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Philosophy Faculty Works. 34.

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Responsibilist Virtues and the ‘Charmed Inner Circle’ of Traditional Epistemology

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Ernie Sosa’s unique brand of performance-based virtue epistemology continues to mature. His fourth book in epistemology in twice as many years, *Judgment and Agency* (2015) deepens and extends Sosa’s previous work on the nature and value of knowledge. The result is impressive. *Judgment and Agency* reads like a product of sustained, penetrating philosophical reflection by one of the great minds in the field—which, to my mind, is precisely what it is.

My focus in this paper will be Sosa’s treatment (contained mainly in Chapter 2) of an issue specific to virtue epistemology: namely, the relationship between “responsibilist” and “reliabilist” approaches to virtue epistemology—or, somewhat less technically, the role of intellectual *character* virtues on Sosa’s reliabilist account of knowledge. However, readers with little or no interest in this or immediately related topics may still find the book a very interesting and worthwhile read. For, in addition to treating several core issues in traditional and virtue epistemology, Sosa also deals substantively with topics in several other areas, including (but not limited to) social epistemology, philosophical methodology, action theory, and philosophy of mind.

1. The Reliabilist/Responsibilist Distinction

There is a longstanding distinction in virtue epistemology between virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. Sosa is the originator and leading proponent of virtue reliabilism. In *Judgment and Agency*, he expands his account of knowledge into responsibilist territory, raising questions about the very viability of the reliabilist/responsibilist divide:

[M]y main thesis [in chapter 2] will be that reliabilist, competence-based virtue epistemology must be understood broadly, in a more positively ecumenical way, with responsibilist agential intellectual virtues at its core. (11)

A true epistemology will indeed assign to such responsibilist-cum-reliabilist intellectual virtue the *main* role in addressing concerns at the center of the tradition. To anticipate, here is why that is so: because the *sort* of knowledge at the center of traditional epistemology, from the Pyrrhonists through Descartes, is high-level *reflective* knowledge. This is a knowledge requiring free, volitional endorsement by the subject who judges, or the corresponding disposition. (36)

Ironically, reliabilist, competence epistemology is a more radical responsibilist epistemology. It considers responsibilist, agential competences to be crucial for a proper treatment of the most central, most traditional issues of pure epistemology. (55)

On the standard account, the difference between virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism is rooted in their differing conceptions of intellectual virtue. For virtue reliabilists like Sosa and John Greco (2010), epistemic reliability is the distinguishing mark of an intellectual virtue. Accordingly, their focus has tended to be on cognitive faculties that reliably produce true beliefs, for example, memory, vision, introspection, and reason. Responsibilists, by contrast, conceive of intellectual virtues as excellences of intellectual *character*. These include traits like curiosity, attentiveness, open-mindedness, and intellectual humility, carefulness, thoroughness, courage, and tenacity.

Though the distinction between virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism has been useful for understanding the variegated terrain that has emerged in virtue epistemology over the past 20 years, careful scrutiny reveals some problems with it. One problem stems from the fact that intellectual character virtues also seem critically important to epistemic reliability. Specifically, they appear central to our reliability within certain intellectually challenging and important epistemic domains. Consider, for example, the demands of making an innovative scientific discovery or conceiving of an illuminating historical explanation. One might possess perfect vision, an exceptional memory, and formidable logical acumen while still being ill-equipped for cognitive success in these and many related contexts. Getting to the truth and avoiding error in challenging domains often requires a manifestation of qualities like intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, open-mindedness, and intellectual perseverance. The upshot is that epistemic reliability sometimes makes demands on us, not merely as cognitive animals or mechanisms, but also as cognitive *agents*. It requires that we act, think, and sometimes even feel in intellectually virtuous

ways. Once this is recognized, the line between virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism begins to blur.

