Virtue Epistemology: Character versus Competence

Introduction

It has long been received wisdom that there are two quite distinct forms of virtue epistemology. One of these finds in epistemology important correlates of Aristotle’s moral virtues. Such responsibilist character epistemology builds its account of epistemic normativity on the subject’s responsible manifestation of epistemic character. The other form of virtue epistemology cleaves closer to Aristotelian intellectual virtues, while recognizing a broader set of competences still restricted to basic faculties of perception, introspection, and the like. This orthodox dichotomy of our field is deeply misleading, and will be challenged in this chapter.

1. In his book, *The Inquiring Mind*, Jason Baehr argues for a distinctive approach, while presupposing the dichotomy and offering detailed critiques of rival approaches. Against my own virtue reliabilism, he charges that it deplorably neglects responsibilist, agential intellectual virtues. Against other responsibilists, he argues that character epistemology can have only very limited success with the issues of traditional epistemology, such as skepticism and the nature of knowledge. Given that there is more to epistemology than those perennial issues, he proposes a focus on his preferred character, responsibilist, agential virtue epistemology. This in his view is how we can best locate epistemological character traits within epistemology, thus bringing epistemology and ethics closer together than in the past.

What is more, not only have virtue reliabilists neglected responsibilist, agential intellectual virtues, which are so important for issues beyond those of traditional epistemology. They have even overlooked how important responsibilist virtues are in dealing with those traditional issues once we consider levels of human knowledge more sophisticated than those attainable through simple mechanisms such as sensory perception.

Given how thoroughly and how well Baehr has discussed those issues in his book, that is an excellent place to start our own discussion. In particular, I will discuss his critique of my own alternative approach, and offer a defense. In its discussion of my views the book misfires, or so I will argue. But I aim to rise above polemics to an overview of virtue epistemology, one that reveals more fully the current state of the field, and options now available at its cutting edge.

2. Baehr contends “...that the concept of intellectual virtue does merit a secondary or supporting role” in traditional epistemological inquiry into the nature, conditions, and extent of human knowledge. By intellectual virtues, moreover, he means responsibilist, agential, character intellectual virtues, not reliabilist faculties. He concludes his fourth chapter as follows:

> We have seen that virtue reliabilists ... must expand their focus to include, not just the more mechanical or faculty-based dimension of human cognition, but also the more active, volitional, or character-based dimension. ... The cost of not doing so, we have seen, is that reliabilists are unable to account for the sort of reliability involved with ... much of the knowledge that we as humans care most about.

3. I will defend four claims in response.

First, from its inception, virtue reliabilism has *always* had that expanded focus.

Second, responsibilists *have* advocated a *distinctive* conception of responsibilist, character-based intellectual virtue, but it is partial and inadequate.

Third, and ironically, we should recognize a sort of active, volitional intellectual virtue that will be a special case of reliable-competence intellectual virtue.

2. On this, as we shall see, there is dissonance in the ranks of responsibilities. Linda Zagzebski hopes and believes that responsibilist virtue theory can solve traditional problems of epistemology, whereas Baehr declares defeat, at least in crucial part. Here I side with Zagzebski’s aspirations, but agree with Baehr that they have not yet been attained. Rather than conceding defeat, however, I will offer a better responsibilist account, one that welcomes responsibilities at the core of virtue reliabilism.

Fourth and finally, we can best understand the relativist, character-based intellectual virtues highlighted by relativists as auxiliary to the virtues that are a special case of reliable-competence intellectual virtue.

A true epistemology will indeed assign to such relativist-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. Ironically, our reliabilist framework did always potentially, and does increasingly (actually and explicitly) give the place of honor to the aential, volitional approach, a central place that relativists either emphatically deny to it (Baehr), or do not sufficiently provide for it (Zagzebski).

So, my main thesis will be that relativist, competence-based virtue epistemology must be understood broadly, in a more positively ecumenical way, with relativist aential intellectual virtues at its core.

Before we turn to that, however, here follows a defense against the specific critique offered by Baehr in his book.

A. Character Theory versus Competence Theory

We begin with quotations showing relativist competences to have been present in virtue reliaiblism from its inception. Here are two relevant passages (from among many).

1. First an early passage:

   Note that no human blessed with reason has merely animal knowledge of the sort attainable by beasts. For even when perceptual belief derives as directly as it ever does from sensory stimuli, it is still relevant that one has not perceived the signs of contrary testimony. . . . [E]ven when response to stimuli is most direct, if one were also to hear or see the signs of credible contrary testimony, that would change one’s response. The beliefs of a rational animal hence would seem never to issue from unaided introspection, memory, or perception. For reason is always at least a silent partner on the watch for other relevant data, a silent partner whose very silence is a contributing cause of the belief outcome.

   That same view stays in place over the many succeeding years until we reach the following:

   I speak of “mechanisms” or processes of belief formation, and sometimes of “input/output mechanisms,” but I want to disarm explicitly any implication that these are simple or modular. . . . A mechanism can be something close to a reflex, or it can be a very high-level, central-processing ability of the sort that enables a sensitive critic to “decide” how to assess a work, based on complex and able pondering.

   Of course the intention was always to explain knowledge of all sorts, including sorts where the competences involved are those of a skilled art critic, scientist, mathematician, or detective, and not just the sorting competence of a chicken sexer.

2. Those quoted passages should already lay to rest the notion that virtue reliabilism is restricted to peripheral or modular or automatic mechanisms of belief formation. What then can possibly have suggested that virtue reliabilism does exclude the more sophisticated, actively volitional dimensions of our cognitive lives? Consider this from Baehr’s book:

   The tight logical connection between character virtues and faculty virtues is also evident in the fact that when epistemologists offer detailed characterizations of the latter, they have a hard time avoiding talk of the former. Sosa, for instance, in a discussion regarding the fallibility of faculty virtues, notes that the reliability of one’s cognitive faculties can be affected by one’s intellectual conduct. Interestingly, the conduct he proceeds to describe is precisely that of certain intellectual character virtues and vices. . . .

