



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

From epistemic anti-individualism to intellectual humility

Citation for published version:

Kallestrup, J & Pritchard, D 2016, 'From epistemic anti-individualism to intellectual humility', *Res Philosophica*, vol. 93, no. 3, pp. 533-552. <https://doi.org/10.11612/resphil.2016.93.3.2>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.11612/resphil.2016.93.3.2](https://doi.org/10.11612/resphil.2016.93.3.2)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Res Philosophica

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



FROM EPISTEMIC ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM TO INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

ABSTRACT. Epistemic anti-individualism is the view that positive epistemic statuses fail to supervene on internal, physical or mental, properties of individuals. Intellectual humility is a central intellectual virtue in the pursuit of such statuses. After some introductory remarks, this paper provides an argument for epistemic anti-individualism with respect to a virtue-theoretic account of testimonial knowledge. An outline of a dual-aspect account of intellectual humility is then offered. The paper proceeds to argue that insofar as testimonial knowledge is concerned, this stripe of epistemic anti-individualism leads to a particular account of intellectual humility.

1. INTRODUCTION

Virtue epistemology is roughly the project of assigning paramount importance to intellectual virtues (often broadly conceived) in accounting for a range of positive epistemic statuses. In particular, an influential wing of contemporary virtue epistemology is preoccupied with the theory of knowledge.¹ These virtue epistemologists aim to characterise knowledge in purely virtue-theoretic terms, without appeal to any separate modal condition. Call such a view *robust virtue epistemology* (RVE).

Some proponents of RVE understand the relevant virtues in terms of *reliable cognitive abilities*. Hence, their view also goes under the name *virtue reliabilism*. Thus, following Ernest Sosa (2007; 2011), a belief counts as knowledge if true because of (or through) the appropriate exercise of reliable cognitive ability.² Interestingly, other friends of RVE also seek to explain knowledge in virtue-theoretic terminology, yet they understand intellectual virtues specifically in terms of *refined character traits*. This view is known as *virtue responsibilism*. Thus, Linda Zagzebski (1996, 271) defines knowledge as a true belief state that arises out of acts of intellectual virtue, where such acts are, roughly, what someone with that virtue would do in the right circumstances as they arise from its motivational component. So, while virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism agree on the key

role that intellectual virtues should play in theorizing about knowledge, the latter takes a more restrictive line on what can count as an intellectual virtue.³ For now, we will follow virtue reliabilists in understanding the intellectual virtues very broadly, such that they include reliable cognitive abilities, though we will be returning to consider virtue responsibilism towards the end of the paper. In particular, we will be arguing that a particular *metaphysical* view about the nature of cognitive abilities in the context of testimonial knowledge leads to a particular *normative* view about intellectual character traits with regard to such knowledge.

We shall proceed as follows. §2 argues that an influential version of RVE is committed to an individualistic conception of cognitive abilities according to which they supervene on internal physical features of individuals. §3 constructs an argument against RVE when understood along such individualistic lines. The argument shows that when a hearer acquires testimonial knowledge, the truth of her belief in the target proposition, as proffered by the speaker, is not entirely because of a cognitive ability that supervenes on such features. §4 develops an outline of what intellectual humility consists in. Traditionally, intellectually humble individuals are those who neither overrate their strengths nor underrate their weaknesses, but our claim is that neither overrating weaknesses nor underrating strengths are equally characteristic features of such individuals. §5 then provides an argument from such an anti-individualistic conception of cognitive abilities to the indispensability of intellectual humility, thus understood, in an account of those character traits that are needed when acquiring testimonial knowledge. Finally, §6 contains some concluding remarks.

2. ROBUST VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY AND EPISTEMIC INDIVIDUALISM

Let's consider Sosa's version of RVE in more detail. On his view (2007; 2009), an achievement is an *apt* performance, where a performance is apt when *accurate because adroit*. As an example of a performance having such a *triple-A* analysis, take the achievement of a master archer who in normal circumstances hits the target when dispatching an arrow. The aptness of her performance consists in the success being because of (or through) the skill. The 'because of' relation is to be understood in terms of the *manifestation of a competence* (or disposition). So, the archer's performance is an achievement in that hitting the innermost ring is a manifestation of her competence to do so when distance to target, visibility, and weather conditions are normal.

In more recent work, Sosa (2015) proposes a *triple-S* analysis of a complete competence comprising an innermost *S*-competence, which is the seat (or skill), an inner *SS*-competence,

which is the combination of seat and shape, and a complete *SSS*-competence, which is the conjunction of seat, shape and situation. As an example, if the complete competence is being a competent driver of a vehicle on a certain occasion, then the seat is the basic driving skill, the shape is being awake, sober, alert, etc., and the situation is being seated at the wheel, in a reliable vehicle, on a dry road, etc. The connection between the triple-A analysis of a performance and the triple-S analysis of a competence is the following: a performance is apt when its success manifests competence, which happens just in case the innermost skill causally produces the success in combination with the appropriate shape and situation. The seat of the competence is determined as the causal basis for a success-response of an object when subjected to a stimulus in certain shape and situation combinations. Since a complete competence is necessarily a competence to succeed when trying for some outcome—such that if one tried, one would very likely succeed—no such competence can bring about that outcome. Only the innermost seat can do that when the shape and situation are conducive to the outcome.

Let's now transpose Sosa's framework to an epistemological setting. On his view, knowledge is a *cognitive* achievement in the sense that knowledge involves a belief which is a performance exhibiting a similar triple-A structure: the belief is apt just in case it is true (accurate) because of (or through) cognitive ability (adroitness). In short, knowledge is apt belief. In the case of knowledge, a cognitive ability is to be understood as a cognitive competence (or disposition) to believe truly when circumstances are normal, which means that the 'because of' relation is a *manifestation* of such competence in normal circumstances. So, knowledge is an achievement in that believing truly manifests a cognitive competence to do so when circumstances are normal. Exactly what it means for circumstances to be normal is an important question to which we shall shortly return. Note for now that Sosa's triple-S analysis of a complete competence also applies to cognitive competences. Knowledge requires the possession of a complete cognitive competence comprising the conjunction of seat, shape and situation. Suppose individual *S* acquires knowledge on the basis of visual experience. In that case, the seat is *S*'s visual apparatus (e.g., optic nerve and retinal receptors), the shape is *S*'s current bodily and mental state, (e.g., awake and attentive), and the situation comprises proximate environmental features (e.g., visibility and distance). What we have so-far called 'normal circumstances' thus corresponds to what Sosa dubs 'situation'.