In *Judgment and Agency*, Sosa makes a similar case against the distinction between virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. As indicated by the quotations above, he views responsibilist character virtues (of some sort) as central and indispensable to the kind of reliability required for *reflective* knowledge, which again he describes as the concept of knowledge “at the center of traditional epistemology, from the Pyrrhonists through Descartes” (36). This is a welcome and exciting development in Sosa’s theory of knowledge, particularly for those of us who think that the epistemic significance of volition, agency, desire, and other elements of personal character have received insufficient attention within traditional epistemology.

However, the situation is not quite what it seems. For, while Sosa now gives a central role to volitional virtues of *some* sort, it is not clear whether these traits are the ones of interest to virtue responsibilists—traits like open-mindedness and intellectual courage, humility, carefulness, and thoroughness. Sosa registers three misgivings about treating responsibilist character virtues as important to traditional epistemology: they involve excessive motivational demands; they are quasi-ethical; and they are best understood, not as (partly) constituting knowledge, but rather as putting one in a position to know. I will elaborate on and respond to each of these misgivings below. But first: If Sosa does not think responsibilist character virtues merit a central role in his account of knowledge, in what sense does his account contain “responsibilist agential intellectual virtues at its core”? Evidently, by “responsibilist agential virtues” Sosa has in mind a related set of qualities that are volitional, agential, and characterological in nature, that can (partly) constitute knowledge, but that are neither motivationally too demanding nor quasi-ethical. In my remarks, I will defend the relevance of responsibilist character virtues to Sosa’s epistemology against the misgivings just noted. In closing, I will offer some remarks concerning whether character-based virtue epistemology is best understood as a contribution to epistemology, ethics, or both.

2. The Motivational Requirements of Responsibilist Virtues

Sosa’s first misgiving about responsibilist character virtues is that they involve an overly demanding motivational component. Sosa’s immediate target here is a requirement that Linda Zagzebski (1996) and I (2013) subscribe to according to which intellectual character virtues necessarily involve an element of *intrinsic* epistemic motivation, for example, a “love,” desire, or

commitment to the truth as such.¹ Sosa argues that such a requirement is out of place in an analysis of knowledge for the straightforward reason that a lot of people know a lot of things in the absence of any such motivation: “Hedge fund managers, waste disposal engineers, dentists, and their receptionists, can all attain much knowledge in the course of an ordinary workday despite the fact that they seek the truths relevant to their work only for their instrumental value” (48-49). I agree with Sosa that knowledge doesn’t require intrinsic epistemic motivation. However, I do not think this supports the conclusion that responsibilist character virtues are of little importance to his theory of knowledge. There are a couple of reasons for this.

First, while a person’s intellectual carefulness and thoroughness need not be intrinsically motivated in order for her to acquire knowledge, surely they *can* be. The odd fund manager or dentist who thinks and reasons in intellectually virtuous ways out of an intrinsic concern with reaching the truth still acquires knowledge. The fact that she cares about the truth as such does not negate her status as a knower. The result is that while intrinsically motivated responsibilist virtues are not necessary for (the relevant aspect) of knowledge, they can be *sufficient*. If so, then it is a mistake to eschew responsibilist virtues on account of their necessarily involving an element of intrinsic motivation.

Second, it is entirely open to Sosa to *reject* the relevant motivational requirement on responsibilist virtues. Specifically, Sosa can retain an interest in intellectual carefulness, thoroughness, open-mindedness, and so on, while denying that these traits are intellectual virtues only if they are intrinsically motivated. Of course, in doing so, he would need to identify some *other* basis—beyond virtuous or admirable motivation—for treating these qualities as intellectual virtues. But here an obvious explanation presents itself: namely, that the traits in question are epistemically *reliable*. In fact, just such a view already exists in the literature. Julia Driver (2000) has argued that a trait of character is an intellectual virtue just in case it is systematically helpful for reaching the truth and avoiding error.² This view has the further advantage of providing Sosa with a ready explanation of the point (noted above) that in many important domains, epistemic reliability requires precisely the kind of intellectual activity that is characteristic of responsibilist virtues (that it isn’t simply a matter of having excellent vision, a reliable memory, etc.).³