   Again, an exercise of character virtues is often manifested in and partly constituted by the operation of certain faculty virtues. Moreover, as the passages from Sosa indicate, the reliability of faculty virtues often implicates one or more character virtues. Therefore the attempt to make a principled

3. Part IV will make a detailed case for this in Chapter 10 re. Pyrrhonism, and in Chapter 11 re. Descartes.

4. In what follows I will characterize my view indifferently as “relativist” or “competence” virtue epistemology (CVE).


7. And, besides, dictionaries reveal that a “mechanism” need not reside in a machine. A google search will turn up “trading mechanisms,” “defense mechanisms,” “mechanisms for dealing with stress,” etc.
exclusion of character virtues from the reliabilist repertoire of intellectual virtues on the grounds that faculty virtues but not character virtues are "sources" of belief seems bound to fail.  

The restrictive view attributed to me may well need correction, but it never has been my view. The attribution is based on no supportive reference, but only on what is "suggested" by the simplicity of the examples that I use as clear cases of simple knowledge to be explained. It is assumed that the view is restricted to the sorts of competences in examples of simple perceptual, intuitional, or mnemonic knowledge. But no such explicit restriction can be found in my published work. Passages are cited (as Baehr indicates above) where I show clear signs of making no such restriction, but those passages are used (surprisingly) to demonstrate the inadequacy of my view, for imposing such a restriction. Nevertheless, what has never been excluded from my virtue reliabilism is agential competences.

On the contrary, the right conclusion is that the restrictive view is not my view. I restrict not the competences but only the examples. I focus on those simple enough to reveal more starkly certain basic problems that any theory of knowledge must solve. Further problems may of course arise when less simple instances of knowledge are highlighted. But first things first, and frankly it has been challenging enough to try to deal with the simpler examples first. Although I have always recognized both an animal and a reflective level of knowledge, as it happens my current project is to develop the more agential and reflective side of my virtue epistemology.

3. What could have led to the misunderstanding of my position? In part, the reason may perhaps emerge in the following note of Baehr's:

As I note below, an additional requirement for what Sosa calls "reflective" or "human" knowledge is that the person in question have an "epistemic perspective" on the known belief, which consists of an additional set of coherent beliefs about the source and reliability of the original belief (see 1991: ch. 11). Our concern here, however, lies with the virtue component of Sosa's analysis.

8. These passages are from the concluding paragraphs of section 4.4 of Baehr's book.

9. What follows will take up problems of epistemic agency as its main focus, and will exploit distinctions that deal directly with additional problems that arise once virtue epistemology becomes more explicitly and voluntarily agential.

10. And I am now fully engaged in the project; witness the present text.

11. This is note 4 of chapter 4 of Baehr's book. Italics added. The reference is to my Knowledge In Perspective.

Here Baehr restricts his discussion of my views to their animal component, leaving aside the reflective component. Is it any wonder that virtue reliabilism is thought to neglect the active, agential, responsible side of epistemology, when its main attempt to do so is left out of account?

Does virtue reliabilism leave out agency? Does it least leave out the conscious, intentional, volitional agency that is involved in deliberation and in conscious pondering, or weighing of reasons? Not at all; at most, the animal side of virtue reliabilism would be guilty of such negligence if it aspired to be an account of all human knowledge. But it has no such ambition. Rather, it has always been joined to an account of the more distinctively human sort of knowledge, the reflective sort.

4. Baehr lays out what he takes to be the formal conditions that must be satisfied by any intellectual virtue, according to Competence Virtue Epistemology:

IV-CVE What Intellectual Virtues Are According to Competence Virtue Epistemology (according to Baehr)

[Intellectual virtues are] personal qualities that, under certain conditions and with respect to certain propositions, are reliable means to reaching the truth and avoiding error.

And he attributes to John Greco the idea that intellectual virtues would need to play a critical or salient role in explaining why a person reaches the truth.

Baehr focuses on agential virtues. These virtues have, in his view, certain distinctive features:

a. They are virtues exercised in intentional agency.

b. They are developed through repeated agency.

c. They bear on the personal worth of the possessor.

d. They aid agential success.

e. In epistemology, they concern intentionally conducted inquiry.

Because of its focus on traditional faculties such as perception, memory, and inference, virtue reliabilism is said to overlook character traits, such as open-mindedness and intellectual courage. These traits are said to possess the five features of agential virtues listed, and to satisfy the formal

12. In fact, not even animal knowledge is necessarily so exclusive, as should have been clear already in the main text, and will be emphasized in section D3.

13. Baehr, passing, e.g., section 2.2.1, pp. 22–5.
conditions accepted by competence virtue epistemology (spelled out in IV-CVE above). Such overlooked character traits are indeed, under certain conditions and with respect to certain propositions, a reliable means to reaching the truth and avoiding error, and their exercise can most saliently explain why the subject gets it right in believing as they do.

Does competence virtue epistemology (virtue reliabilism) plead guilty?

5. Reliabilist intellectual virtues, according to Baehr’s IV-CVE, are to be understood simply, by definition, as traits (a) whose manifestations reliably yield true belief, and (b) that play a salient role in explaining why one reaches the truth in cases where one does so. That is indeed an account in the literature, an account of epistemically relevant belief-yielding sources. And there are early passages of mine, such as the following, which might misleadingly suggest that I subscribe to that account:

We have reached the view that knowledge is true belief out of intellectual virtue, belief that turns out right by reason of the virtue and not just by coincidence.14

Although I later retain that view of knowledge,15 my account of intellectual virtues still differs from IV-CVE in a way that matters for how we should understand virtue reliabilism, or so I will now argue.

6. Competence virtue epistemology aims to solve two Platonic problems: the Theaetetus problem as to the nature of knowledge, and the Meno problem as to its distinctive value. Knowledge is analyzed as belief whose correctness manifests the believer’s pertinent competence. So, the pertinent competence (the pertinent reliabilist intellectual virtue) must be one whose exercise can constitute knowledge. That is what I claim knowledge to be: belief that is correct, that thus succeeds, through the exercise of competence. At least, that is what an important, basic sort of knowledge amounts to.16 However, the “through” must be restricted. A belief might attain correctness “through” competence only because the exercise of competence puts one in a position to know. And that will not suffice to make that correct belief an instance of knowledge. For, that exercise of competence may not immediately take the form of the correctness of a belief. It may rather take the form of putting one in a position to exercise a competence, such as sorting by eyesight, whose exercise does amount to a correct belief, a correct sorting.

