one’s power of receptive knowledge.² (Rödl 2007, 108)

To equate the notion of practical justification of action to our concept of ethical justification of belief takes some work, though Rödl helps us out later in his work by writing: “An assertion is an action, and as such a response to the question what to do. It may or may not be justified in the light of the normative order of this question; it may or may not be *practically* justified,” (Rödl 113). This supports the notion stated throughout this paper that there is an active component to belief. It is this active component which can be analyzed ethically according to its relationship with intellectual virtue, just like any action can be analyzed with regards to moral virtue. A brave action, for example, is ethically (or practically, in Rödl’s terminology) justified insofar as it stems from bravery, as bravery is a virtue and thus being brave is a constitutive part of a

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² This quote involves a piece of Rödl’s highly specific and technically precise terms: receptive knowledge. The nuances of Rödl’s usage of the term does not concern this paper. For present purposes, it is sufficient to equate the term with “perceptual knowledge”, in contrast with the “first-person knowledge” one has of oneself.
flourishing life ("conform[ing] to one's practical life-form). Likewise, a creative, discerning, or impartial belief, thought of as something actively formed by a knower, is ethically justified insofar as it stems from creativity, discernment, or impartiality, as these are intellectual virtues and thus constitutive parts of a flourishing human life. Believing in this way answers the question "what to do" in the realm of belief.

However, merely stating that ethical belief justification is directed at a flourishing life may strike some as still an insufficiently explained concept, and does not yet indicated the connection between ethical and epistemic belief justification. While it correctly points out the general explanation for why we desire intellectual virtues, it fails to capture the specific way in which these virtues contribute to a flourishing life. This way must in some way be truth-involving or truth directed, even if we recognize that we do not fault people for failure to hit the truth in specific instances as long as their beliefs are manifestations of intellectual virtues. How can this be explained? The best answer will be to explain ethical justification as it relates to epistemological justification. In characterizing an ethically justified belief as one which we would want believers to have, this wanting ought not be understood in a subjective or relative way. A believer is not intellectually virtuous just because he believes what is socially acceptable, for instance. What we want are not socially acceptable beliefs, but epistemically justified beliefs. A belief can be considered reasonable and ethically justified, then, if it is an honest and intellectually virtuous attempt at an epistemically justified belief. Whether or not an epistemically justified belief is in fact achieved will depend on the circumstances, which are (at least in some important way) out of the control of the believer and, in particularly difficult cases, may even be unknowable to him or her.

We can give a definition of ethically justified belief, therefore, which involves two
propositions. First, an ethically justified belief is that which any intellectually virtuous believer would form in the given circumstances. Second, an ethically justified belief is a belief which would be epistemically justified in normal circumstances. This pair, however, leaves both intellectual virtue and normal circumstances undefined, and seems to require each for the definition of the other. Intellectual virtue is that which leads to an ethically justified belief, which is that which would be an epistemically justified belief in normal circumstances. Normal circumstances are those in which epistemically justified beliefs are also ethically justified beliefs, which are in turn those beliefs which are formed by intellectually virtuous believers. We have succeeded in linking all the relevant concepts together, though we lack a way to move forward. Not until either normal circumstances or intellectual virtue is defined independent of the other can any progress be made.

The general methodology of virtue theory (epistemological or ethical), however, reveals a way out of this dilemma: we must start with intellectual virtue. Normal circumstances seem far too difficult to define. Define them too tightly, counting a circumstance as normal only when it is quite easy to get an epistemically justified true belief, and nearly everyone would count as possessing most intellectual virtues. Define them too broadly, including all situations in which achieving an epistemically justified true belief is not technically impossible, and hardly anyone will count as intellectually virtuous. We must instead start with our common sense notion of intellectual virtue and define normal circumstances based on this. We may not have one hundred percent certainty regarding what is an intellectual virtue without knowledge of what normal circumstances are, but we do seem to have quite a good general idea. Philosophers have written on the topic since Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. Even in everyday speech there are ideas about what makes someone intellectually valuable. Though these ideas are certainly not
philosophically rigorous, they give us somewhere to begin. A simple investigation of those praised as intelligent leaves us with a list of intellectual virtues include such qualities as creativity, diligence, critical thinking, intellectual honesty, curiosity, any many more.

Starting from these notions, we can understand ethically justified belief by imagining what someone possessing these intellectual virtues would believe in a given circumstance. We can then understand normal circumstances as those in which this ethically justified belief would be also epistemically justified. Depending on how difficult to achieve our definitions of intellectual virtue turn out to be, it may be the case that nearly every circumstance is a normal one, or it may be that most circumstances are non-normal.

Conclusion

While more work needs to be done to rigorously define some of the relevant terms, this new account of virtue epistemology makes productive strides in the right direction. Everything is made possible by the separation of ethical belief justification from epistemic belief justification, which requires an understanding of the active character of belief formation or, as Rödl puts it, the act of assertion. This enables us to discover the true end goal of intellectual virtue: not to reliably acquire true beliefs, but to successfully acquire reasonable, ethically justified beliefs, or, to put it another way, to ethically acquire justified beliefs. It is against the metric of ethically justified beliefs which the successful use of the capacities of intellectual virtue must be evaluated. Understanding these capacities in this light resolves the mystery of Gettier problems and other difficult cases, as it is no longer troublesome to hold that a believer acts correctly yet does not acquire knowledge. It also clarifies why we can hold great scientists of the past such as Aristotle to be paragons of intellectual virtue despite their often false conclusions: we do not judge them based on whether or not their beliefs are epistemically justified, as they were writing in
incredibly difficult circumstances, without the centuries of technological and theoretical advancements we ourselves enjoy. Instead, we value them for exercising their intellectual virtue to an extraordinary extent, coming up with ethically justified and praiseworthy beliefs. These scientists are then clearly understood as virtuous agents or virtuous believers, even in cases where they were not truly knowers.
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