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Reliability as a Virtue

The concept of reliability is both central in contemporary epistemology and important for the moral assessment of persons. In epistemology it has been treated mainly as a characteristic of belief-grounding processes, such as perception; in ethics, it has apparently not so far been systematically explored by philosophers. Given the resurgence of virtue ethics and, more recently, the appearance of virtue epistemology,¹ one would expect more analysis of reliability a trait of persons. There is some question whether, as a trait, reliability in cognitive matters should be conceived as a virtue rather than as some other kind of good characteristic. In exploring that question, this paper will develop and appraise a case for treating such reliability as an intellectual virtue. My main concern, then, will be intellectual reliability; but I take this to be significantly related to reliability as a global characteristic of persons, and I shall begin with general considerations applicable to the trait so conceived.

I. Reliability and Its Close Cousins

Reliable persons, as ordinarily conceived, are people we can count on, where ‘can’ has roughly the sense of ‘may reasonably’. It is convenient to call reliable persons—those reliable in an overall way—*globally reliable*. What we can count on

from them depends on the scope of their competence. Not even a globally reliable person is reliable in every domain of conduct or every subject, and no fully reliable person would pretend to be. As is suggested by the idea that reliable persons are those we can count on, the two central domains—and arguably the only two major domains—in which reliability is manifested are the practical and theoretical.² A globally reliable person must be reliable to some significant degree in both of these domains.³ I will later concentrate on reliability in the theoretical realm; but, as is evident in the intuitive applicability of the idea that we can count on reliable persons in any domain of their serious undertakings, there are apparently certain cross-categorical elements essential to reliability. Let us first consider some of these elements that have significant potential to clarify the overall notion.

In exploring whether intellectual reliability is a virtue, we might begin with an important passage about virtue in which Aristotle speaks of actions that express it as coming from “a firm and unchanging character.”⁴ Whatever we make of firmness and changelessness, the crucial notion here is apparently not *unchangeability*. A reliable person *can* change, even in character, in some ways that do not affect reliability. Indeed, we must make room for the point that reliability admits of degrees and one can therefore become more reliable (or less so). The plausible idea suggested by Aristotle is perhaps that one may not change in the wrong way or for the wrong kind of reason. A reliable person may not, for instance, be fickle, spineless, or (in certain ways) whimsical.

It turns out to be very difficult to explicate just how character *should* be unchanging as regards virtues (which are of course important features of character). The notion of stability expresses part of the idea. But it provides at most a necessary condition for reliability. We may, however, distinguish between stability in *personality* and stability in *character* conceived as constituted chiefly by the

combination of virtues and vices of a person. We might then say that stability in character is a necessary condition for reliability. If my honesty or my clarity of mind diminished, I might easily go from being reliable to being unreliable.

It is equally clear, however, that stability in character is not sufficient for reliability (nor is firmness, which is different). A person who is fickle, foolish, and faithless can be constantly and incorrigibly so—and in that way quite stable in character. Vices can be as important in a person's character as virtues, and a character that is sullied by vices may be as constant as one that is admirable for virtue.

I take a kind of stability in a person to be *one* constituent in reliability. If we reconsider the idea of reliable people as those we can count on, we might take a suitably high degree of predictability to be another element in reliability. This is clearly not sufficient, but a person could not be both reliable and *utterly* unpredictable. To be sure, someone could be predictable morally but not intellectually; unpredictable aesthetically but highly predictable in table games; and so forth. What we may say is that reliability in a given kind of matter—practical or theoretical—implies a high degree of predictability of a certain kind in relation to that matter. Consider the moral case. In taking you to be reliable as a moral judge, I need not know what you will decide about who is right in a dispute, but I will take your being just and conscientious to be predictable. Similarly, in taking you to be a reliable referee, I need not know what you will judge regarding a paper submitted to my journal, but I will certainly consider you to be clear-headed and intellectually fair-minded in your assessment.

The suggested distinction might be put in terms the difference between *standards* and *applications*: between standards governing moral and intellectual conduct and their application to cases. Reliability in a domain implies stability in

one's use of guiding standards, but it allows unpredictability in the results of applying them. Roughly, the distinction is between *criterial predictability* and *behavioral predictability*, where 'behavioral' is taken broadly enough to encompass act-types, judgment-types, and even belief-formation. Criterial, but not behavioral, predictability is a good candidate for a necessary condition for reliability.