Finally, it is worth noting that this way of thinking about intellectual character virtues would involve only a relatively minor tweak to something like Zagzebski’s view of intellectual virtue. Zagzebski agrees with Sosa that intellectual virtues necessarily are reliable (1996: 176-83). And Sosa presumably agrees that intellectual virtues involve *some* kind of motivational requirement, for

example, a requirement to the effect that if S is intellectually careful, say, then S must be motivated to act or think in intellectually careful ways when doing so would be appropriate. The only difference would be that according to Zagzebski but not Sosa, intellectual virtues also necessarily involve an element of *intrinsic* motivation.⁴

3. The Quasi-Ethical Nature of Responsibilist Virtues

Sosa's second misgiving about responsibilist character virtues is that they have an ethical dimension and therefore are out of place in a "pure" epistemology.⁵ As I understand it, Sosa's reasoning here is as follows.⁶ When considering whether a particular belief amounts to knowledge, we abstract away from non-epistemic or ethical considerations. Therefore, when it comes to identifying intellectual character traits an exercise of which might partly constitute an item of knowledge, these identifications must also be purely epistemic. However, as responsibilists think of character virtues like open-mindedness and intellectual courage, they involve an "admixture of practical assessment" (45). Therefore, these and similar character virtues are out of place in an analysis of knowledge.

In what sense are virtues like open-mindedness and intellectual courage thought to involve an "admixture of practical assessment"? Concerning open-mindedness, Sosa suggests that (at least part of) what makes this trait an intellectual virtue is that it involves "proper respect" for "our fellow rational creatures, simply because other members of a kingdom of ends are *deserving* such treatment" (43-44). And he suggests that intellectual courage is an intellectual virtue "because it helps us properly to assess how much personal risk to take for an answer to a certain question," which presumably involves "estimating the value of having that answer and comparing this with the risk to one's personal welfare" (44).

Here as well I think there are some problems with Sosa's argument. First, it not entirely clear that virtue responsibilists generally accept a quasi-ethical conception of intellectual character virtues. For example, consider the view, subscribed to by many virtue responsibilists, that intellectual virtues are grounded in a positive orientation toward distinctively *epistemic* ends or goals. James Monmarquet, for instance, defines intellectual virtues as the character traits "a *truth*-desiring person would want to have" (1993: 30; emphasis added). And Zagzebski and I, as noted above, maintain that intellectual virtues are based in a "love" of epistemic goods or an intrinsic concern with "cognitive contact with reality" (Zagzebski 1996: 167).⁷ According to this way of thinking about

intellectual virtues, the interests and activities of an intellectually virtuous agent are fixed by distinctively epistemic ends or goals. The intellectually virtuous person is not (as such) concerned with practical or ethical matters.⁸

A second and ultimately more important point is that, regardless of how most virtue epistemologists have tended to think of traits like open-mindedness or intellectual courage, Sosa is free to conceive of them in purely epistemic terms. He can think of open-mindedness, for instance, as a disposition to entertain and give a fair and honest hearing to alternative perspectives (strictly) out of an endeavor to get to the truth. And he can think of intellectual courage as involving a willingness to overcome one's fear about engaging in a particular cognitive activity (e.g. judgment, inference, perception) based (strictly) on a reasonable assessment of the distinctively *epistemic* risks involved with doing so. Finally, in light of the previous point, this way of thinking about the traits in question would not represent a significant departure from views already in the virtue responsibilist literature.