It may be thought that a virtue such as open-mindedness or intellectual courage could be a directly knowledge-constitutive virtue. Accordingly, Baehr alleges, the reliabilist, competence-based view neglects responsibilist virtues that it should welcome within its fold, since they too can be important in explaining how a subject gets it right. And it must indeed be granted that, in certain instances, a responsibilist virtue can provide the salient explanation, especially where the truth must be won through complex and competent effort. Courageous and open-minded pursuit of truth—by a scientist, or journalist, or detective—might well enable someone to uncover a truth that escapes all others. Baehr has a telling objection to any form of reliabilist virtue epistemology that requires for knowledge only that the correctness of the knowing subject’s belief must derive somehow, perhaps at a great remove, from the exercise of a certain intellectual virtue that is normally a reliable aid to reaching the truth. Such a form of virtue epistemology would be negligent if it ignored, or declared irrelevant, any responsibilist virtues that did help one attain truth, including open-mindedness and intellectual courage.

However, Baehr’s objection is not relevant to a virtue reliabilism for which the virtues or competences that matter are not simply those whose exercise through inquiry can reliably help one reach the truth. In my view, for example, there are distinctive competences whose exercise can constitute knowledge. And a competence whose exercise reliably aids our search for truth—even so as to be the salient explanation of why truth is then attained—might easily be one whose exercise would not constitute knowledge. It may just fail to be of the right sort to be thus constitutive.

For example, a scientist may follow a healthy regimen with strict discipline, and her good health may help explain why she makes her discoveries, by contrast with her wan, depressed rivals; and may even be the salient explanation.

Or, it might work the other way around. It might be that someone’s obsessive pursuit of truth, even at the cost of malnourishment and depression, puts them in a position to attain truths that are denied to their healthy rivals.

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14. Knowledge in Perspective, 277. This, by the way, is the earliest statement of the knowledge as apt belief view of knowledge, so in advocating it do not follow suit, contrary to Baehr’s footnote 8, on p. 37.

15. This is emphasized in footnote 2 of ch. 2 of Sosa’s A Virtue Epistemology. That footnote makes it explicit that the view developed in that later book is essentially that same view, now better formulated, based on an improved conception of apiness, with its scope explicitly amplified to cover performances generally. And the conception of intellectual virtues required for this view differs importantly from the IV-CVE that Baehr attributes to virtue reliabilists.

16. Here I have in mind oedal (belief-constituted) animal knowledge. We shall find in due course that there is a subcerebral sort of animal knowledge.
My distinction has on one side intellectual virtues whose manifestation helps to put you in a position to know, and on the other intellectual virtues whose manifestation in the correctness of a belief thereby constitutes a bit of knowledge. In my view, a competence can constitute (credal) knowledge only if it is a disposition that can be manifest in the correctness of the constitutive belief. A competence in general is a disposition to succeed with a certain aim, and a competence to believe correctly is a special case of that.

The crucial point is that a competence whose exercise can aid one’s attaining a correct and even an apt belief is not necessarily one that is manifest in any such attainments. For it need not be a competence to attain any such things as correctness or aptness, despite being a competence whose exercise further such attainments. The competences of focal interest to competence virtue epistemology are those whose manifestations in such attainments constitute knowledge. These are the competences whose manifestations constitute apt belief.

8. Granted, the avoidance of negligence can be constitutive of a full competence whose manifestations might constitute knowledge. And character traits such as open-mindedness and intellectual courage might help us avoid such epistemic negligence. But their role would be epistemically tangential. What really matters here for epistemology is the epistemically auxiliary virtue of avoiding negligence. This might in a particular case be aided by an ethical virtue of intellectual courage (proper assessment of whether a certain degree of personal risk is worth taking for the sake of a bit of knowledge on a certain question whose answer would be personally valuable). But the role of such courage is ethical and only accidentally epistemic. Thus, consider readily available evidence whose lack would block the agent from knowledge on the question at hand. Obtaining such epistemically needed evidence might require a crazy degree of personal foolhardiness rather than any ethically proper intellectual courage.

Accordingly, we should distinguish between an intellectual ethics that is purely epistemic, and an intellectual ethics that is properly a part of ethics. Suppose what makes “open-mindedness” a virtue is (even just partly) that it is required for the proper respect due our fellow rational creatures, simply because other members of a kingdom of ends are deserving of such
treatment. Or suppose "intellectual courage" is thought to be a virtue in a certain instance because it helps us properly to assess how much personal risk to take for an answer to a certain question. This would presumably involve estimating the proper value of having that answer and comparing this with the risk to one’s personal welfare. Such open-mindedness and such intellectual courage would then be properly ethical competences, part of corresponding ethical virtue (where the full virtue would include not only intellectual assessment, as above, but also an executive competence to act on that assessment, thus avoiding akrasia, for one thing).

The study of such ethical intellectual competences and virtues would be a part of applied ethics. Biomedical ethics is a branch of ethics that studies ethical issues concerning the practice of medicine, or of biomedical research, in particular. Business ethics is a branch of ethics that studies ethical issues concerning the practice of business in particular. A correlate intellectual ethics is thus a branch of ethics that studies ethical 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. Et cetera.

What then is the implied contrast? What would be the purely epistemic correlates of such ethical competences or virtues of open-mindedness or intellectual courage? For the purely epistemic correlates we would bracket any specific evaluative or ethical values or desiderata. In determining how we ought to proceed, individually or collectively, we would take a question as given. By contrast, the assessment of what questions are properly pursued does seem straightforwardly a question of ethics. Once a question is given, however, there arises the familiar threefold issue: affirmation, denial, suspension. If, for simplicity, we restrict ourselves to cases of conscious judgment, then our threefold issue is a matter of choice. The epistemic agent faces a choice among three intentional actions. In making that choice, one might take certain preliminary steps (such as opening the lid of a mysterious box, in order to find out what it contains, or such as seeking evidence, which is readily available, and which it would be epistemically negligent to disregard). In determining one’s answer—one having gathered enough evidence to avoid negligence—one can now make one’s choice, in doing which one should exercise proper care and attentiveness, which will enhance the reliability of one’s choice procedure.

I hope our example will have suggested traits of purely epistemic intellectual character that can bear on one’s epistemic threefold choice. Some of these are competences and virtues of inquiry, of how to put oneself in a position to know (often in an evidential position to know). But others are competences and virtues of judgment proper, as with proper care and attentiveness. The latter 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. So, these traits will be implicated in competences whose manifestations might constitute the agent’s knowledge.