The key point for present purposes concerns Sosa's conception of the seat (or skill) as it pertains to knowledge. On his view, when *S* knows *S* gets things right through *her own* cognitive abilities, where the latter are thought of along *individualistic* lines as being located where *S* is and as having a physical basis resident in *S*. Here is Sosa:

[4] competence is a disposition, one with its basis resident in the competent agent, one that would in appropriately normal conditions ensure (or make highly likely) the success of any relevant performance issued by it. (Sosa 2007, 29)

Indeed, RVE is often expressed in terms of how when S knows, the truth of her belief is *primarily creditable* to her cognitive ability (or competence).⁴ (Note that this is a weaker claim than that S has knowledge only if the truth of her belief is *exclusively* down to her cognitive ability, which is implausible by any reckoning, as the exercise of such ability depends on favorable environmental conditions being in place—e.g., visual perception depends on suitable lighting conditions). For S to possess a cognitive ability such that the *most salient factor* in S 's cognitive success is the exercise of that ability requires the existence of a physical basis within her bodily boundaries on which that ability supervenes.⁵ If instead that physical basis were to extend beyond the skin-and-skull of S to include features of the physical or social environment, then the cognitive success would be down to an ability that was possessed by the conjunction of S and those external features.

By way of illustration, consider a familiar case involving knowledge-undermining luck. Suppose S forms the belief that there's a sheep in the field on the basis of a visual experience as of a sheep. Unbeknownst to S , she is looking at a sheep-shaped object. Nevertheless, S believes truly as there happens to be a real sheep behind that object. Such Gettier-style cases present no difficulty for RVE. The reason is that while S both exercises her own ability (to form visual beliefs) and believes truly, the truth of that belief is not *because of* that ability, because S does not believe truly in circumstances that are normal for its exercise. Rather, the belief that S forms is true because of incidental features of her environment.⁶ More accurately, while S 's success may be to some degree creditable to her ability—after all, had the object not been sheep-shaped, S would not even have formed the belief—it's not *primarily creditable* to that ability. Environmental happenstance is what most saliently explains why S hit on the truth.

So, RVE has a lot going for it. Nevertheless, we shall in the next section present an argument against RVE when understood along individualistic lines. Let's work our target view into shape by defining two versions of RVE. Take an *individualistic feature* to be any mental or physical feature located inside the bodily boundaries of an individual. Consider then first what might be called *Individualistic Robust Virtue Epistemology*:

(I-RVE)

Necessarily, if individual S forms a belief which is true through manifesting cognitive ability A , then S has individualistic feature I , such that any individualistic duplicate S^* also forms the same belief in such a way that its truth is through manifesting A .

Our fake-sheep case illustrates the falsity of I-RVE. Suppose S , who is looking at a genuine sheep, forms a true belief that there's sheep in the field through manifesting her cognitive ability

\mathcal{A} . It does not follow that S 's individualistic duplicate S^* , who is facing a sheep-shaped object, also thereby manifests \mathcal{A} when she forms a true belief with the same content. While S straightforwardly acquires knowledge, the *intervening epistemic luck* prevents S^* from gaining knowledge. Crucially, as we saw, Sosa's RVE can handle such cases: since S 's belief is apt and S^* 's belief is inapt, only the former counts as knowledge. So, I-RVE imposes an unduly demanding type of individualism on Sosa's RVE.

Here's a better tack. The key difference between S and S^* pertains to their proximate environment. That is to say, the reason the truth of S 's belief is through manifesting \mathcal{A} , while the truth of S^* 's belief is not, is that they form their respective beliefs on the basis of looking at different objects. The truth of a perceptual belief about an object is because of \mathcal{A} only if formed on the basis of a perception of that very object. Otherwise, the conditions for exercising \mathcal{A} would be deemed abnormal. Let's use 'local conditions' to pick out those proximate environmental features which differentiate S from S^* . Consider then a weaker version of I-RVE:

(I-RVE*)

Necessarily, if individual S forms a belief which is true through manifesting cognitive ability \mathcal{A} , then S has individualistic feature I under local conditions L such that any individualistic duplicate S^* who also forms that belief under L does so in such a way that its truth is through manifesting \mathcal{A} .

Note that I-RVE* does not predict that S has knowledge when forming a true belief on the basis of looking at a sheep if and only if her individualistic duplicate S^* also has knowledge when forming the same true belief on the basis of looking at a sheep-shaped object. The reason is that the different objects S and S^* confront make for a difference in their local conditions.

Consequently, while S believes truly through manifesting \mathcal{A} , the truth of S^* 's belief is down to environmental coincidence. Hence, by the lights of RVE, S can be said to know, whereas S^* 's true belief falls short of knowledge. In brief, I-RVE* captures the kind of epistemic individualism to which Sosa's preferred version of RVE is committed. However, as we shall argue in the next section, the problem with I-RVE* is not about cases of *intervening* epistemic luck, but rather that this view cannot handle cases of *environmental* epistemic luck.⁷

3. AN EPISTEMIC TWIN EARTH SCENARIO

We shall now argue that I-RVE* is incompatible with certain kinds of testimonial knowledge. That RVE faces a *prima facie* problem in accounting for such knowledge is familiar. What is less widely recognised is that the source of this problem stems from its commitment to the kind of epistemic individualism which I-RVE* captures. Here's the intuitive problem. On standard views of testimonial knowledge, a hearer *H* can acquire such knowledge in suitable circumstances by largely *trusting* the word of the speaker *S*. Given that the kind of trust involved on behalf of *H* is one of *epistemic reliance* on *S* for knowledge, it seems inaccurate to say that *H* is primarily creditable for the relevant cognitive success. Indeed, *H*'s cognitive success seems much more attributable to *S*'s exercise of cognitive ability than her own.