4. The “Auxiliary” Status of Responsibilist Virtues

Thus far I have argued that responsibilist character virtues like open-mindedness and intellectual courage need not be understood in quasi-ethical terms or as (necessarily) involving an element of intrinsic motivation, and thus that Sosa should not resist thinking of these traits as central to his account of reflective knowledge. However, Sosa's primary misgiving seems to be that responsibilist character virtues are not *of the right sort* to contribute to reflective knowledge. In particular, he argues that while responsibilist character virtues can help put a person in a *position* to know, they are not plausibly viewed as *constituting* knowledge.⁹ He concludes that responsibilist virtues should be understood as “auxiliary” rather than “constitutive” virtues:

[O]pen-mindedness, intellectual courage, persistence ... are not in the charmed inner circle for traditional epistemology. They are only “auxiliary” intellectual virtues, by contrast with the “constitutive” intellectual virtues of central interest to virtue reliabilism.¹⁰ (42)

Sosa defends this view of responsibilist virtues primarily by way of examples, the most straightforward and illuminating of which is as follows:

Suppose a mysterious closed box lies before us, and we wonder what it contains. How can we find out? We might of course just open the lid. In pursuit of this objective we will then exercise certain competences, perhaps even character traits (if the box is locked, or the lid stuck), such as persistence and resourcefulness. And perhaps these qualities (in certain contexts, and in certain combinations) do lead us reliably to the truth. Nevertheless, the exercise of *such* intellectual virtues need not and normally will not *constitute* knowledge, not even when that exercise does indirectly lead us to the truth.¹¹ (42)

What sort of competence does constitute knowledge in a case like this? The obvious answer appears to be: reliable visual perception. One knows what is in the box on account of *seeing* it.

This and related examples nicely illustrate the fact that responsibilist character virtues *can* function as auxiliary virtues. They suggest, for example, that responsibilist virtues have an important role to play in the process of *inquiry*, which often eventuates in (yet is prior to) knowledge-constituting epistemic performances. But the more important question is: Why think that responsibilist virtues like intellectual perseverance, open-mindedness, and intellectual courage can function *only* as auxiliary virtues? Why not think that they can also function as constitutive virtues? I will argue that in fact they can.

We can begin by thinking about intellectual *perseverance*. While it may be natural to think of intellectual perseverance as a matter of not giving up in one's *search* for the truth, which may be consistent with thinking of it merely as an auxiliary virtue, intellectual perseverance can also manifest in other, knowledge-constituting cognitive acts, for example, in the act of *maintaining* a belief or judgment. S might, out of intellectual perseverance, *continue to affirm* a certain well-supported proposition P despite a barrage of prima facie forceful but ultimately implausible and mistaken objections. If not for her intellectual perseverance, we might imagine, S would have prematurely and mistakenly surrendered her belief. Thus S's intellectual perseverance can be seen as manifesting in her ongoing affirmation of P. And we can say that, subsequent to the challenge to her belief, S knows that P largely on account of this trait.

Next consider *open-mindedness*. Suppose, alternatively, that S's interlocutor raises what is in fact a damning objection to S's belief, but that the undermining quality of the objection is subtle and unspecific enough that in the absence of open-minded attention to the objection, its force could easily be missed. S proceeds to listen to her interlocutor in an open-minded manner. While S's open-mindedness might thereby put her *in a position* to know that she is no longer justified in believing P,

it might also be manifested in her *grasping* of the relevant logical or probabilistic relation. She might, in an act of open-minded listening or consideration, *apprehend* that the justification for her belief has been defeated.

Or suppose that the evidence threatening S's belief consists of a nearly imperceptible physical detail (e.g. an obscure mark on an X-ray or some tiny feature of a cell viewed from under a microscope). Again we can imagine that the detail is subtle and unexpected enough, and that the stakes are high enough, that unless S is ready and willing to consider counter-evidence to her beliefs, she will fail to *see* or *notice* it. Accordingly, S's subsequent visual perception of the detail might manifest her open-mindedness. Her open-minded attention to possible counterevidence might explain how or why she sees—and *knows*—as she does.