Other such traits—intellectual perseverance, for example—will be virtues of inquiry. These will not be part of the competences whose manifestation might constitute the agent’s knowledge. Someone lazy could have as much knowledge in a given domain as would someone industrious. The lazy knower could just be lucky to be placed in the position to know, a position that the industrious knower would need to win with much effort and persistence. The kind that someone industrious would have to pry open laboriously might just open of its own accord for someone lazy. And so on.

So, intellectual virtues of both sorts can be stable traits of character, and some are indeed constitutive of the competences whose manifestation in true belief (and in true and apt belief) amount to human knowledge. But these are all purely intellectual virtues, with no admixture of practical assessment. The factors involved in their exercise are only the purely epistemic factors of truth and aptness. So these are not matters of the applied intellectual ethics sketched above. They are rather integral to a purely epistemic intellectual ethics.

B. Responsibilist Virtue Epistemology: Baehr versus Zagzebski

Here is the internecine disagreement in brief.

1. Baehr and Zagzebski share a high-minded conception of intellectual virtues. For them these are character traits that bear on the personal worth of the person. They are inherently motivational. Such virtuous character traits are manifest in actions that must be motivated by a virtuous pursuit of the truth. In their view, a belief that derives (at least in important part) from such a virtue must derive from actions that express the subject’s love of truth.
2. Zagzebski believes that such character-based responsibilist epistemology can help with the traditional problematic of epistemology, at the core of which is the project of defining knowledge. Indeed, for Zagzebski it is emphatically this motivational component that explains the distinctive value of knowledge, the value that knowledge has beyond whatever value might be found in the corresponding merely true belief. So, she proposes that knowledge is best understood as belief that gets it right through such responsibilist intellectual virtue.8

3. For Baehr, however, that approach is blocked by simple counterexamples, such as a pang of pain, or a strike of lightning out of the blue, which one knowingly discerns with no delay. These one can't help knowing, sans deliberation and unmotivated by love of truth.

4. Zagzebski responds:

[My definition] . . . does not rule out easy knowledge by sense perception. A person who believes that she sees an easily identifiable object typically knows that she sees the object, provided that there are no indications in her environment that she should not trust her visual sense or understanding of the concept under which the object falls.9

And she extends the point to testimony, and presumably would go further.10

18. Occasionally, and more recently, she takes the somewhat different view that it is the knowledge that does manifest such high-ranking virtues that has relevant distinctive value, even if there is a lower order of knowledge that lacks it. But this will not help with the Mephisto problem, which is not really solved through appeal to such worthy belief motivated by the love of truth. What makes knowledge of the right way to Larissa better than mere true belief need not depend on its being an achievement that deserves admiration, nor on its being pregnant with pragmatic value. This is increasingly clear if we switch the example to one of knowing which is the shortest road to Larissa. Of the two obvious roads, the shortest may be just infinitesimally shorter, so that its increment of pragmatic value is negligible, nor is one motivated by love of truth, by contrast with desires for instrumental means. Moreover, one's knowledge may have been attained through the most ordinary testimony, by asking a passer-by, which would merit little personal credit or admiration. And yet knowing what one believes is in that case still better than merely getting it right by luck. The sense in which it is still better commutes with the fact that epistemology is not a department of ethics. Epistemic attainments, like good shots, are not quite generally and inherently valuable in any objective sense. In spite of that, the good ones are still "better" than alternatives even so. Knowledge is in that way a better attainment than belief that does not succeed or does so just by luck. But this general superiority is not a quasi-ethical matter of motivation. It is rather a matter of competence, which is often and importantly enough a matter of intentional agency, but can also be just a matter of functional, biological, or psychological teleology.


20. Compare Sosa, Knowledge in Perspective, 240: "The beliefs of a rational animal hence would seem never to issue from unaided introspection, memory, or perception. For reason is always

5. But Baehr insists as follows:11

[If as I work late at night there is a power outage] . . . I am, as it were, overcome by knowledge that the lighting in the room has changed . . . Nor is it plausible to think that I am "trusting my senses" in the relevant, motivational sense. . . . Again, knowledge of this sort seems not to involve or implicate the knower's agency at all.

And this line of criticism seems right at least to the following extent. We cannot explain the appropriateness of the belief that the room has gone dark as a matter of non-negligent agency, if that belief is not at all a product of intentional agency, which is the sort of agency important to character epistemology. Surely motivation relates to agency, not to passive reactions that approximate or constitute mere reflexes.

It might be replied that one can take a kind of agential credit for a locomotive's staying on a certain track, despite one's having actively intervened not at all. One might still deserve credit even so, if there have been junctures where as conductor one could have intervened, where one was free to intervene and, without negligence, freely opted not to do so. Unfortunately, this will not do. The problem is that in the cases urged by the critics, there is no freedom to intervene in what seems clearly to be a belief, and even an instance of knowledge, as with the knowledge that the room has gone dark.

6. Here is the upshot. If we restrict responsibilist virtues to those that are both agential and bear on the personal worth of the agent, in virtue of their motivational component, then Baehr is right to think that we cannot build a traditional epistemology on such virtues, and Zagzebski wrong to think otherwise. Not even knowledge can be accounted for in those terms. However, in my view Zagzebski is right to think that a traditional epistemology can be built on responsibilist virtues, and Baehr wrong to think otherwise. Where they both go wrong is in supposing that responsibilist virtues must involve the personal worth of the agent, must be virtues of that sort, involving motivation that passes muster.

Moreover, my point here cannot be dismissed as merely terminological. Understood in a metaphysically interesting way, my claim is that the relevant kinds for building a responsibilist virtue epistemology are not just the

at least a silent partner on the watch for other relevant data, a silent partner whose very silence is a contributing cause of the belief outcome."

21. The Inquiring Mind, 44.
following two: (a) non-agentual faculties, and (b) personal-worth-involving, motivationally appropriate agentual virtuous competences. We may or may not consider the latter to be a category or kind worth emphasizing. We may or may not consider it worth emphasizing in a responsibilism that aspires to solve traditional epistemological problems. Regardless of all that, there is at a minimum also or instead the following epistemic kind: (c) agential virtues. These obviously go beyond non-agentual faculties. So, they go beyond a reliabilism restricted to such faculties. And so I submit that they can reasonably be considered “responsibilist” intellectual virtues, in the sense that agents would be epistemically, agentially responsible in exercising them, and irresponsible through their neglect, and even vicious through exercise of conflicting dispositions. In other words, they are traits or competences of agents as agents. And among these are the traits or competences of conscious, intentional agents as such.