Even here, however, a major qualification is needed. For suppose I reflect hard on an intellectual method I have used and decide that it is defective. I may then change my criteria for evaluating a given kind of thing, say undergraduate writing. This may or may not affect the level of my grading, but I will arrive at my grades in a different way. Have I not remained reliable as a judge of undergraduate writing? Surely I may have. But if I have, it may be because I have *second-order criteria* that have remained constant and in terms of which I changed my standards for judging the writing.

Something similar might be said, to be sure, about changes in my second-order criteria, depending on how we distinguish orders. Depending on how theoretically oriented I am, might I not have third-order criteria in such matters? There will, however, be a finite limit to the number of orders realizable in the psychology of any given person. All the criteria of reliability are subject to a constitutive conception of reliability; these criteria will be essentially connected with truth in the theoretical case and with goodness, rightness or some kind of success in the practical realm. But that broad conception allows plurality in criteria at a given order and in the number of orders of criteria possible for a given person.

May we say, then, that a reliable person is, as one might put it, predictably *principled*? If we could subsume all of the relevant kinds of criteria under the idea of principles, this would be promising. But we cannot. Some criteria are holistic or otherwise not articulable in any formulation that expresses a principle. Certainly

virtue theorists would make some such claim. Intuitionists, moreover, might allow intuitive satisfactoriness and intuitive cogency to suffice as anchors in processes of altering criteria of practical decision and of intellectual judgment. The wisest course here is to allow a person's ultimate criteria to be of various sorts provided their internalization in character and corresponding manifestations in behavior do justice to the elements that go into being a person one may, in the relevant ways, count on.

One more element in reliability should be considered here. It is also suggested by the idea of reliability as a trait in virtue of which the person is someone we can count on. We cannot count on someone who repeatedly gets (or does) things wrong. This suggests that there are *objective* limits governing reliability. Since we are not yet focusing on the intellectual case, we need a broad term to capture the idea in the practical domain as well. I suggest that reliability in a given matter entails a high degree of *correctitude* concerning it. There is no way to make this criterion precise; we can, however, use the notion of correctitude to clarify the notion of a single person's being more reliable at one time than at another, of one person's being more reliable than another, and of everyone's being imperfectly reliable.

Wherever objective standards are invoked, skepticism rears its familiar head (some would say its ugly head). Suppose that a Cartesian demon has us all hallucinating and that I make errors as often as is possible under that condition. If we hallucinate in concert, no one will ever think I cannot be counted on—and indeed, I might in fact be successfully counted on so long as the demon is suitably beneficent. Surely such “success” would not bespeak reliability, but what we might call *quasi-reliability*. This is because reliability entails a good measure of genuine knowledge (among cases in which the person forms beliefs). Here, too significant a proportion of my beliefs are false.

Even if we imagine that my beliefs are true because (say) the demon has me having *veridical* hallucinations as a basis of the crucial beliefs, such ill-grounded beliefs do not constitute knowledge. The matter is more complicated if the demon is reliable. One might think that I then have a kind of *derivative reliability*, such as a person might have, in cognitive matters, through being hooked up to an honest and reliable person and forming beliefs on those matters only as a result of this reliable origin. But what kind of reliability does the demon have in the first place? If the demon is *de facto* reliable (e.g. giving me true beliefs all of the time), we might say that my *de facto* reliability is just as high as the demon's. But it would not follow that I have a genuine intellectual virtue. I hope the plausibility of this will emerge in the remaining sections, which, in the light of what has been said so far, will concentrate on reliability as a candidate for an intellectual virtue.⁵

II. Knowledge and Intellectual Reliability

I have so far spoken as if I took reliability in intellectual matters to require not merely justified true belief, but knowledge. Let us explore this. We can say, of a man who is persistently right but does not know (as where we know someone else manipulates the brain to produce correct judgments), 'He is reliably accurate'. But here the point is not that the *person* has the trait of intellectual reliability; it is that we can count on (rely on) his accuracy in the relevant matters. He is, however, more like a reliable gauge than like a reliable person. Nonetheless, one might ask how different reliable persons are from reliable gauges. If Sheila is reliable in mathematical matters, isn't she like a gauge that is reliable in measuring, say, temperature?