The foregoing cases also point to how *intellectual courage* might be involved in a knowledge-constituting epistemic performance. For, suppose S is also deeply *fearful* of the possibility that her justification for believing P might get defeated—that exposure to counterevidence might lead to the unraveling of her career or many of her prized beliefs. Here, it may be that S will grasp that her belief has been defeated only if she is also intellectually courageous. More precisely, S's intellectual courage might manifest in her open-minded attention to the fact that her belief has been undermined, which in turn might partly constitute her knowledge of this fact.

A final case illustrates a further way in which intellectual courage and related qualities can function as constitutive virtues. Thus far we have considered instances of a priori knowledge (grasping a logical relation) and perceptual knowledge (visual awareness of a physical detail). But responsibilist virtues can also manifest in instances of introspective knowledge. Consider what is sometimes required for facing certain undesirable truths about one's own character or personality. A normal or naturally well-functioning capacity for introspection is not always sufficient for this kind of cognitive achievement. If the flaws are significant and threatening enough, a basic competence for introspection may need to be supplemented and regulated by qualities like intellectual courage, open-mindedness, and intellectual honesty. In an act of courageous, open, and honest introspection, one might come to grasp, accept, and thereby know that one has a certain flaw.

These cases illustrate two important points. First, they shed additional light on why it is a mistake to draw too sharp of a distinction between responsibilist character virtues and reliabilist faculty virtues. In each case, one or more responsibilist virtues are manifested in the operation of a cognitive faculty. This is entirely normal. Indeed, what would it look like for a person to engage in intellectually virtuous activity in the absence of any cognitive faculties? Intellectual virtues just are (in

part) dispositions to employ and regulate the operation of one's cognitive faculties in certain reasonable and reliable ways.¹²

Second, and more importantly, the cases support the point that responsibilist character virtues like open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and intellectual perseverance can play a *constitutive* role in instances of knowledge. In fact, provided that these virtues are not unique in this regard, the cases support the view that *in general* responsibilist character virtues can function, not just as auxiliary intellectual virtues, but also as constitutive virtues.¹³

The discussion up to this point suggests the following general picture. As Sosa has continued to develop his account of reflective knowledge, he has shed increasing light on a gap that cannot be filled by reliabilist faculty virtues. Rather, the gap needs to be filled by virtues that are at once robustly volitional and agential but also epistemically oriented—hence his appeal to the notion of “reliabilist agential virtues.” Sosa has stopped short, however, of equating reliabilist agential virtues with responsibilist character virtues; indeed, he has been reluctant to think of the latter as even a subset of the former. While he has had his reasons for doing so, I have tried to show that ultimately these reasons are not persuasive. Instead, we should think of (reliabilistically construed) responsibilist character virtues as playing precisely the sort of role that Sosa has marked off for reliabilist agential virtues.¹⁴

If this picture is correct, then Sosa owes virtue responsibilism an even wider embrace than the one he extends in *Judgment and Agency* (which is significant to begin with). This does not mean that he can or should accept all the details of any particular virtue responsibilist's account of these traits. But neither should he throw the baby out with the bathwater: Sosa can and should, I am claiming, think of (reliabilistically construed) open-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual courage, carefulness, perseverance, and so on, as belonging to the “charmed inner circle” of his virtue-theoretic account of knowledge.

5. Epistemology or Ethics?

Were Sosa to accept this conclusion, it would lead to an even more perfect union of virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. But would this necessarily be a good thing? Might it, for instance, involve a problematic conflation of epistemology and ethics?

