RESENHAS
REVIEWS

VARGAS, Miguel Ángel Fernández (ed). *Performance Epistemology. Foundations and Applications*. Oxford: Oxford Un. Press, 2016.

JORGE ORNELAS. *UNAM*, MÉXICO
jornelass@gmail.com

Virtute duce, comite fortuna

Cicero, Epistulae ad Familiares,
10.3.2.7

In *Metaphysics* (1.91a,15-25) Aristotle complains that, in trying to explain the fundamental role of Forms, Plato used "empty words and poetical metaphors". Facing this methodological deficit, Aristotle decided to invent Logic. Something similar can be said regarding contemporary epistemology: facing traditional epistemological problems (such as the New Cartesian Demon problem, the Gettier cases, the value problem for knowledge, the problem of easy knowledge, etc.) Ernest Sosa decided to invent *Virtue Epistemology* (or VE, hereafter). Performance Epistemology contains twelve chapters by leading epistemologists in which VE's *pros* and *cons* are discussed, and another one by Sosa himself. The book also has a remarkable introduction by Miguel Ángel Fernandez wherein he captures the crux of VE, underlines its main contribution to contemporary epistemological discussions, and offers a panoramic view of the chapters comprising this volume.

There are two main insights in VE. First, that human knowledge is understood as a *performative* practice in which the competences of the epistemic agent are central to the success of the cognitive endeavor. Second, regarding traditional epistemological problems, VE is attractive because of its ability to put both internal and external elements of knowledge in their place. "Animal", or first-order knowledge, is an apt belief produced by a *reliable* competence of the subject, while "reflexive", or second-order knowledge, is an apt belief "aptly noted", wherein the epistemic agent needs to be in a position to note that her first-order belief has been *aptly* formed. After the Gettier cases, the discipline experimented a sea change in which Sosa's VE became one of the central pieces of the new epistemology.

Performance Epistemology opens with the chapter "Epistemic Competence and Judgment" by Sosa. There, he tries to settle what kinds of luck VE can avoid. Luck has always been a thorn in the side of epistemology. Plato (Teet. 201d) was the first to design a justification requirement to block luck from knowledge and keep our basic epistemic intuition regarding luck in place. That is, when the agent knows her true belief is not merely a matter of luck. Cartesian epistemology approached the problem of luck from within the subject. To avoid luck leaking into knowledge, it was necessary to reinforce our rational internal procedures in order to gain knowledge (cf. Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Natural Intelligence*). The Gettier cases and the skeptical problem, however, showed us that even if an agent's epistemic procedures were impeccable, luck could still affect knowledge attributions. Think about counterfactual scenarios in which the agent does everything in her power to know, but fails because of luck (skeptical scenarios), or only succeeds because of it (the Gettier cases). These last cases put pressure on a second intuition regarding luck: when the agent knows, that knowledge is accredited to her, in the sense that her true beliefs are due to her cognitive abilities. Most contemporary epistemologists have tried to amend this last problem from an external perspective, which is why causal, reliable and counterfactual requirements (sensitivity and safety) flourished. Unfortunately, the outcome was the same: counterfactual scenarios can always be modified in order to satisfy external requirements so that the agent's true belief is still consistent with luck. VE has tried to combine both perspectives: on one hand, by focusing on the agent's epistemic competences as a process through which true beliefs are formed, Sosa's *aretaic* approach to knowledge retains most of the internalist intuitions (epistemic responsibility, reflexivity, etc.) On the other hand, Sosa sustains externalist intuitions by stressing the *reliability* of those very competences.

For many years, Sosa has been quite conscious of the problem of luck, and has tried hard to contain its epistemic damage. In his contribution to *Performance Epistemology*, Sosa bites the bullet by establishing that "animal knowledge" is indeed compatible with the kind of luck which undermines the SSS framework regarding the nature of competences (*Skill + State + Situation*). However, he sustains that the AAA framework (*Accurate + Adroit + Apt*), which sanctions the normative relation between competences and performances, was introduced precisely to block the kind of luck remaining in most of the epistemic problems mentioned above (the Gettier cases, the New Cartesian Demon Problem, the Value Problem for Knowledge, etc.) This is presented as a Solomonic solution because Sosa makes it appear that we can keep our anti-luck intuitions in all those scenarios while at the same time explaining what is problematic about them. In the Gettier cases, Smith's beliefs are not apt because they do not proceed from his competence. In the New Cartesian Demon scenario, the victim's beliefs are not apt but still count as justified because they use exactly the same competences that we use in the actual world, which are considered

reliable there. Something similar can be said regarding traditional skeptical scenarios. We value knowledge over true belief because only the former is an apt belief aptly noted, while mere true belief does not satisfy second-order requirements. Because of all of this, VE has a lot of explanatory power. However, I wonder if this apparently Solomonic approach is enough to solve all the aforementioned epistemic problems. Sosa's VE correctly diagnoses that luck can contaminate knowledge in both directions, internal and external. However, it seems to me that his sympathies with the Aristotelian approach to virtue drove him to privilege internal factors over external ones.