We can illustrate this point by adapting a familiar example offered by Jennifer Lackey:

Having just arrived at the train station in Chicago, Morris wishes to obtain directions to the Sears Tower. He looks around, randomly approaches the first passerby that he sees, and asks how to get to his desired destination. The passerby, who happens to be a Chicago resident who knows the city extraordinarily well, provides Morris with impeccable directions to the Sears Tower. (Lackey 2007, 352)

Lackey's concern in offering this scenario is to motivate a much stronger conclusion than what interests us presently, in that she wants to contend that there are cases of testimonial knowledge where the agent's cognitive success is in no significant way creditable to her cognitive agency. That's why it's important to the example that Morris is merely trusting the word of his informant.⁸ Whatever the merits of case, so construed, we want to interpret the Morris example somewhat differently. On our construal, while Morris is indeed largely trusting the word of another, he is also displaying some relevant cognitive abilities.

Two kinds of cognitive ability in particular are on display. The first is that Morris is displaying some degree of cognitive ability when it comes to discerning trustworthy speakers from those that, relative to the target proposition, clearly are not to be trusted. That is, we are stipulating here that Morris wouldn't ask just anyone, such as a very small child (indeed, he wouldn't just ask any *thing* either, such as a lamppost). The second is that Morris is displaying some degree of cognitive ability in terms of how he responds to the testimony that's offered, where this includes the manner in which it is offered. That is, we are stipulating that Morris is not the kind of epistemic subject who would simply believe anything he is told by his informant, no matter how outlandish, and no matter how it is presented. A further stipulation that we want to make about this case—which is likely implicit in Lackey's rendering of it—is that Morris's

cognitive environment is epistemically friendly in relevant respects. That is, this is a scenario where informants are plentiful, reliable, helpful, and so on.

With the case so understood, we take it as uncontroversial that Morris has knowledge (unlike in the original case that Lackey formulates, which is more contentious). More precisely, insofar as we have as much testimonial knowledge as we take ourselves to have, then Morris had better be able to acquire knowledge in this way, as a lot of our testimonial knowledge is acquired in a similar fashion. The problem, however, is that given the degree of epistemic reliance involved in Morris's acquisition of a true belief in this case, it isn't plausible that his cognitive success is *primarily* creditable to his exercise of cognitive ability. That is, even though Morris is displaying some degree of relevant cognitive ability in this scenario, it is nonetheless the case that his cognitive success is more attributable to the cognitive agency of his informant rather than his cognitive agency. Even so, given that Morris is displaying a significant degree of relevant cognitive ability—i.e., he isn't simply being gullible—and given also that he is in such an epistemically friendly environment in this regard, we take it that there is a strong intuition that Morris should be treated as having knowledge.

The Morris case presents a *prima facie* problem for I-RVE*, according to which Morris' knowledge would consist in the truth of his belief being through *his own* cognitive abilities—i.e., an abilities (e.g., to discriminate between reliable and unreliable testifiers) that supervene on individualistic features of Morris. And yet, on the face of it, the truth of his belief is primarily creditable to *someone else's* cognitive abilities.⁹

Let's now proceed to mount an argument showing that I-RVE* is in conflict with a key commitment of contemporary social epistemology. More precisely, our argument will show that, when understood individualistically, an individual's cognitive ability to detect reliable informants cannot possibly ground testimonial knowledge. Here's some background. Sandy Goldberg (2010; 2011) distinguishes between *direct and diffuse epistemic dependence*. Roughly, the former happens when hearer *H* relies on speaker *S* such that changes in *S*'s epistemic perspective would make for changes in the epistemic properties of *H*'s beliefs. Testimony is a case in point when understood *narrowly* as a communicative exchange between *S* and *H*. The latter happens when variations in the practices and mental states of members of *H*'s community would make for variations in the epistemic properties of that community, even after subtracting the effects of any direct epistemic dependence *H* exhibits with respect to its members. Testimony is a case in point when more *broadly* understood in that testimonial exchanges give rise to knowledge only when communal parties other than *S* and *H* are involved in *remotely monitoring and policing* the exchanges in question.

In these cases, *H* epistemically depends on community-wide practices that secure a testimonial-friendly environment by fostering reliable testifiers and rooting out unreliable testifiers.

Now, let *H* be an ordinary epistemic individual embedded in an epistemic community GOOD in which most other speakers are reliable. In particular, not only does *H* possess an ability to discriminate between reliable and unreliable informants, *H* also regularly exercises that ability in the process of acquiring testimonial knowledge. Moreover, in GOOD the testimonial exchanges between *H* and various speakers are monitored and policed in a proper and timely fashion. Assume that *H* acquires knowledge upon accepting reliable speaker *S*'s testimony. The content of *S*'s knowledge pertains to an ordinary proposition which any reliable speaker will know. If I-RVE* is true, *H* acquires knowledge through her discriminatory ability.

Now imagine that *H* is unwittingly transported to epistemic community BAD which also mostly contains reliable testifiers. The difference is that while the testimonial processes in GOOD are monitored and policed in a *knowledge-enabling* manner, the corresponding processes in BAD are monitored and policed in a *knowledge-precluding* manner *vis-à-vis H*. To wit, third-party epistemic individuals reliably ensure that *H* is mostly exposed to unreliable speakers. *H* has no inkling of the systematic way in which reliable informants are being screened-off from the testimonial processes. Most of the competent-looking speakers with whom *H* comes into contact are in fact not trustworthy. Assume that *H* forms a true belief on the basis of hearing reliable speaker *S*'s testimony. The proposition in question is again an ordinary one which every reliable speaker will know.