If we think of reliability as a trait of character, there is a difference. A gauge is reliable regardless of the kind of reliable causal process by which its reading

matches the quantity it is intended to measure. But traits of character have as their manifestations actions *for reasons* and judgments held for reasons or otherwise *well-grounded* in a certain way that is connected with the thinking and phenomenal life of the person. Consider just the intellectual case. Not all knowledge is well-grounded in this way. Secondly, a judgment or assertion that is so connected with the facts as to express knowledge need not also express a trait of character. Let us consider two kinds of case. The first illustrates just the latter point, the second both.

In one common kind of case, the knowledge is “second-hand,” as with testimony-based knowledge.⁶ Here we may have reliable (and reliably grounded) belief—in aretaic language, *reliably believing*—but not believing *from reliability* (as a virtue). Indeed, acquiring knowledge from testimony does not imply that the *person* is reliable at all. A testimony-based belief may exhibit only *focal reliability*, the narrow kind exhibited by a single belief.

Another kind of case is illustrated by the knowledge reliably exhibited by the *idiot savant*.⁷ Granted, in the latter instance, we have a kind of intellectual capacity stable enough to be considered an enduring psychological characteristic. But it is not a trait of character. It is a competence, but not a virtue. Still, the arithmetic reliability in question may be quite broad. Call it *sectorial reliability*. Reliability as an intellectual virtue may entail sectorial reliability in a certain range of sectors; these may be behavioral domains as well as realms of subject-matter, but even when it is broad, sectorial reliability does not entail intellectual virtue.

It must be granted, then, that if a person with the arithmetic capacity in question has a stable enough calculative capacity, we might speak of reliability in arithmetic matters. The reason for this may be that there is a concept of reliability that is *epistemic*, in the sense that the characteristic is a matter of having a certain kind of knowledge stably across a certain range of cases, for instance logical,

arithmetic, meteorological, or even psychological subject-matter, as with someone highly “intuitive” about people. This is a plausible hypothesis. Combined with an externalist conception of knowledge, it explains why the kinds of people in question are considered reliable.

Elsewhere I have made a case for an externalist conception of knowledge that can fill the bill here.⁸ But, supposing all of this is right, if reliability is to be an intellectual virtue—as opposed to an intellectual power that manifests itself in regularly seeing certain kinds of truths⁹—then it must meet at least two further conditions. It must be a trait of character, and it must be one for which a person as such deserves a certain kind of praise. Virtues are good things in people, and they are inherent goods and not merely instrumental ones. This brings us to another dimension of the topic of intellectual reliability.

III. Intellectual Reliability and Internal Grounds of Justification

If, as I have suggested, global intellectual reliability is a weighted combination of elements each of which is constituted by reliability in a certain domain, we may learn most readily what it requires by considering some representative elements. Let us, then, examine reliability (1) in a subject area, such as American literature, (2) in a highly structured domain of cognitive activity, such as reasoning, and (3) in an open-ended realm that combines the intellectual and the practical, such as journalistic investigation.

With reliability in a subject-matter, we can distinguish sheer knowledge of facts important for the subject-matter from capacity to answer questions about it to which one does not already have answers. Call the first kind of reliability *memorial*. What is essential to it is simply stored knowledge (or at least stored true beliefs). A reference book could have this. If this is all we refer to in calling someone reliable in

matters of American literature, we might instead use ‘knowledgeable’, and even that term suggests much more than simply retained information about the relevant domain the person has already studied. If, by contrast, reliability regarding American literature is to count as an aspect of intellectual reliability conceived as a virtue, then its range must be in a certain way *open-ended*. The person must be able to reason about a question, to go to a literary text and consider it in a way that leads to a range of correct judgments, and to provide some reasons for such judgments, if only in the form of indications of what texts support them.

This kind of reliability is not merely memorial; it does not range over a fixed range of items mentally stored, and it is a creditable capacity, in a sense implying that a person is praiseworthy as such for having it. By contrast, merely memorial reliability might be wired into people in such a way that they have no idea why they believe what they do and are even surprised to find out that they are so regularly right. They would be analogous to a certain kind of *idiot savant*.