These and many other anxieties regarding Sosa's VE are present in *Performance Epistemology*. The majority of chapters can be organized in two groups: the first criticizes and enriches the way in which Sosa has modeled epistemic agency, while responding to internalist insights at the same time; the second deals with externalist elements gathered by VE.

In "Who Knows?", Baron Reed reinforces Sosa's idea (1997, p.491) that the "subject is the seat of justification" by appealing to the notion of "person". It is the person, and not only her cognitive skills, who is correct and actively connected to the environment through knowledge. Allan Millar ("Abilities, Competences, and Fallibility") proposes an account of recognitional abilities which sustains Sosa's internalist claim (2011, p.82) regarding justification in unusual environments (such as fake-barns): the subject retains her justification because she retains her relevant cognitive competence. The problem in those cases is, according to Millar, that the subject lacks the perceptual ability to recognize barns around *qua* barns (p.79.) Sosa has presented the allure of reflective knowledge by appealing to the coherence exhibited by all the elements in a system of knowledge. Three of the final chapters of *Performance Epistemology* raise serious doubts regarding this coherence assumption. In "Rising Above the Animals: The Search for Intellectual Assurance", Richard Fumerton challenges Sosa's characterization (2009, p.223) of reflective knowledge from a metaepistemological template. According to Fumerton, reflective knowledge is merely animal knowledge in a second order, which makes it vulnerable to the problem of easy knowledge and, at the same time, exhibits an explanatory deficit regarding the putative advantage of the coherence requirement. That is why, Fumerton concludes, VE is an unsatisfactory epistemology as long as it cannot provide us with a "philosophical assurance" regarding human knowledge in general without appealing to epistemic circularity. Ram Neta ("Epistemic Circularity and Virtuous Coherence") tries to improve Sosa's (2011) defense of circular explanations regarding the reliability of our cognitive abilities from a foundationalist approach. Hilary Kornblith presents a more corrosive critique of reflective knowledge. In "Epistemic Agency", Kornblith appeals to cognitive psychology literature in order to deny that reflection on first-order beliefs is the distinctive seal of epistemic agency, as VE maintains. Using that same data, Kornblith

convincingly argues that cognitive mechanisms by which beliefs are produced are not available for reflective scrutiny, which is why reflecting on the reliability of those very mechanisms does not increase an agent's probabilities of success. Following a similar train of thought, Stephen Grimm ("The Value of Reflection") argues that reflecting on the reliability of belief-producing processes does not report any epistemic improvement. However, this kind of reflection is valuable from an ethical perspective, precisely because agents exercise their doxastic autonomy.

The other group of chapters focuses on the way VE tackles externalist intuitions regarding knowledge and justification. In "Knowledge, Virtue, and Safety", John Greco challenges Sosa's privilege of virtue over safety. According to Sosa (2007, p.31), the possibility of dreaming undermines safety, but not aptness, "so long as we are actually awake". Greco claims that knowledge requires reliability, not in any circumstances whatsoever, but in those circumstances relative to particular relevant epistemic needs (just like being awake in the case of dreaming). John Turri ("Knowledge as Achievement, More or Less") also discusses the relationship between safety and aptness by considering that a safe belief, and not only an accurate one, has to manifest the agent's competence in order to block most of the objections to VE. Therefore, Turri argues for including safety (*Amplitude*) and reliability (*Adequateness*) in Sosa's AAA structure. In this same vein, Peter Graham ("Against Actual-world Reliabilism: Epistemically Correct Procedures and Reliability True Outcomes") criticizes Sosa's (2004, p.308; 2007, p.84). Normal-world Reliabilism as a variant of Actual-world Reliabilism. Instead, Graham proposes a normal-circumstances reliabilism, where reliability is "what makes epistemically correct procedures correct in all possible circumstances in terms of reliability in a special set of circumstances" (pp.103–4). Kallestrup and Pritchard ("Dispositional Robust Virtue Epistemology versus Anti-luck Virtue") raise a more radical critique regarding Sosa's identification of knowledge with apt belief. Appealing to epistemic Twin Earth cases, in which some relevant factors for knowledge exist beyond the cognitive agency of the subject, they argue that apt belief is neither sufficient for knowledge ("Negative Epistemic Dependence") nor necessary ("Positive Epistemic Dependence"). Both cases show that the possession of epistemic virtues depends on external factors beyond the agent's perspective (*pace* Sosa's externalist bias.) An essay on Sosa's epistemology of intuition by Paul Boghossian ("Intuition and Understanding") and another on some epistemic vices produced by incompetences by Pascal Engel ("The Epistemology of Stupidity") complete the book.

Thus, *Performance Epistemology* testifies that the Aristotelian insight of VE prevails: epistemic virtue should guide our epistemic endeavor, and only in that way can we raise our probabilities of success, which is why we need to form our epistemic character as the *aretaic* VE establishes. However, this is an insufficient explanation for excluding luck from knowledge completely. As the initial quotation from Cicero

established, luck must also accompany our apt beliefs, but that is something that no theory of knowledge can fully guarantee.

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