The question is: does *H* acquire testimonial knowledge in BAD? Here's an important reason to think that she does not. Knowledge requires a *safe basis*: if you believe truly on a certain basis, then not easily would you have formed a false belief on that same basis.¹⁰ Thus understood, *H*'s belief in GOOD is safe because not easily would *H* have acquired a false belief through testimony. Had *H* approached another informant, she would still have ended up with a true belief because nearly all the untrustworthy ones have been weeded out by the third-party members of GOOD. But *H*'s belief in BAD is unsafe. Very easily would *H* on the same basis have formed a false belief with the same content. *H* was fortunate that she ended up with a true testimonial belief due to the third-party members of BAD inadvertently letting a reliable informant slip through their net. Because most speakers with whom *H* conversationally interact are unreliable, had *H* formed the same belief on the basis of approaching a different informant, that belief would have been false. Consequently, *H* lacks knowledge in BAD.

If the foregoing is right, then *H* has knowledge in GOOD that she lacks in BAD. The pressing problem is whether that epistemic difference is down to a difference in (the manifestation of) cognitive ability when understood individualistically. Consider again:

(I-RVE*)

Necessarily, if individual *S* forms a belief which is true through manifesting cognitive disposition *D*, then *S* has individualistic feature *I* under local conditions *L* such that any individualistic duplicate *S** who also forms that belief under *L* does so in such a way that its truth is through manifesting *D*.

A friend of I-RVE* would then have it that in GOOD *H* forms a belief the truth of which is through exercising an ability to discriminate between reliable and unreliable testifiers. After all, the case is such that *H* reliably exercises that ability in GOOD. It follows from I-RVE* that *H* has individualistic feature *I* under local conditions *L* such that any individualistic duplicate of *H* who also forms that belief under *L* does so in such a way that its truth is through exercising that same ability. But given our description of GOOD and BAD, *H* in BAD is exactly such a duplicate. First off, *H* in GOOD and *H* in BAD are individualistically indiscernible, because *H* in GOOD is unwittingly transported into BAD. Second, the local conditions in GOOD and BAD are identical. In both cases does *H* form the same true belief on the basis of the very same piece of testimony. Remember that the speaker *S* is stipulated to be as reliable in BAD as *S* is in GOOD. It follows, by the lights of I-RVE*, that *H* in BAD also forms a belief in such a way that its truth is through exercising an ability to discern reliable testimony. But since *H* is clearly unable to discriminate between reliable and unreliable testifiers in BAD, the truth of *H*'s belief cannot be through exercising such ability. Rather, the truth of *H*'s belief in BAD is through *environmental luck*. Or more precisely, while the truth of *H*'s belief in BAD may to some extent be down to such a discriminatory ability, sheer luck is what primarily explains why *H* hits the truth. So, while a proponent of I-RVE* might insist that *H* in GOOD has knowledge, this view falsely predicts that so does *H* in BAD. In sum, our epistemic twin scenario involving GOOD and BAD presents a counterexample to I-RVE*.¹¹

4. INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

The foregoing shows that friends of RVE should dissociate themselves from the kind of epistemic individualism to which this view is typically wedded. Only then will they be able to offer a plausible account of direct and diffuse epistemic dependence. Exactly which particular shape an anti-individualistic version of RVE should take is not a question we shall settle here. §5

argues instead that combining virtue reliabilism with epistemic anti-individualism has consequences for which responsibilist virtues should be adopted and promoted in the pursuit of testimonial knowledge. Virtue reliabilism, remember, is a version of RVE according to which intellectual virtues should be understood as reliable cognitive abilities, and by ‘responsibilist virtues’ we have in mind refined character traits. But before that argument is presented, we must develop at least a rough account of the pertinent responsibilist virtue, namely *intellectual humility*. The remaining part of this section is devoted to such an account.

Historically, the concept of humility has been used for a range of different purposes, primarily in various religious and philosophical contexts. We shall not attempt a comprehensive analysis of this multifaceted concept. Rather, our attention shall be restricted to an *epistemic* kind of humility—*intellectual humility*—which has to do with proper acknowledgement of the character of the cognitive abilities that are involved in producing or retaining knowledge.¹² What exactly does such acknowledgement amount to? Dictionaries typically define humility *negatively* in terms of “the quality or state of not thinking you are better than other people”; “the quality of having a lowly opinion of oneself”; “the act or posture of lowering oneself in relation to others”¹³ This contemporary conception takes humility to imply esteeming oneself as no better than others. If transposed to an epistemic context, humility would be the quality of having a lowly view of one’s cognitive abilities *vis-à-vis* knowledge, and not regarding them as epistemically better than others’ cognitive abilities. However, on such an exclusively negative conception, intellectual humility is hard to conceive of as a virtue alongside other intellectual virtues—e.g., open-mindedness, diligence, and so on. After all, if one’s cognitive abilities are genuinely better in an important epistemic respect when compared with other epistemic individuals, there why is there something virtuous about debasing or degrading one’s own abilities, in comparison with those individuals? To do so would hinder rather than further one’s epistemic pursuits by undermining the role that those abilities could play in generating or sustaining knowledge.

Nevertheless, the said negative conception is onto something. Intellectual humility does have something to do with proper acknowledgement of the limitations and deficiencies of those cognitive abilities which normally lead to knowledge. Deliberate failure to acknowledge such boundaries and faults betrays an epistemic arrogance that is incompatible with intellectual humility. But being part of an *accurate assessment* of one’s cognitive abilities, such acknowledgement is different from epistemically lowering oneself in relation to others. Here’s an outline of our *dual-aspect* view of intellectual humility.