What is missing from mere memorial reliability that accounts for the difference between it and the normal, open-ended kind that goes with creditworthiness? An Aristotelian of a certain kind might give a *historical* answer: in the normal case the person has learned both the relevant facts and how to explore the subject matter.¹⁰ But surely if a person reliable about American literature were perfectly duplicated, the perfect double would immediately be reliable about it as well, though, to be sure, the double would be mistaken in those memory beliefs implying the person’s previous existence or past learning of the relevant facts. What both people would have, moreover, is at least this: (1) a sense of why they believe the relevant propositions, if only a sense of remembering them as opposed to a consciousness of one or more premise(s) for them; (2) a capacity to bring the subject matter into consciousness and think about it in a way that yields grounds—in the

form of beliefs, impressions, or aesthetic responses, for instance—for believing them; and (3) a capacity to evaluate the propositions, for instance to find confirmation or disconfirmation. (1) has both phenomenal and dispositional aspects. When we think of a proposition we believe in the light of one or more elements (such as other propositions) which we take to support it, we *tend* to have a sense of some kind of support, commonly justificatory or psychological support or both. Quite apart from whether this sense is in fact phenomenally realized, we have a non-inferential disposition to attribute, to a ground, propositions we believe *on* that ground (such as a premise).¹¹ (2) and (3) are intellectual capacities for mental activities that can be performed well or badly and so make appropriate a certain kind of praise or criticism of the agent.

These three points about reliability as a trait bring out that people who are reliable about a subject in the way that counts toward intellectual virtue do not merely *know facts* about the subject; they also *know how* to think about it, and they tend to *know why* they think what they do about it (there is only a tendency here because, self-knowledge being imperfect, in special cases one could be unable to tell why one thinks what one does). The intellect is central in such knowledge, but the will also has a role: there are things such persons can do, at least mentally, which are intellectually good things to do—the kind that partly explain why we should regard the person as *praiseworthy* in a normative sense and not just as instrumentally good as a source of information.

Is the picture different for reliability in a highly structured realm, such as that of reasoning? If I am reliable in reasoning, I must tend to avoid making invalid or inductively unwarranted inferences. But if my mind works like a logic machine and I have no idea why I draw the conclusions I do, my repeated success would be puzzling to me, and I would be credited with a mysterious power rather than with an

intellectual virtue. Suppose I have no sense of connections between premises and conclusions; I simply find myself believing what follows from what I already believe. I cannot explain in any intuitive way why what follows does, or why certain premises give inductive support to a conclusion. I just keep getting the logically right answers in such matters. This is a useful capacity; but it evokes wonder rather than a tendency to credit the person with a virtue. One might, to be sure, offer a kind of praise; but this kind of praise is likely prospective and aimed at reinforcement, not retrospective and given in recognition of something non-instrumentally good. We can, to be sure, praise the person for the ability in a complimentary way; but this is more like praising the performance of a machine than like praising the judgment of a good literary critic.

There is another way to see the difference between reliability in reasoning as a virtue—call it *aretaic reliability*—and such reliability as a mechanical logical power—call this *inferential behavioral reliability*. Logically, *modus ponens* is no better than *modus tollens*. If reliability in reasoning is just a matter of producing valid reasoning, then people having it could simply add to the propositions they believe any propositions that follow from those. By contrast, one way rational people correct errors is to deduce consequences of what they believe and give up beliefs that entail clear falsehoods. In this way, they pass from using *modus ponens* to using *modus tollens*.

One might, to be sure, segregate the sheer inferential sense of validity (and inductive support) from any capacity to judge truth and falsity. This distinction is important, but my point is that when we are thinking of reliability in reasoning as one of the elements of intellectual virtue, we expect some degree of good *judgment* concerning truth or plausibility. If this is missing, we are talking of something like a logic machine combined with the kind of reliability possible for an *idiot savant*.

If, under the heading *reasoning*, we include abduction—roughly, reasoning to the best explanation—which often requires a measure of imagination and is in that way creative, we find some confirmation of the point that some degree of good judgment is required for intellectual virtue. Take abduction again. A beneficent demon could endow someone with a knack for finding good explanations. But this can count as producing an intellectual virtue as a kind of successful gift, as opposed to that trait's being earned through experience. If, however, the demon does not, as it were, let go after the gift, we might only have a case of knowing *why* in the same way we have knowing *that* where the knowledge is simply wired in. It is important how someone succeeds in abduction; if the person reliable in inferring good explanations has no sense of how the explanatory propositions provide understanding and no awareness of certain kinds of connections, we do not have a virtue but at best mere behavioral reliability.