To some this may seem like an odd question. However, it is not uncommon in virtue epistemology to encounter the supposition—if not the outright assertion—that any kind of concern

with traits like open-mindedness or intellectual courage falls within the purview of ethics *rather than* epistemology.¹⁵

One problem with this worry should now be clear enough. If Sosa were to accept the line of argument sketched above, while he would be making room for responsibilist virtues in his theory of knowledge, he would be conceiving of them in purely epistemic terms (with no “admixture of practical assessment”) and in their role as constituents of knowledge. Thus anyone who finds this line of argument convincing and accepts Sosa’s reliabilist epistemological framework should have little trouble seeing the suggested concern with responsibilist virtues as falling squarely within epistemology.¹⁶

But what about a concern with responsibilist virtues that *do* contain an element of practical assessment? In keeping with a point of Sosa’s noted above, suppose we were to think of open-mindedness as motivated in part by “the proper respect due our fellow rational creatures, simply because other members of a kingdom of ends are *deserving* of such treatment.” And suppose we were to think of intellectual courage as involving an estimation of “the proper value of having [an] answer [to a given question] and comparing this with the [corresponding] risk to one’s personal welfare” (44). Sosa says that the philosophical study of open-mindedness and intellectual courage thus conceived would be part of *applied ethics*. Specifically, he says it would belong to a correlate of biomedical and business ethics that focuses on “issues concerning scientific or other research, and concerning the value of various sorts of knowledge for human flourishing, and concerning issues of the acquisition and retention and sharing of such knowledge” (44). I assume that what Sosa means here is that the study of “mixed” responsibilist virtues, as we might call them, is proper to applied ethics *and not to epistemology*—rather than to epistemology conceived of as a department of applied ethics.¹⁷ In the remainder of my comments, I will raise some objections to this view.

First, at least some of the philosophical work in question would not be *applied* at all. This includes attempts to clarify the nature and structure of “mixed” responsibilist traits as well as any notable conceptual relations these traits might bear to other important epistemic or ethical statuses. While the resulting theories could be applied to scientific or other intellectual domains in an effort to offer a kind of practical intellectual guidance in these areas, the construction or development of the theories would be a separate and prior process. At most, then, the study of mixed responsibilist traits would be proper to applied *and theoretical* ethics.

Second, recall that even on a mixed conception, the traits in question are largely comprised of epistemic features and aims. Open-mindedness and intellectual courage are dispositions to think,

reason, and inquire in certain ways. And they manifest characteristically in the pursuit of epistemic goods. Accordingly, even if their status as virtues were determined partly on the basis of practical considerations, their epistemic dimensions would remain prominent and essential. This by itself is a sufficient reason for doubting that the philosophical study of mixed responsibilist virtues is proper only to ethics and not at all to epistemology.

Third, why think, in the first place, that allowing considerations of personal well-being or flourishing to enter into one's conception of intellectual virtues should make these traits exclusively the subject matter of ethics? One answer that I suspect might tempt at least some philosophers is that any kind of concern with well-being or flourishing is *ipso facto* the business of ethics rather than epistemology. This worry looks reactionary given the point that while mixed responsibilist virtues may contain an "admixture of practical assessment," they are, as intellectual virtues, concerned principally with distinctively epistemic activities and goods. But it also betrays a further, subtler error. Specifically, it neglects the fact that human well-being or flourishing is partly *constituted* by epistemic pursuits and achievements.¹⁸ Part of what it is to be well off or to flourish as a human being is to pursue and enjoy a share in epistemic goods like truth, knowledge, and understanding.¹⁹ Indeed, if Aristotle is to be believed, a certain kind of epistemic activity—viz. *theoria*—constitutes the highest form of human flourishing. While this may be an overstatement, it seems quite plausible to conceive of certain epistemic pursuits and achievements as fundamental human goods. Accordingly, the fact that considerations of personal well-being or flourishing enter into the conditions for mixed responsibilist virtues is not sufficient for thinking of reflection on these traits as proper only to ethics.