We distinguish between two types of intellectual humility. *Confidence humility* concerns proper cognizing of the extensiveness and effectiveness of one’s cognitive abilities as they pertain

to knowledge. Such cognizance has two aspects. Firstly, a *negative* aspect in which one should recognize the existence of one's cognitive imperfections as well as the limits of one's cognitive merits. Ignoring or downplaying the presence of one's cognitive flaws and overestimating one's cognitive merits are both incompatible with intellectual humility. In other words, epistemically humble individuals neither ignore their cognitive shortcomings nor overrate their cognitive strengths *vis-à-vis* knowledge. To underestimate one's flaws or overestimate one's merits is to reveal an *inflated* conception of oneself as a potential subject of knowledge. Being humble in the epistemic sense rules out professing to have knowledge beyond what is licenced by one's cognitive abilities. No intellectually humble individual is unnecessarily confident about their abilities to produce or sustain knowledge.

Secondly, the proper cognizing of the extensiveness and effectiveness of one's epistemically relevant cognitive abilities also has a *positive* aspect of equal importance in which one should recognize the genuine breath and depth of one's abilities. Epistemically humble individuals do not underrate the role their cognitive abilities actually play in producing or sustaining knowledge, nor do they overrate the extent to which their cognitive faults prevent or undermine knowledge they might otherwise have had. To overestimate one's cognitive failings or to underestimate one's cognitive merits is to betray a *deflated* sense of self-worth with which intellectual humility is incompatible. Being intellectual humble rules out harboring such deep-seated sense of distrust of one's own cognitive abilities. Every humble individual is sufficiently confident about their abilities to produce or sustain knowledge.¹⁴

Let's now turn to a different type of intellectual humility. Whereas *confidence humility* is about correctly assessing the strengths and weaknesses of one's own cognitive abilities so as to have enough but not too much confidence in their suitability for knowledge, *attribution humility* concerns proper inter-personal behavior in response to one's accurate cognizance of those strengths and weaknesses, and in particular with regard to whose cognitive agency one's cognitive successes should be attributed. Just as with confidence humility, attribution humility has two aspects.

First, it has a *negative* aspect in which humble individuals do not overestimate the extent to which their cognitive successes are attributable to their cognitive agency. For example, they do not brag about knowledge they possess which is largely attributable to others people's cognitive agency, let alone boasting about knowledge they lack. Rather, they will identify the cognitive resources of others and thereby acknowledge any important bearing they may have on their own cognitive successes. They will seek to draw with due respect more efficiently or extensively on others' resources so as to further their own epistemic pursuits.

Second, attribution humility has a *positive* aspect in which humble individuals do not underestimate the extent to which their cognitive successes are attributable to their cognitive agency. To systematically falsely attribute one's cognitive successes to other people's cognitive agency would hinder one's acquisition of knowledge by making one less willing to draw on one's own cognitive resources in the pursuit of knowledge. In addition, one would likely be prevented from being flagged up as a reliable informant in one's epistemic community.

Let's finally dwell on the dual-aspect of both confidence and attribution humility. Arguably, the negative aspects of both types are what most naturally characterize intellectual humility, but our contention is that the positive aspects are equally important parts of what it takes to be an intellectually humble individual. As a character trait intellectual humility is a responsibilist virtue, which involves both that one has enough but not too much confidence in one's cognitive abilities to ensure they are utilized in ways that optimize knowledge, and that one appropriately attributes one's cognitive successes to one's cognitive agency. Without the negative aspects, one will overrate strengths and underrate weaknesses, and hence misapply one's cognitive abilities accordingly. Consequently, one is likely to take undeserved credit for what others have cognitively achieved. Without the positive aspects, one will underrate strengths and overrate weaknesses, and hence fail to apply one's cognitive abilities accordingly. Consequently, one is likely to miss out on deserved credit for what one could have cognitively achieved.

Both aspects thus emphasize that intellectual humility has at least *instrumental value* in terms of being conducive to the acquisition of knowledge, but arguably also *final value* in terms of being a valuable character trait on its own. It is standardly held that intellectual humility is valuable even when abstracting away from particular epistemic benefits.¹⁵ Intellectual humility would lack either value if one either overreacted or underreacted to the presence of cognitive limitations and insufficiencies. In particular, to systematically overplay one's cognitive faults induces irrational doubt about one's cognitive abilities, which not only seriously undermines the acquisition of knowledge, but also engenders a sense of inferiority and self-depreciation. To belittle or disparage oneself in this way is to deprive one of a feature which otherwise would be praiseworthy on its own.¹⁶

5. FROM EPISTEMIC ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM TO INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Let's take stock. In §2 we argued that robust virtue epistemology (RVE) has been wedded to epistemic individualism according to which the truth of an individual's belief is because of (or

through) cognitive ability (or competence) only if any individualistic duplicate who forms the same belief under the same local circumstances does so in such a way that its truth is because of that same ability. Drawing on an epistemic twin scenario in the context of testimonial knowledge, we proceeded in §3 to build an argument against this individualistic version of RVE; what we called I-RVE*. In the previous section we then sketched a dual-aspect view of intellectual humility. Whereas contemporary views typically restrict attention to the negative aspect in which humble individuals neither overrate their strengths nor underrate their weaknesses, our view emphasizes a positive aspect in which such individuals *also* neither underrate their strengths nor overrate their weaknesses. Both aspects apply to what we called confidence humility and attribution humility. In this section we develop an argument from epistemic anti-individualism to our preferred view of intellectual humility, which pertains to those cognitive abilities that are in play in testimonial exchanges between speakers, hearers and third-parties.

Here's the line of thought. Our epistemic twin scenario shows that the acquisition of testimonial knowledge largely through trust of an informant is not because of one's exercise of cognitive agency (e.g., a cognitive ability to discriminate between good and bad testimony). Or, more precisely, while such agency, when construed individualistically, may play a minor (indispensable) role, the overarching role in accounting for the truth of the pertinent belief is played by the cognitive agency of others. But the extent to which an individual should rely on her cognitive abilities in the pursuit of knowledge should be proportionate to the role that those abilities actually play in accounting for the truth of that belief. So, the extent to which the hearer should rely on her own cognitive abilities is very small in comparison to the extent to which she is dependent on others' cognitive abilities. But if a hearer in the main depends on the cognitive abilities of others when gaining knowledge via testimony, she should avoid being overly self-reliant, and ought instead display a significant amount of intellectual humility with respect to her own individualistic abilities being able to produce such knowledge. So, a recipient of testimony should adopt a humble attitude in the pursuit of testimonial knowledge.