C. Virtue Epistemology: Responsibilism
as a Kind of Reliabilism

I. In order to circumvent the impasse within responsibilism, we must first be clear that epistemology is not a department of ethics. An extremely high epistemic status, certain knowledge, can be attained with a deplorable state that represents a sad waste of time, as when someone spends a morning determining with certainty how many beans are left in their coffee bag.

Moreover, that is quite compatible with there being special instances of knowledge that are outstanding accomplishments, which require an admirable love of truth (on a certain matter) and willingness to pursue it with persistent toil and sacrifice. And it is also compatible with the fact that possessing knowledge of certain sorts, for various sorts, is an indispensable part of any flourishing life. Moreover, having sufficient knowledge of a certain sort may be indispensable without any particular bits of knowledge of that sort being indispensable, or even much desirable.

Independently of all that, it remains that there is a distinctive dimension of epistemic assessment isolated from all such broadly ethical (or prudential) concerns. Moreover, within this epistemic dimension, love of truth plays a negligible role at most, if any at all. 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. That is why they want them, not because they love truth. That seems indeed to be true of service professionals generally, including medical doctors and lawyers. It is not love of truth that routinely drives their professional activities, by contrast with desire for professional standing, wanting to help someone, or trying to make a living.

Disinterested, high-minded motivation must be distinguished from intentional, volitional agency, as must even any sort of positive motivation, except the purely instrumental. Dispositions to succeed when one tries need not be closely allied with, and much less do they need to be constituted by, a high-minded motivation, one that can bear on the personal worth of the agent, on how fine a person they are. Professionals are indeed routinely engaged in intentional, volitional truth-seeking in their work lives, even when they do not disinterestedly, lovingly seek the truth. Nor need they evince any “respect” for the truth, properly so-called. An assassin may even have no desire whatever for the truth on the location of his victim except only for the fact that it will make his crime possible. Indeed, if he thought a false belief would be at that juncture get him more efficiently to his objective he might heartily approve of his so believing, and be glad he did so, with no regrets whatever. His search for truth, since agential, is subject to the full range of responsibilist assessment nonetheless. And his knowing the location of the victim in believing as he does about that location, is still better epistemically than his merely believing correctly, and of course better epistemically than his believing incorrectly. Similarly, his shot may be an excellently apt shot, and thereby better than an inapt shot (whether successful or not), despite the murderous motivating intention. (That is to say, it is better as a shot; it is a better shot. It need not be a better entity, or a better thing to happen, nonetheless.)

In conclusion, once we distinguish the sort of comparative evaluation (epistemic performance evaluation) that is involved in our taking knowledge to surpass merely true belief in (the relevant sort of) value, this removes any temptation to take personally laudable motivation to be the key, even if in a broad sense one’s cognitive prowess may be a component of one’s personal worth, as might be the shooting prowess of our assassin. Broad “personal worth” is not what responsibilist, character epistemologists have in mind, at least not Baehr. The assassin is not a better person for being such a good
shot. A more accomplished person, yes, but not a better person, in any sense closely related to ethical assessment.

2. Someone might believe in knowledge only as power and in accuracy only as instrument. So, he neither endorses nor does he adhere in general to any truth-centric norm such as: It is correct to believe P only if P is true. Rather, what he endorses and adheres to is this: It is correct to believe P only if so believing will help me gain fame, wealth, and power. (Notoriously, such people abound, and some even become famous, wealthy, and powerful.)

Some people like that can still attain vast stores of useful knowledge, however, so long as they keep track of the areas of life where they need to supplement their deep indifference to objective value (to what is true, good, beautiful, just, honest, etc.). They do not care one bit about any such value, nor even, truth be told, about their own happiness or pleasure, except only insofar as their favoring and pursuing any such normal values will gain them fame, wealth, or power. Such monstrosity is quite compatible with the acquisition of vast stores of knowledge useful to the monster, well beyond the normal allotment enjoyed by a more normal human being. How so? Because the monster can be super-intelligent, and can discern when he had better ensure that his beliefs are true, but only because access to the truth is required if he is at all likely to attain his deepest objectives, which are restricted to self-aggrandizement. So, he does follow the norm of believing only what is true in those instances, but he does so exclusively for his own twisted ends.

Might such considerations apply to epistemic cases like that of some schoolchild learning his tables, or some accountant doing his thing, or a dental assistant using her records? Someone might after many years of rote labor still attain knowledge and well-justified belief despite how much they despise having to go through their motions in order to attain the knowledge that they need instrumentally for the attainment of their non-epistemic objectives.

Let us next turn to a second distinction that will help accommodate responsibilism properly in epistemology.

3. At a certain level of abstraction, we can distinguish two sorts of “belief,” one implicit and merely functional, the other not merely functional but intentional, perhaps even consciously intentional. It is the latter that needs our attention in giving responsibilism its proper place in epistemology. This is because our rational nature is most fully manifest in such reasoned choice and judgment. Accordingly, it is consciously, rationally endorsed judgment that is at the focus of the epistemological tradition from the Pyrrhonists through Descartes. It is not only the act of conscious, intentional judgment that is of interest, however, since by extension there is also the correlated disposition to judge upon consideration.

Still, although we do not here focus on functional, implicit belief, what we learn about intentional belief—even conscious, intentional belief—should carry over to belief generally, whether intentional or merely functional. The key to the carryover would be a conception of functional belief as still aimed at truth, or at representing accurately and reliably enough. Functional belief might aim at truth only functionally: for example, through psychological or biological teleology. This would enable thinking of functional belief also as a kind of action, even when it is only implicit, and neither conscious nor intentional. Anyhow, I distinguish such functional belief only to put it aside, so as to focus on the sort of belief that does turn out to be a form of intentional action.

What is intentional belief? How is it structured? We focus on affirmation, and the corresponding disposition to affirm, in the endeavor to answer a given question correctly.23 Consider the great importance of these for a collaborative social species. Affirmation seems essentially required for collaborative deliberation and for information sharing. Take collaborative deliberation, right up to the most complex, as in a nation’s governance; also, information sharing, crucial as it is in a great many contexts, prominently in scientific inquiry.