Being a person with abductive reliability also requires a capacity for some degree of critical reflection. This is in part because there is a close connection between abductive reliability in the normative sense in which it is praiseworthy and, on the other hand, understanding. I take understanding why something is so to be richer than simply knowing a proposition that in fact explains it and knowing that this fact implies it. For one thing, this does not imply believing anything to the effect that what is explained is the case *because* of the explaining element known to obtain. A related capacity that counts toward intellectual virtue is understanding of non-propositional phenomena, such as persons or their creations, as opposed to understanding why something is so. The latter is connected with the former even if (as I leave open here) not every instance of the latter entails one of the former.¹²

The third case I want to consider, that of reliability in investigative journalism, is closely connected with abductive reliability. A reliable investigative

journalist tends not only to find certain correct information but also to infer explanations of information already possessed, to see through rationalizations, to discern motivations, and to evaluate evidence for a claim before making it. A wide range of intellectual skills, used in a coherent combination, is required here. Although, to some degree, motivation is irrelevant to reliability as an intellectual virtue, when it comes to activities of this practical kind, we at least expect the intellectual elements to be resistant to distortion by non-intellectual desires and various kinds of biases. To put the point in the language of virtue ethics, the *telos* of reliability as a virtue in cognitive matters is truth (more accurately, significant truth in the relevant domain). Consider journalists who get good results repeatedly because they always investigate people they do not dislike, but would distort their findings if they did dislike their subjects. They are not intellectually reliable, but at best reliable *for* reporting on figures they do not dislike. This is *relativized reliability*; it may or may not be connected with a subject-matter in a way that implies sectorial reliability, but it is a kind we must countenance. It is, however, a narrow kind and can be at least much like mere behavioral reliability.

If the concept of a trait as a virtue is normative in a way that implies something non-instrumentally good—which is of course not to imply that it cannot also have instrumental value—it should be expected that reliability cannot simply be either just a matter of *having* knowledge or even a capacity to *arrive* at it regardless of how one does so. I think this point is best seen if we contrast an intellectual virtue with an intellectual *power*. In each case in which I have contended that a certain kind of epistemic capacity is not a virtue, the relevant capacity does represent a power. An intellectual virtue is more than such a power, though—particularly in the case of reliability—it requires a significant degree of epistemic power.

If one thinks of belief as “aiming” at truth and of knowledge as true belief appropriately grounded in the “facts,”¹³ one may be inclined to reply that it does not matter for the concept of reliability as a virtue how the relevant knowledge arises or is grounded; all that matters is that the person have a certain minimum amount of knowledge and a capacity to acquire more in the circumstances that constitute the field of application of the virtue. But suppose one thinks of the intellect as responding to grounds of justification that are constitutive of the concept of justification and, so far as we can tell, are also indications of truth. This twofold conception of these justificatory grounds corresponds with our concept of the role of the standard basic sources of justification and knowledge—perception, introspection, memory, and reason.¹⁴ On this conception, the intellectual virtues are not merely contingently tied to these grounding elements; no trait can count as an intellectual virtue that does not properly reflect responsiveness to these elements.

Given that the will plays an important role in a person’s responsiveness to these grounding elements, this view also connects intellectual virtue with moral virtue, for which the will is plainly central.¹⁵ To be sure, we do not form beliefs at will nor perceive (as opposed to observing) at will. But we can do things at will that enhance the quality and quantity our perceptions; we can activate memory at will by, for instance, searching it; and both introspection and, for most of us, reason can, at will, be engaged in in ways that enhance knowledge in new and potentially valuable ways. None of these capacities need function, however, as a condition for the mere acquisition of knowledge or for its mere retrieval from storage in memory.