Let's formulate the foregoing more succinctly, so as to explain how the previous sections provide support for two of the premises. Here's the argument:

- (P1) In the case of testimonial knowledge gained largely through trust of an informant, the hearer's cognitive abilities (interpreted in accordance with I-RVE*) play a minor role in comparison to the much more prominent role that the speaker and third-parties' cognitive abilities play in accounting for the truth of the hearer's belief.
- (P2) The extent to which an individual should rely on—i.e., be confident in, and attribute her cognitive success to—her own cognitive abilities (interpreted in accordance with I-RVE*) should be proportionate to the role that those cognitive abilities play in accounting for the truth of the pertinent belief.

- (C1) So, in the case of testimonial knowledge gained largely through trust of an informant, the extent to which the hearer should be confident in, and attribute her cognitive success to, her own cognitive abilities (interpreted in accordance with I-RVE*) is very small in comparison to the extent to which she is dependent on others' cognitive abilities.
- (P3) But if a hearer acquires testimonial knowledge by largely depending on the cognitive abilities of others, and therefore should adjust her confidence in, and her attribution of her cognitive success to, her own cognitive abilities (interpreted in accordance with I-RVE*), then the hearer ought to display some intellectual humility *vis-à-vis* her own cognitive abilities.
- (C2) So, a recipient of testimony should adopt an intellectually humble attitude in the pursuit of testimonial knowledge gained largely through trust of an informant.

Let's scrutinize the premises in turn. Premise (P1) is basically the upshot of our anti-individualist argument from §3. We first showed that in cases of *direct epistemic dependence* where a hearer acquires testimonial knowledge largely on the basis of the speaker's say-so, it's the speaker rather than the hearer's cognitive abilities that are primarily responsible for the truth of the hearer's belief. Following on from §2, I-RVE* is assumed throughout to hold of the relevant cognitive abilities, as RVE has typically gone hand-in-hand with epistemic individualism about such abilities. We then argued that in cases of *diffuse epistemic dependence*, the cognitive abilities of individuals who are not directly part of the testimonial exchanges also play an indispensable role in accounting for the truth of the hearer's belief. We shall not here attempt to determine the degree to which the hearer is dependent on such third-parties. The key point is that in a wide range of cases of testimonial knowledge, the role played by the hearer's cognitive abilities, when understood along the lines of I-RVE*, is relatively minor in comparison with the roles played by cognitive abilities of the speaker or third-parties to the testimonial exchanges.

The second premise (P2) makes an independently plausible claim about how to *proportion reliance* on one's epistemic sources. To rely on, or place trust in, a source of belief formation or retention—e.g., perception, memory, introspection or reasoning—is to have confidence in, or attribute reliability to, that source as a means to achieve one's epistemic goals. Thus, if the goal is to acquire perceptual knowledge, then one relies on one's perceptual apparatus if in normal circumstances one takes perceptual experiences to determine how to form perceptual beliefs—i.e., if one tends to base relevant beliefs on such experiences. Suppose that in actual fact perception is a highly reliable epistemic source in that a preponderance of one's perceptual beliefs are true. In that case, what one *rationally ought* to do, given one's epistemic goals, is to rely on one's perceptual apparatus when circumstances are normal. Rationality requires that one adopt epistemic attitudes that promote one's epistemic goals, such as maximizing knowledge acquisition. If instead perception is actually highly unreliable in that a high ratio of one's perceptual beliefs are false, then given one's epistemic goals one *rationally ought* to refrain from relying on one's perceptual apparatus. (P2) pertains to a *hybrid* case where several distinct

epistemic sources contribute disproportionately to the truth of a given belief. In such a case, one rationally ought to proportion one's reliance accordingly. Consider:

Epistemic Proportionality

If epistemic source *X* contributes significantly more than epistemic source *Y* to the truth of the belief that *p*, and one's epistemic goal is to acquire knowledge that *p*, then one rationally ought to rely correspondingly more on *X* than on *Y* when forming the belief that *p*.

Thus, given that the speaker and third-parties' cognitive abilities contribute significantly more than the hearer's ability to receive and evaluate testimonies, the hearer ought to adjust her reliance on those abilities accordingly if the goal is to acquire testimonial knowledge. If instead the hearer were to rely disproportionately if not exclusively on her own cognitive abilities, the epistemic goal is liable to be thwarted. Since she would then be relying on a cognitive ability for the formation of a belief well beyond the contribution that source yields to its truth, she is likely to form a belief on a basis that will lead her astray.

The first conclusion (C1) follows straightforwardly from (P1) and (P2). Put the specific claim in (P1) about the disproportionate roles that the hearer and other's cognitive abilities play in accounting for the truth of the hearer's testimonial belief together with the general claim in (P2) about adjusting one's reliance on a given cognitive ability to the role it genuinely plays *vis-à-vis* the truth of the target belief. It follows that in the specific cases of testimonial knowledge that interest us the amount of trust the hearer should place in her own cognitive abilities should be significantly less than the degree to which she is dependent on others' cognitive abilities. We assume throughout that the relevant cognitive abilities are construed along the lines of I-RVE*, that the relevant epistemic goal is the attainment of testimonial knowledge, and that to rely on testimonial exchanges is to take others say-so to inform or constrain the way in which one forms testimonial beliefs.