Then where on the philosophical map should the study of mixed responsibilist virtues be located? The fairly obvious reply is that such reflection exists at the *intersection* of epistemology and ethics. It is an area in which the two fields overlap. One advantage of carving things up in this way concerns the fact that philosophers from both fields have unique perspectives and forms of expertise that are critical to arriving at the best overall account of the subject matter in question. This expertise comes in the form of relevant background knowledge and a mastery of relevant concepts, distinctions, principles, and so on. Thus if most epistemologists, say, were to maintain—even just implicitly—that any concern with personal character or human flourishing is "just ethics," the resulting portrait of the nature and importance of intellectual character virtues would be significantly and regrettably impoverished.²⁰

6. Conclusion

I have argued for an even deeper wedding of epistemology and virtue theory than Sosa endorses in *Judgment and Agency*. On the one hand, I think this difference is significant, for I believe a wider embrace of responsibilist virtue theory promises a significantly better understanding of the personal or characterological dimensions of knowledge and related epistemic goods. On the other hand, viewed from a broader perspective, this difference is small. As it stands, Sosa's book takes reliabilist epistemology deep into responsibilist territory—much deeper, in fact, than reliabilists have ventured up to this point. On this account alone, I regard it as an extremely important and valuable contribution to the field.

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¹ In my own case, this requirement stems from my commitment to thinking of intellectual virtues as personal excellences or as traits that bear favorably on their possessor's personal worth. Further, the idea isn't that an intellectually virtuous person's epistemic motivation must be *entirely* intrinsic. Rather, according to both Zagzebski and me, this motivation might also have an instrumental dimension.

² Driver is clear (2000: 126) that whether the trait involves an element of intrinsic epistemic motivation is neither here nor there with respect to its status as an intellectual virtue.

³ Presumably Sosa would add to Driver's requirements by claiming (perhaps among other things) that for a character trait to count as an intellectual virtue, it must be capable of manifesting in the immediate formation of knowledge (vs. merely in the process leading up to that formation, however far back in time this process might go).

⁴ Of course, this difference can make a big difference in certain contexts—e.g. when it comes to explaining the nature of knowledge. Here Zagzebski's conception is at a major disadvantage for reasons that Sosa makes clear. The present claim is about their accounts of intellectual virtue as such.

⁵ Actually, it is not entirely clear whether Sosa thinks this is true of *all* responsibilist character virtues. In articulating this worry, he focuses on two virtues in particular: open-mindedness and intellectual courage. His discussion elsewhere suggests that he may think differently about traits like intellectual carefulness and attentiveness (44-45). If this is right, then the scope of Sosa's exclusion of responsibilist virtues may not be so wide. However, for present purposes, I am going to ignore this possibility. I am interested in showing that Sosa's worry fails to apply even to virtues like open-mindedness and intellectual courage.

⁶ See the argument on pp. 43-45.

⁷ For a contrasting perspective, see Baril (2013). Notably, in defending pragmatic constraints on epistemic excellence, Baril takes herself to be arguing against the standard view.

⁸ This picture also receives some support from existing treatments of particular intellectual virtues, including the virtue of open-mindedness, which is sometimes characterized by responsibilists as being an intellectual virtue to the extent that its possessor has good reason to think that its exercise will further her share in distinctively *epistemic* goods—most obviously the good of truth (see my 2011: Ch. 8). Admittedly, in my own treatment of open-mindedness, I allow for the possibility that open-mindedness might be motivated by a concern with another person's intellectual or epistemic autonomy. While this is an others-regarding focus, it remains epistemic insofar as it is concerned with *epistemic* autonomy, that is, with another person's ability to freely think, reason, weigh evidence, and so on, in the pursuit of epistemic goods. Intellectual courage receives similar treatments. It too is often portrayed as necessarily motivated by distinctively epistemic goods (see my 2011: Ch. 9). In my chapter on intellectual courage, I explicitly take up the question of whether "non-epistemic or non-intellectual normative considerations can play a role in determining whether an exercise of intellectual courage is intellectually virtuous," noting that it is "at least *prima facie* odd to think that they might" (189). While I go on to express some sympathy with the opposite position, I note that this sympathy stems from my commitment to thinking of intellectual virtues as contributors to personal worth—a commitment, we have seen, that Sosa does not and (given his interest in defending a virtue-based analysis of knowledge) should not share.