Another conception of virtue points in the same direction. Suppose we think of virtues as traits of character that are constitutive of a person’s proper functioning. With only minimal realization of them, we function minimally well; with a higher level of realization, we function better; with optimal realization, we function with

excellence. Mere epistemic power does not bespeak proper functioning for human beings; but intellectual reliability as a trait that is cognitively successful on the basis of the operation of the basic sources of knowledge—and such non-basic sources as inference—does bespeak such functioning. This is not to suggest a theory of proper function; but any plausible theory of proper intellectual function for human beings would surely give a major role to these capacities.¹⁶

IV. Reliability as a Basis for Trust

If we can speak of counting on a reliable person, or of counting on a person's reliability concerning a particular subject-matter domain, we can also speak of trusting a person in the same ways. Counting on people is a *way* of trusting them. Unlike counting on people, trusting them does not imply dependence on them; but it does imply a tendency to depend on them should one's needs dictate doing so. We can, of course, count on a reference book, and, in certain arithmetic matters, we can count on an *idiot savant*. Is there anything to be learned about reliability as an intellectual virtue by exploring its connection with trust? I believe there is.

Consider the notion of a person's being *trustworthy*. We usually speak of such people only in relation to moral appraisal. The virtue—and the duties—of fidelity are the chief normative notions pertinent to understanding trustworthiness in persons. Is it the same with intellectual virtues, and in particular with reliability? Here the difference between a trustworthy reference work and a trustworthy scholar in American literature is apparent. The former has a predicable and finite content. One could in principle check it all out, in which case one would tend to cease *calling* the volume by the aretaic name 'trustworthy'; we would say, for instance, that it is entirely correct or something else more accurate and in a way more informative. But a trustworthy person is presupposed to be a free agent; and where intellectual

virtue, including reliability, is in question, there will be an open-ended range of conditions under which knowledge may be expected. Both points need development.

If I am trustworthy, as opposed to merely predictable, in a matter, then I have the freedom to do what I am trusted not to do, yet may be relied on not to do it. Moreover, I can be relied on not to do it not just because I am programmed that way but because my values support avoiding it. If my trustworthiness is seen as a virtue, I am expected to do the right thing for the right *reason*. This does not apply to someone who simply gets things right as a result of the right wiring. Even if such a person could decide not to act in the expected way—or could, by an effort of will—suspend judgment on the proposition the program places before the mind as calling for assent, the person is not responding to reasons. Responsiveness to reasons is not just a matter of volitional capacities.

Moreover, from the will's having the negative power to prevent action or belief formation, it certainly does not follow that the person has a responsiveness to reasons. That responsiveness is a positive and forward-looking capacity. The programmed person may still have reliable belief-producing processes; but such a person would be missing the crucial responsiveness to reasons that trustworthiness, as a virtue, requires.

A related point concerns the degree of objective success needed for intellectual reliability as a virtue. I have stressed that such reliability comes in degrees; your record in making correct judgments need not be perfect in order for you to be highly reliable. I now want to add that reliability does not require getting the right results *initially* upon seeking the relevant information. Intellectually reliable people tend to check their results and may make many errors initially, provided they correct them. There is, then, a measure of *conscientiousness* implicit

in reliability as a virtue in normal human beings who, like all of us who are at all informed, realize their fallibility. The relevant conscientiousness is inexplicable apart from a notion of applying standards connected with perception and the other basic sources of justification. Such application requires voluntary action, at least of a mental kind, and responding to reasons in a way that is not required for mere cognitive reliability.

I have argued that although there is a potentially useful notion of sheer cognitive reliability, reliability as a virtue—*aretaic* reliability—must be conceived as a trait of persons and not merely as a psychological capacity whose exercise yields true beliefs. Such global reliability entails a measure of “firm and unchanging character” and of predictability, but neither is sufficient for it. In the intellectual domain, reliability as a virtue is not global, but also not merely sectorial: it has at least the generality implied by being informationally open-ended. Possessing it is not a matter of simply having access to a group of true propositions such as might form the content of a reference book. This holds even where it is domain-specific, as with reliability limited to a particular subject area.

Intellectual reliability, like other virtues, implies a degree of objective success. Success entails a high degree of correctitude: being intellectually reliable implies that at least a good majority of one’s beliefs about significant matters in the relevant domain constitute knowledge.¹⁷ But the concept of knowledge is external in a way that allows its possession to be cut off from the responsiveness to grounds and reasons that is required for virtue. Any virtue has a connection with the will; as an intellectual virtue, reliability has a connection with the person’s exercise of judgment on the basis of perception and reasoning, among other sources of

knowledge and justification. And as a virtue, it is more than a cognitive power and implies internal elements that constrain the kind of basis of the knowledge it makes possible. It grounds a kind of trustworthiness which cannot be based on just any kind of cognitive reliability that produces a high proportion of beliefs constituting knowledge. It is good in itself, partly because of its internal structure; and, partly because of its external success, it is good for us.¹⁸

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Endnotes

¹ See Ernest Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), John Greco, *Putting Sceptics in Their Place* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), John Greco, ed., *Ernest Sosa and His Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), and Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007)..