Premise (P3) connects a claim about the extent to which one ought to rely on one's cognitive abilities with a claim about intellectual humility. The connection is that if a hearer ought not rely very significantly on her own cognitive abilities (understood in accordance with I-RVE*) when it comes to their contribution to the truth of testimonial beliefs, then she ought to adopt an intellectually humble attitude in the pursuit of testimonial knowledge. For if the rational course of action is to place a very small amount of trust in the role that the hearer's abilities play with regard to the truth of such beliefs, then she should properly acknowledge her limitations and deficiencies. As shown in §4, such acknowledgement constitutes one aspect of intellectual humility—i.e., neither overrate the strengths nor underrate the weaknesses of one's cognitive abilities in the role they play in generating knowledge. On the other hand, while the hearer's cognitive abilities to discriminate good from bad testimony play a relatively minor role in the

acquisition of testimonial knowledge, another aspect of intellectual humility has it that she should still properly acknowledge such a role, and so neither overrate the weaknesses nor underrate the strengths that those abilities play in filling it. Importantly, once the hearer realizes the relatively minor but non-negligible role her own cognitive abilities play in coming to possess testimonial knowledge, she ought to behave accordingly. Taking in the fact that she is heavily dependent on others' cognitive contribution to the acquisition of such knowledge, the hearer ought to recognize that her cognitive success is more attributable to other people's cognitive agency than her own, and then adopt an outward attitude of making more or better use of others' abilities so as to promote testimonial knowledge. That's not to say the hearer should refrain from attributing any part of her cognitive success to her own cognitive agency, since underestimating the extent of such an attribution is also incompatible with our notion of intellectual humility.

The last step (C2) in our argument follows from (C1) and (P3) by *modus ponens*. Basically, if it is both the case that the degree to which our hearer should trust her own cognitive abilities is relatively small, and that the hearer ought to display some intellectual humility with regard to such abilities if she ought not trust those abilities to a very significant degree, then it follows that the hearer should adopt an intellectually humble attitude in the pursuit of (the relevant kind of) testimonial knowledge. That is to say, (P3) establishes the conditional that a hearer ought to display intellectual humility if she is largely depending on others' cognitive abilities when acquiring (the relevant kind of) testimonial knowledge, and (C1) yields the antecedent of that conditional—i.e., that the hearer does so depend. The consequent (C2) follows—i.e., that our hearer should adopt an intellectual humble stance when seeking to obtain testimonial knowledge of this kind.

6. CONCLUSION

Robust virtue epistemologists disagree over which intellectual virtues should take center stage in a viable account of knowledge: reliable cognitive abilities or refined character traits. In the context of a broad class of testimonial knowledge where a hearer depends directly on the speaker and diffusely on third parties to the testimonial exchange, the cognitive abilities of the hearer play a minor role in comparison with the abilities of others in regard to the truth of the target belief. An epistemic twin scenario was developed to show that what converts a true testimonial belief into knowledge fails to supervene on the hearer's individualistic features. Having thus established epistemic anti-individualism with respect to testimonial knowledge, we proceeded to sketch a

dual-aspect account of intellectual humility so as to mount an argument from this metaphysical view about the nature of cognitive abilities to a normative claim about such a virtuous character trait. While we agreed with the prevailing conception that intellectually humble individuals neither overstate their strengths nor understate their weaknesses, our contention was that such individuals also neither overstate their weaknesses nor understate their strengths. Importantly, given the direct and diffuse dependency theses, a hearer rationally ought to proportion her reliance on her own and others' cognitive abilities accordingly—i.e., be confident enough but not overly confident in her own abilities with regard the truth of the target belief, and accurately mark the extent to which her cognitive successes are attributable to her cognitive agency or the cognitive agency of others. Since these features of confidence and attribution are definitive of intellectually humble individuals by the lights of our dual-aspect account, there is a compelling line of reasoning from epistemic anti-individualism to intellectual humility.¹⁷

REFERENCES

- Author1 & Author2 (2012); (2013); (2014); (*Forthcominga*); (*Forthcomingb*).
 Author2 (2005); (2007*b*); (2007*a*); (2009*a*); (2009*b*); (2010); (2012); (2015).
 Author2 & Co-Authors (2010).
 Author2 & Co-Author (2011).
 Axtell, G. (1997). 'Recent Work in Virtue Epistemology', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34, 410-30.
 Baehr, J. (2006). 'Character, Reliability, and Virtue Epistemology', *Philosophical Quarterly* 56, 193-212.
 Battaly, H., Howard-Snyder, D., Whitcomb, D., & Baehr, J. (*Forthcoming*). 'Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
 Code, L. (1987). *Epistemic Responsibility*, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
 Driver, J. (2001). *Uneasy Virtue*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
 Goldberg, S. (2010). *Relying on Others*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 ——— (2011). 'The Division of Epistemic Labour', *Episteme* 8, 112-25.
 Greco, J. (2003). 'Knowledge as Credit for True Belief', *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, (eds.) M. DePaul & L. Zagzebski, 111-34, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 ——— (2007). 'Discrimination and Testimonial Knowledge', *Episteme* 4, 335-51.
 ——— (2009). *Achieving Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 Hazlett, A. (2012). 'Higher-Order Epistemic Attitudes and Intellectual Humility', *Episteme* 9, 205-23.
 Hookway, C. (2003). 'How to Be a Virtue Epistemologist', *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, (eds.) M. DePaul & L. Zagzebski, 183-202, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 Kvanvig, J. (1992). *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind*, Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
 Montmarquet, J. (1993). *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
 Pieper, J. (1965). *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance*, New York: Harourt, Brace.
 Roberts, R., & Wood, J. (2007). *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, New York: Oxford University Press.
 Sosa, E. (2007). *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 ——— (2009). *Reflective Knowledge: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 ——— (2011). *Knowing Full Well*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
 ——— (2015). *Judgement and Agency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 Zagzebski, L. (1996). *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 ——— (1999). 'What is Knowledge?', *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, (eds.) J. Greco & E. Sosa, 92-116, Oxford: Blackwell.

NOTES

¹ That said, there is equally influential wing of virtue epistemology which explicitly *eschews* the project of offering a theory of knowledge. See, for example, Code (1987), Kvanvig (1992), Montmarquet (1993), Hookway (2003), and Roberts & Wood (2007).