Such affirmation can be conscious and intentional. If you add a column of figures in your head, for example, you may seemingly obtain a certain result. But if the problem is complex enough, you may still hesitate to affirm accordingly. You may first take out pencil and paper, or a calculator. Eventually, coincidence of results may provide strong enough evidence.

22. Properly understood, might some subjects like this be epistemically irrational even if perfectly knowledgeable? Kurt Sylvan takes up related issues concerning rationality, rather than knowledge, in “Truth Monism without Teleology” in Thought, 1.3 (2012): 161-5; and in On the Normativity of Epistemic Rationality (Ph.D. Thesis, Rutgers University, 2013). And he continues to develop that view in papers under preparation.

23. In what follows, nearly always “affirmation” will be short for “alethic affirmation” (where what makes it “alethic” is that it is aimed at truth).
which leads you to assent (properly so). You *decide* when to assent; you wait until the evidence is strong enough.

We need not assume, however, that affirmation *must* be conscious. Even when a chain of reasoning takes place *silently*, with no conscious inner speech, there must be *steps* of reasoning sequentially involved. And these steps are presumably present events rather than pure dispositions. Such steps are then taken intentionally, in pursuit of truth on the question addressed. They are hence acts of “affirmation,” even if they are relevantly silent and subconscious.

We focus on such intentional, judgmental belief. How is it structured? Judgmental belief is definable as a certain sort of disposition to affirm. What sort of disposition? For a start let us take *judgment* that *p* to be a certain sort of *alethic* affirmation, in the endeavor to get it right on whether *p*. Judgmental belief can then be understood as a certain sort of disposition to judge in the endeavor to get it right on whether *p*, if one so endeavors.

Compare pragmatic affirmation, whether as a means to reduce cognitive/affective dissonance, or to instill confidence that will enhance performance, or the like. On our conception the latter is not proper belief. It is rather a sort of “make-belief” or mock belief.

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24. This is both how it seems (at least to me) and, in the absence of any ostensible defeating reason, this is (I say) how it is. I find that claim no less proper than the following: that sometimes I *decide* to raise my right hand, and that sometimes I *know* that I see my right hand (and see it go up); that these things seem to me to be so, and that, in the absence of ostensible defeating reasons, they really are so.

25. The implicit reasoning that we often postulate would seem to be a sequential causal process that is episodic, whereby there are intermediate inferential juncatures and preservation of lemmas in memory. And the drawing of the immediate inference, even when subconscious, will be episodic. So, our postulation requires episodic act. If there is subconscious, conditional reasoning, then some such acts will be suppositional, and will not plausibly occur as affirmations. But not all subconscious reasoning that we have reason to postulate will be just conditional reasoning. And when reasoning is not conditional, then it will be affirmative, and steps of such reasoning would seem to count as acts, not just dispositions. These then are the acts that I am viewing as subconscious affirmations.

26. It might be wondered whether this cut psychological reality at the joints. Although I am not entirely sure what is at issue in this question, I do think there is such a thing as the act of affirming, and that it can take the form of public assertion or that of private affirmation to oneself. I think that this is an act of crucial importance for a social species that depends as heavily as we do on collective deliberation and on the sharing of information. Moreover, it also seems crucial to distinguish various importantly different objectives that one might have in performing that act. And, for epistemology, there is a particularly important intention that one might have in performing it, namely that of getting it right thereby on the relevant whether question: the act of *alethic* affirmation. And, I submit, we do well to recognize a further particular act for special attention: the act of affirming in the endeavor *thereby to get it right* reliably enough and indeed *ably*: the act of judgment. Closely related to that is of course the corresponding disposition, which one might then label “judgmental belief.”

27. Judgment is, I suggest in first approximation, “a certain sort” of (alethic) affirmation, of affirmation aimed at correctness. But, again, and as will be argued below in greater detail, one can thus affirm (alethically, in pursuit of truth) without judging.

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D. Responsible Virtue Theory in the Tradition

1. The Pyrrhonists stop short of endorsed beliefs. If we define reflective knowledge as animal knowledge properly endorsed, then the Pyrrhonists fall short of

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that, and settle into a state of judgmental suspension, even while continuing inquiry. Moreover, they allow their functional seemings to have sway over their lives: they opt to live by appearances. Resultant functional seemings result from competing vectorial seemings, as when one resolves conflicting testimony from two friends in favor of the one trusted more. The testimony of one friend makes it seem that p, that of the other makes it seem that not-p, and the clash may be resolved in favor of the friend trusted more. The Pyrrhonists seem to guide their quotidian conduct on the basis of such resultant seemings. That is the regimen they seem to advocate explicitly. But they will not judgmentally endorse any such seemings. They are impressed by the fact that resultant vectors rarely or never warrant endorsement. So, they prefer to suspend conscious endorsement. This is why they remain skeptics (in a state of continuing skepticism, or inquiry, with little or no settled judgment or judgmental belief). 28

2. The endorsement of Pyrrhonian interest is agential. Crucial agential performance and competence thus attend even the most basic perceptual knowledge. Functional, perceptual seemings are passive states that we cannot help entering. But endorsement of them remains volitional, agential. 29 And such endorsement is required for those functional states to ascend to the level of fully reflective, judgmental knowledge, the level to which the Pyrrhonists aspire, in which they are followed by Descartes. 30

3. Conscious epistemic agency can be found not only in the second-order endorsing judgments, moreover, but also in corresponding first-order judgments themselves: not in the merely functional introspective or perceptual beliefs, but in correlated judgments and judgmental beliefs. This point can be developed through the following items and distinctions.

a. Affirmation pure and simple, as a means to whatever objective, if any. (This is normally a free act, whether it is affirmation to oneself or to others.)

b. Affirmation in the endeavor to answer a whether-question correctly.

c. Affirmation in the endeavor to answer correctly and also competently, reliably enough, even aptly.

Consider such affirmation to oneself, or to others when this is called for. This is an act of crucial importance to a species as heavily dependent as is ours on collaboration, intellectual and deliberative. And it is thus an act that one would expect to be subject to social norms.