² There is an interesting parallel between intellectual reliability and reliability in conduct (the “practical” kind) and, on the other hand, the contrasting directions of fit that, since G. E. M. Anscombe’s introduction of the metaphor, have been associated with belief and intention, respectively. Just as belief is supposed to have a mind to world to direction of fit, intellectual reliability is supposed to be a matter of getting certain propositional matters right; and just as intention is supposed to have a world to mind direction of fit, behavioral reliability (reliability in conduct) is supposed to exhibit a good fit between our intentions and our actions.

³ There is no good way to be precise about just how often a reliable person must succeed in the relevant matter, or just how probable a reliable (or reliably grounded) belief must be. Cf. Sosa’s frequent appeal, in developing his virtue epistemology, to the idea that of what would “not easily” fail; e.g., “What is required for the safety of a belief is that not easily would it fail by being false.”

See *A Virtue Epistemology*, p. 25.

⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1105a29. Terence Irwin, trans (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999).

⁵ For theists there is the related question of whether our de facto reliability is always dependent on God's sustaining the truth-preserving character of the path from the facts to our beliefs that epistemically reflect them (as knowledge paradigmatically does). This interesting question leads to the further a question whether, even for God, it is possible to design a world that is systematically misleading in the way a demon world is. One plausible answer is Descartes's well-known denial, but I cannot pursue it here.

⁶ I have discussed this matter in detail in "The Place of Testimony in the Fabric of Knowledge and Justification," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34, 4 (1997), 404-422 and in *Epistemology* (London: Routledge, 2003), esp. ch 5.

⁷ In *Epistemology*, ch. 8, the idiot savant is discussed as an indication of the possibility of knowledge without justification.

⁸ See *Epistemology*, ch 8, on knowledge.

⁹ I have distinguished between an epistemic virtue and an epistemic power in discussing Ernest Sosa's virtue perspectivism. See "Intellectual Virtue and Epistemic Power," in *Ernest Sosa and His Critics*, 3-16.

¹⁰ In "Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief," in Abrol Fairweather and Linda Zagzebski, eds., *Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), 82-97, I discuss the Aristotelian conception of a virtue in some detail. He may have, in different places in NE, presented both historical and non-historical conceptions of virtue.

¹¹ For an account of inferential grounding (in the case of "belief-basing") see my "Belief, Reason, and Inference," *Philosophical Topics* XIV, 1 (1986), 27-65.

¹² For a detailed epistemological treatment of related aspects of understanding, see Stephen Grimm, "The Sense of Understanding," forthcoming in Henk de Regt, Sabina Leonelli, and Kai Eigner, eds., *Scientific Understanding: Philosophical Perspectives* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press).

¹³ This factual groundedness conception of knowledge goes back at least to Armstrong and Dretske and is found in others. It is sketched, and some references to their work given, in *Epistemology*, ch. 8.

¹⁴ In “Justification, Truth, and Reliability,” I have discussed the matter of internal and external standards of adequacy in detail, and I should add that I am not taking memory to be a basic source of knowledge, as opposed to justification, as argued in ch 2 of *Epistemology*.

¹⁵ My “Acting from Virtue,” *Mind* 104 (1995), 449-471, indicates how the will is crucial for the notion of virtue.

¹⁶ Here it is instructive to compare Alvin Plantinga’s views on proper function and on the Calvinian concept of the *sensus divinitatis*. See *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford, 200x).

¹⁷ It may also be true that all or nearly all of the really important beliefs an intellectually reliable person holds are true, at least within a certain range, say in matters of life and death. This element may vary from one domain to another. I might add that my overall point here is not uncontroversial. Jennifer Lackey, e.g., distinguishes reliable believers from reliable asserters and would likely claim that there is a use of ‘reliability’—even if not as a virtue term—to refer to persons on the basis of the latter characteristic. For on her view, we can obtain knowledge of a true assertion by a person who has the latter but not the former characteristic. See her “Learning from Words,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73, 3 (2006), 592-618.

¹⁸ Acknowledgments