

Module 7: Virtue Epistemology

2. The Theory

A virtue theory does not construe positive and negative epistemic value in terms of *justification alone*. Typically, a virtue theory will involve two different values: *aptness* and *justification*.

A belief that *p* is *apt* =df. (1) *p* is determined by a truth-conducive intellectual virtue.

v is an intellectual virtue = df. *v* is an intellectual disposition or skill (developed or innate) that—in certain contexts—makes one more likely to have true beliefs rather than false beliefs.

A belief that *p* is *justified* =df. (1) *S* believe *p* and (2) *p* is coherent with the rest of *S*'s beliefs.

So, on a virtue theory of epistemology, positive epistemic value is construed in terms of *aptness* and *justification*, not simply one or the other.

2.1 Relative to Environment

A belief is apt relative to given contexts and environments. This is because intellectual virtues conducive to truth in one environment are not always conducive in another. For instance, your visual system will not give you reliable information about what a painting looks like in the dark. Also, your cognitive capacity to reason will falter when you have been drugged.

2.2 Justification without Aptness, Aptness Without Justification

S's belief that *p* can be justified but not apt. For example, consider a case where *S*'s perceptions are all the result of an evil demon, but *S* has a highly coherent set of beliefs. In this case, *S*'s beliefs are justified but not apt. They are justified because they are coherent. They fail to be apt because *relative to the evil demon context*, *S*'s perceptual system is not truth-conducive.

Likewise, *S*'s belief that *p* can be apt but not justified. Consider the perceptual system of a child or someone with some type of amnesia. For these two, beliefs formed by perception are the product of an intellectual virtue (i.e. perception) and therefore apt. However, without a preponderance of other beliefs that cohere with beliefs formed by perception, these individuals are not likely to have a high level of justification.

2.3 Animal and Reflective Knowledge

S's belief that p is *animal knowledge* =Df. (1) S believes p , and (2) S's belief is apt but not justified.

S's belief that p is *reflective knowledge* =Df. (1) S believes p , and (2) S's belief is apt and justified.

Explain this relation.

2.4 Not Reliabilism

First, virtue epistemology is not reliabilism because in order to have knowledge, beliefs must be the product of an intellectual virtue. This means that they have to be formed by dispositions that are sensitive to context.

Second, virtue epistemology is not reliabilism because the latter only requires that beliefs be justified (formed by a reliable process) whereas virtue epistemology distinguishes between *aptness* and *justification*.

Third, virtue epistemology is not reliabilism because the former distinguishes two different types of knowledge: animal and reflective knowledge.

3. Objections and Replies

3.1 Evil Demon

Consider the case where John believes p , q , and r , and S's beliefs are produced reliably by perception, and Michelle believes p , q , and r but Michelle's beliefs are produced by an evil demon. On the reliabilist theory, John is justified while Michelle is not.

According to the virtue epistemologist, John and Michelle are both *justified* (since their beliefs are equally coherent) and neither John nor Michelle's beliefs are *apt* relative to the evil demon context. This is because their perceptual beliefs are not produced by an intellectual virtue that would be truth-conducive in such a context. In other words, neither John nor Michelle have reflective knowledge in a demon environment.

3.2 Unknown Reliable Process

Consider the clairvoyant objection that faces reliabilism. That is, Ben may be clairvoyant, not know that he is clairvoyant, yet believe p based upon this reliable and truth-conducive power. Given that Ben does not know he is clairvoyant, we might say that Ben's belief that p is not justified even though it is reliable.

According to the virtue epistemologist, Ben's beliefs formed by clairvoyance are *apt* but not *justified*. Why is this the case?