4. Consider, more specifically, item 3b above. Such alethic affirmation is compatible with guessing: game show contestants do affirm, even to themselves, and do so in the endeavor to answer correctly, since only thus will they win the prize. Only with 3c do we have judgment. And judgmental belief is the disposition to judge when one faces a question honestly, with intellectual honesty, which does not mean purely disinterestedly, and this for more than one reason. Thus, one may be looking for financial reward, or professional recognition, or even to reduce cognitive/affective dissonance.

5. For the Pyrrhonists, proper endorsement requires the ability to answer the skeptic satisfactorily. So, there is a kind of knowledge of special value (reflective knowledge) that does require agency even when we most simply and passively take the given. Even when one (Müller-Lynen) line seems to us (passively) longer than the other, the question of endorsement is in place, and can be pursued with inquiry (as it is pursued by the Pyrrhonian skeptic). And the endorsement is also paired with the questions consciously addressed even on the first order, where again intentional agency is required. Ironically, relativist, competence epistemology is a more radical relativist epistemology. It considers relativist, agential competences to be crucial for a proper treatment of the most central, most traditional issues of pure epistemology.

6. It might be objected as follows:

Do you really think that Pyrrho or Descartes or any other normal human withholds endorsement on, say, questions of causation in billiards or whether a crying child is distressed? I don't buy it for a second. Sure, they might say "I don't agree with that," but I think those are just empty words.

To my critic, I reply that it is not plausible to accuse philosophers of lying or of self-deception, or of carelessness, or of empty talk, when we are assessing their ostensibly considered stances. They are surely able to withhold public endorsement, public affirmation. Consider next what happens when you
turn something over in your head. Don’t you sometimes hold off when you ask yourself a question, and sometimes eventually get to the point where you are finally willing to say yes flat out? This is affirmation (of at least one sort). I see no reason to deny that the Pyrrhonists or Descartes are honestly holding off where we are willing to say yes flat out. That’s what they suggest they are doing, and I cannot see why they must be lying or self-deceived. Perhaps they do so because they have unrealistically high standards, or perhaps they share approximately our same standards, yet think we are not giving proper weight to skeptical arguments in being willing to affirm. So, what they do in serious philosophical dialectic when they refuse to affirm publicly, they also do in auto-dialectic, in the privacy of their own thought.

7. But the critic has a further objection:

If our practical lives really can be basically insulated from the effects of withholding, doesn’t that call into doubt the value or interest of knowledge associated with the affirmation? It just makes it seem idle and, in turn, makes me wonder whether the philosophical tradition really could have been concerned with this.

Reply: Myself, I am convinced that there is a separable act that humans and perhaps other species can perform, which is (in first approximation) the act of serious public affirmation in the endeavor to truth-tell. And this has special importance for linguistic species. (Compare how Descartes takes language to distinguish the human species so significantly from the lower orders.) Again, we need such affirmations for activities of the greatest import for human life in society: for collective deliberation and coordination, and for the sharing of information. We need people to be willing to affirm things publicly. And we need them to be sincere (by and large) in doing so, where sincerity involves essentially the alignment of public affirmation with private judgment. After all, we do want to coordinate in terms of our real wants, and we do want to share information that is reliably enough known, and conveyed through the informant’s desire to join properly in the community. So, private affirmation also acquires crucial importance on the present approach. And this extends naturally to the dispositions corresponding to these acts of judgment, the public and the private. Suppose that such judgment and judgmental belief can then be seen to be detachable from functional belief (which is just a matter of degrees of confidence, and can be implicit and functionally understood, in a way that connects it with behavior). Does that make judgment idle and of doubtful concern to the philosophical tradition? I cannot see why that would be so, given the specified respects in which judgment and judgmental belief are of such crucial importance to a social (and especially to a linguistic) species.

8. Here is how Hume joins the critic encountered in 6 and 7 above:

A Stoic or Epicurean displays principles, which may not only be durable, but which have an effect on conduct and behavior. But a Pyrrhonian cannot expect that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind; or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action, would immediately cease, and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence. It is true; so fatal an event is very little to be dreaded. Nature is always too strong for principle. And though a Pyrrhonian may throw himself or others into a momentary amazement and confusion by his profound reasonings; the first and most trivial event in life will put to flight all his doubts and scruples and leave him the same, in every point of action and speculation, with the philosophers of every other sect, or with those who never concerned themselves in any philosophic researches. When he awakes from his dream, he will be the first to join in the laugh against himself, and to confess, that all his objections are mere amusement, and can have no other tendency than to show the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent enquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundation of these operations, or to remove the objections, which may be raised against them.

Granted, the Pyrrhonian regimen is subject to a weighty objection if it requires suspension of private and public affirmation in the whirl of everyday life. How can we suspend so radically without enormous harm to our welfare as a social species, given the importance of collective deliberation and the sharing of information? The answer requires a proper interpretation of the regimen. There is at least one reasonable interpretation that escapes the dire Humean consequences. On this interpretation, in moving from serious philosophical dialectic or meditation, Pyrrhonists can lower their standards for “competent and reliable enough judgment.” Thus, they can distinguish

31. Even if there may be other ways, this is a big part of a natural human way to attain the socially necessary collaboration and coordination.

32. David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748), section XII.

33. Recall the three sorts of affirmation distinguished in section 3 above, and note what is required for the third sort, xc, affirmative judgment.
everyday judgment from (intellectually) serious judgment. And they can now continue to affirm judgmentally and to assert publicly, in ordinary contexts, a world of things on which they would still suspend serious judgment. 34

To object that suspending thus is silly or empty is to court antiphilosophical philistinism. We who are serious about philosophy should not be quick to dismiss the love of truth in favor of what suffices for the hurly-burly of the everyday. Even le bon David seems implicated in passages where he ostensibly approves of dismissal rather than solution of deep skeptical ponderings. 35 I am not sure how best to explain that ostensibly philistine reaction but is it not obvious that it should be a last resort? Comfortably settling into a shallow common sense should hold little attraction to a lover of wisdom (which says nothing about the common sense of a Reid or a Moore).

9. A further defense of the Pyrrhonian regimen would, alternatively or in addition, distinguish qualified affirmation from affirmation flat out. Even in philosophical contexts we very plausibly need of qualified affirmation, as we engage in dialectic, with others or with ourselves, as we tentatively work out a view. Similarly, then, we may in everyday exchanges engage in such qualified affirmation. We do not commit flat out to what we say, while still willing to convey it as probable enough for purposes of everyday deliberation and sharing of information.