² For a related proposal, see Greco (2009).

³ For more on the distinction between virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism, see Axtell (1997) and Baehr (2006).

⁴ This formulation makes RVE uniquely placed to deal with the problem of accounting for the special value of knowledge—i.e., the value that no state short of knowledge has. RVE has it that such value accrues from the fact that an achievement is being manifested, something which has at least *prima facie* final valuable, and which is not manifested in a cognitive performance that falls short of knowledge. For further discussion of the relationship between RVE and epistemic value, see Author2 (2009a). See also Author2 (2009b) and Author2 & Co-Authors (2010, chs. 1-4). For further discussion of the idea that achievements (cognitive or otherwise) might have a special value, see Author2 (2010). For further discussion of the topic of epistemic value more generally, see Author2 (2007b) and Author2 & Co-Authors (2011).

⁵ We shall henceforth assume that the relevant notion of supervenience is a weak one. Thus, if an individual *S* has cognitive ability *A*, then an internal physical duplicate *S** of *S* also has *A* only if *S* and *S** occupy the same possible world.

⁶ As Greco (2007, 58) puts it, “there is a sense of ‘luck’ on which lucky success is precisely opposed to success through virtue or ability”.

⁷ For further discussion of epistemic individualism, see Author1 & Author2 (*forthcomingb*).

⁸ The reason for this is that Lackey is targeting a view often equated with RVE, but which is in fact importantly distinct. This is the so-called ‘credit view’—at one time defended by, for example, Greco (2003)—whereby knowing subjects are always deserving of credit (i.e., are praiseworthy) for their cognitive success. This clearly isn’t the same as the RVE thesis that when one knows one’s cognitive success is primarily creditable (i.e., attributable) to one, a thesis that makes no claim at all about whether the knowing subject is deserving of praise (though the two theses have sometimes been conflated in the literature). In any case, in objecting to the credit view, Lackey needs a case of testimonial knowledge where the subject deserved no praise for her cognitive success at all, and hence was merely trusting her informant.

⁹ In fairness, Sosa (2007, 97) does suggest that in ordinary cases of testimonial knowledge, the cognitive success is “attributable to a complex social competence only partially seated in the individual believer.” Sosa doesn’t offer much elucidation of what such complex social competences amount to. Perhaps the idea is that in testimonial cases the cognitive success is primarily creditable to a social competence, which is displayed by the cognitive whole of a testifier-cum-testiffee. In any case, this proposal is antithetical to the spirit of RVE, which has it that *S* has knowledge just in case her cognitive success is because of *her* cognitive ability. So construed, RVE is explicitly a form of epistemic individualism. To embrace wider social epistemic competences may have merit, but represents a radical departure from such individualism.

¹⁰ For further defence of this claim, in the context of a broader anti-luck approach to knowledge, see Author2 (2005; 2007a; 2015).

¹¹ For further discussion of epistemic twin earth arguments of this kind, and their wider significance for virtue-based theories of knowledge, see Author1 & Author2 (2012; 2013; 2014; *forthcominga*). For further discussion of the distinction between intervening and environmental epistemic luck which underpins epistemic twin earth arguments, see Author2 (2009a; 2009b; 2012a) and Author2 & Co-Authors (2010, chs. 2-4).

¹² Note that intellectual humility is taken to be a character trait—i.e., a complex disposition to behave and cognize in a particular way in a range of social and non-social situations. Such a trait depends on, but is irreducible to, characteristic mental states and behaviors. Note also that intellectual humility contrasts with moral humility, which concerns a disinclination to exaggerate moral attributes, such as dispositions to act honestly and conscientiously.

¹³ These quotes are online entries from *Merriam-Webster*, *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Wikipedia*, respectively.

¹⁴ The positive aspects of humility can be traced back to Aquinas who took the “ground of humility to be one’s estimation of oneself according to truth.” (Pieper 1965, 188) Humility has no negative connotations on Aquinas’ view—i.e., there is no suggestion that humility involves an attitude of self-accusation or disparagement of oneself, or of cringing inferiority feelings.

¹⁵ Intellectual humility can plausibly be seen as a constituent part of *wisdom* as a more encompassing *theoretical virtue*. Following Aristotle, the relevant kind of wisdom would be theoretical: “scientific knowledge, combined with intuitive reason, of the things that are highest by nature.” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 1141b) Such wisdom requires deep understanding of first principles and underlying connections, rather than wide-ranging or narrow-minded, scientific expertise. In Plato’s *Apology* the oracle says that Socrates is the wisest of all men, but his wisdom consists in ignorance, in knowing that he apparently knows next to nothing. Wise people conduct their epistemic enquiries diligently and open-mindedly. They are reflective, thorough and fully aware of their own fallibility. They have confidence in own abilities to make good judgments, but are not overly self-confident or abrasive. More recently,

Zagzebski (1996, 49-50) defines theoretical wisdom as a non-propositional kind of understanding that “is a matter of grasping the whole structure of reality”.

¹⁶ Our dual-aspect account of intellectual humility differs markedly from other current views. Hazlett (2012) takes intellectual humility to consist in a disposition to form proper higher-order beliefs about the epistemic statuses of one’s beliefs. Driver (2001) sees intellectual humility as a disposition to underestimate self-worth to some limited extent, in spite of the available evidence. Roberts & Wood (2007) regards intellectual humility as consisting in a disposition to have an unusually low concern for one’s own intellectual status and entitlements. And Battaly *et al* (*forthcoming*) conceive of intellectual humility in terms of proper attentiveness to and owning of one’s intellectual limitations, which involves a dispositional profile to do with cognitive, motivational and affective responses to an awareness of such limitations. This *limitations-owning* view has the most affinities with our dual-aspect account, but there are at least two crucial differences. The former denies that humility consists even partially in owning one’s intellectual strengths, and it fails to recognize that humility has a social or inter-personal dimension.

¹⁷ Acknowledgements.