⁹ As with the previous worry, it is not entirely clear that Sosa thinks this holds for all responsibilist virtues. Above he mentions open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and intellectual persistence. Elsewhere, however, Sosa seems open to thinking of intellectual carefulness and attentiveness as constitutive virtues. He says, for instance, that these traits "can be manifestations, in a particular case, of stable character traits of an epistemic agent. As such, they will help constitute the complete intellectual competences or virtues that the agent exercises and manifests in particular judgments, and in the correctness of these judgments" (45). Here as well the apparently limited scope of Sosa's misgiving needn't concern us, for I want to argue that even the traits that Sosa expresses doubt about can function as constitutive virtues.

¹⁰ Similarly: “[W]e can best understand the responsibilist, character-based intellectual virtues highlighted by responsibilists as *auxiliary* to the virtues that are a special case of reliable-competence intellectual virtue” (36).

¹¹ The statement that responsibilist virtues “need not and normally will not” function as constitutive virtues apparently leaves open the possibility that they can or occasionally will function thus. However, I think the balance of textual evidence supports interpreting Sosa as adopting the more exclusionary view (again, at least with respect to virtues like open-mindedness and intellectual courage). If I am mistaken about this, then the focus of our disagreement shifts to the *extent* to which responsibilist virtues can function as constitutive virtues.

¹² Though their reliability is contingent on a certain amount of epistemic luck. See my (2011: Ch. 6).

¹³ Sosa’s discussion of intellectual carefulness and attentiveness referenced above offers reasons for thinking that they are not unique. Indeed, if they are unique at all, this uniqueness consists in the fact that their ability to function as constitutive virtues is *less* apparent than it is in the case of many other intellectual virtues, including carefulness and attentiveness.

¹⁴ Whether reliabilist agential virtues are *reducible* to (reliabilistically construed) responsibilist virtues is an open question. I will briefly register that I have a difficult time understanding what reliabilist agential virtues might be or look like in a way that does not involve recourse to responsibilist terminology. Sosa’s discussion of carefulness and attentiveness suggest as much. As does his discussion of a virtue proper to judgmental belief: “judgmental belief [a core ingredient of reflective knowledge] is the disposition to judge when one faces a question *honestly*, with intellectual honesty ...” (55). Intellectual honesty, of course, is a responsibilist virtue *par excellence*. Thus, absent further explanation of how reliabilist agential virtues differ from (reliabilistically conceived) responsibilist virtues, one is left to wonder: What might reliabilist agential virtues amount to if *not* reliabilistically construed responsibilist virtues?

¹⁵ See e.g. Dougherty (2014).

¹⁶ Moreover, even if one does not accept a reliabilist framework, one should be able to recognize the important auxiliary role that these virtues might play in the acquisition of knowledge. And presumably inquiry into these connections, while perhaps not part of traditional epistemology, would still be broadly epistemological. Sosa suggests something like this point on pp. 42-44.

¹⁷ This is, to my mind, the most natural interpretation of his comment about applied ethics, especially given the context of the surrounding discussion (which includes the assertion that reflection on purely epistemic auxiliary virtues would, by apparent contrast with reflection on mixed virtues, be proper to epistemology broadly conceived).

¹⁸ My focus here is on human well-being or flourishing. But a similar point could be made about something like autonomy, which is referenced at least implicitly in Sosa’s comments about open-mindedness noted above. For, just as human well-being has a fundamental epistemic dimension, so does autonomy. One can be free to (in the relevant sense) to act but also to think, reason, judge, inquire, and so on, the latter being robustly epistemic.

¹⁹ This makes sense of, among other things, the importance we place on education, which plausibly reflects, not just its instrumental value, but also the fact that learning and intellectual growth are elements of human flourishing.

²⁰ The same goes for a scenario in which virtue ethicists decide that because the traits in question are epistemically oriented and manifest primarily in epistemic activities, they are exclusively the business of epistemologists.