Accordingly, even when we enter a context of serious dialectic or meditation, we can distinguish two different acts: that of qualified affirmation and that of affirmation flat out. The former we can still perform even in that context as we explore a view. At an extreme it can even merge into mere supposition, as we then draw out consequences. But it can be something more substantial than that, if we become convinced that what we affirm has a lot to be said for it, though still unready to affirm it flat out.

10. Cartesian epistemology, too, just like the Pyrrhonian, concerns pondering with a view to judgmental endorsement. It too involves agential, volitional assent, as Descartes recognizes in distinguishing the volitional faculty of judgment from the faculty of passive understanding. But Descartes had clear and distinct awareness that judgment without competence and reliability would not be epistemically adequate. When he finally attains what he considers true certainty (cognition certainty) at the start of Meditation III, therefore, he asks himself what gives him such certainty, and finds no plausible answer beyond "clear and distinct perception." And he then declares flatly, with no need of argument, that clarity and distinctness could never give him the certainty that he has finally found, unless nothing could ever be so clear and distinct without being true. No more ringing endorsement of reliabilism could be uttered.

11. For that reason, among many others, Descartes was a virtue reliabilist, a complete virtue reliabilist for whom aptness of belief is at the core, and for whom reflective knowledge (scientia) is also crucial. Notably, Descartes was also the greatest and most explicit virtue responsibilist, for whom the volitional faculty of judgment is of supreme importance, front and center.

Aligning structurally with Descartes's epistemology, my own AAA, animal/reflective virtue reliabilism also recognizes the importance of agential, volitional, responsible epistemic virtues at its core. 36

12. Of course, we must recognize a distinction between expert knowledge and ordinary knowledge. Standards rise for expert judgment. Similarly, we can distinguish radical from moderate skepticism.

The radical skeptic applies standards for ordinary affirmation that go beyond ordinary social epistemic norms. If he then conducts his everyday life in accordance with his high standards, he is in effect a social rebel. He violates the norms that enable humans to collaborate socially. So, we can properly disapprove and condemn his intellectual conduct.

34. Compare Descartes's method in his philosophical meditations by contrast with his approach to daily life: "As far as the conduct of life is concerned, I am very far from thinking that one should assent only to what is clearly perceived. On the contrary, I do not think that we should always wait even for probable truths; from time to time we will have to choose one of many alternatives about which we have no knowledge." The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume II, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 106. Whether here (in the Second Set of Replies) he is opting for the option that I see for the Pyrrhonists is not entirely clear, but in any case his stance seems closely related.

35. "This skeptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady, which can never be radically cured, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chase it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it. It is impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or our senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavor to justify them in that manner. As the skeptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always increases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. Carelessness and inattention alone afford us any remedy. For this reason I rely entirely upon them..." (Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 218).

36. I defend this interpretation of Descartes in several recent publications, and in Chapter 11, "Descartes's Pyrrhonian Virtue Epistemology."
The moderate skeptic, by contrast, applies his higher standards only to expert affirmation, in the context of serious philosophical dialectic or meditation. He will continue to speak and think with the crowd when in quotidian contexts. This can even take the form of flat-out affirmation, but it can alternatively or in addition take the form of qualified affirmation. And the difference will reside in what is "reliable enough." Just as standards for this do rise with perfectly familiar shifts from ordinary contexts to professional contexts, so do they with a shift from ordinary contexts to serious philosophy. The philosopher will properly require the ability to respond to a great variety of skeptical concerns that need not, and should not trouble us in ordinary life.

13. Thus do we admit a sort of pragmatic encroachment. The relevant difference between the study or seminar room and the market place is constituted by practical concerns. Practical concerns do bear on whether we affirm reliably enough. However, our grade of encroachment need not go all the way to the particular practical context of the believer whose belief is up for epistemic assessment. Social epistemic norms can abstract from such specific contexts. Yet the approach is nonetheless receptive to a high grade of pragmatic encroachment that would make room for varieties of knowledgeable expertise, and also for the difference between a Cartesian assent that is properly meditative versus one that must suffice in the everyday.

14. In conclusion, I submit that important virtues of inquiry are auxiliary to the attainment and exercise of knowledge-constitutive competences. However, we should also recognize that an auxiliary epistemic virtue might still be an overall personal vice. The example of obsessiveness to the point of ill health is already suggestive.

Compare the example of Gauguin as he abandons his family for the sake of his art. Gauguin may have exercised artistic auxiliary virtue in his escape to Tahiti, and it is conceivable that his art was great enough to justify his action all things considered. And epistemic accomplishment might then be analogous, and assessable analogously.

In any case, there is another respect in which aesthetics and epistemology enjoy autonomy. Artistic and epistemic performances are properly assessable within domains unto themselves, the artistic or epistemic domains relevant to such performances. And such assessment is autonomous from the values pertinent to other domains, as well as from overall value or moral standards. When we say that knowledge is better than mere true belief, the alleged superiority is epistemic. This superiority must be understood autonomously, so that it does not derive from any moral or personal worth that may attach to the believer’s motivation, if any. And this is so even if some particular epistemic and artistic accomplishments can withstand conflicting extraneous values, as conceivably in the case of Gauguin.

15. Finally, an irenic parting. Again, we should gladly recognize the many important intellectual virtues beyond the knowledge-constitutive. And we should welcome the philosophical study of such virtues.

Still, the virtue of some auxiliary virtues must be understood within the framework of virtue reliabilism. The reason for this is that what makes them auxiliary virtues is their enabling us to acquire or sustain the complete competence—the Skill, Shape, and Situation, SSS complete knowledge-constitutive competence—in virtue of whose manifestations we know answers to questions in a given domain. (Compare how the competence to drive safely on a certain road would be constituted by the innermost Skill that the driver retains even asleep, by the Shape that requires his being awake and sober, and by the Situation involving a road that is dry enough, not covered by a thick layer of oil.) We are helped to understand why some auxiliary competences count as auxiliary epistemic virtues (and not just as general moral or other practical virtues), then, if we understand the structure of knowledge-constitutive competences, and can better see how auxiliary virtues might enable us to attain and exercise our knowledge-constitutive virtues.

37. That they not only can but do abstract that way is argued in Chapter 8.

38. And celebrate their insightful study, as in the books of Zagzebski (Virtues of the Mind, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Baehr (The Inquiring Mind).