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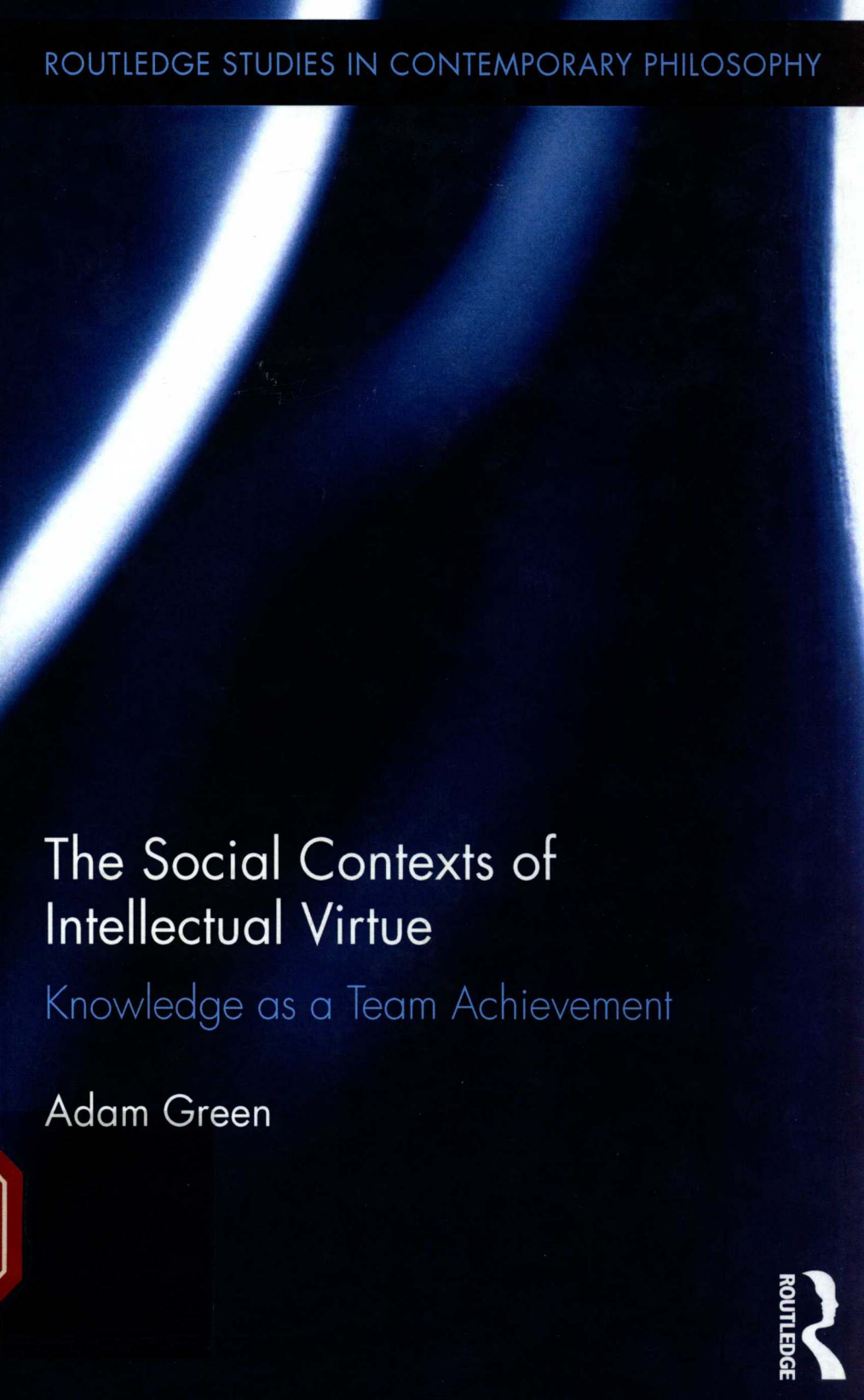

The Social Contexts of Intellectual Virtue

Knowledge as a Team Achievement

Adam Green

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The Social Contexts of Intellectual Virtue

This book reconceives virtue epistemology in light of the conviction that we are essentially social creatures. Virtue is normally thought of as something that allows individuals to accomplish things on their own. Although contemporary ethics is increasingly making room for an inherently social dimension in moral agency, intellectual virtues continue to be seen in terms of the computing potential of a brain taken by itself. Thinking in these terms, however, seriously misconstrues the way in which our individual flourishing hinges on our collective flourishing.

Green's account of virtue epistemology is based on the extended credit view, which conceives of knowledge as an achievement and broadens that focus to include team achievements in addition to individual ones. He argues that this view does a better job than alternatives of answering the many conceptual and empirical challenges for virtue epistemology that have been based on cases of testimony. The view also allows for a nuanced interaction with situationist psychology, dual-processing models in cognitive science, and the extended mind literature in the philosophy of mind. This framework provides a useful conceptual bridge between individual and group epistemology, and it has novel applications to the epistemology of disagreement, prejudice, and authority.

Adam Green is an assistant professor of philosophy at Azusa Pacific University. His work ranges over epistemology, the philosophy and cognitive science of religion, and philosophical psychology. His previous work on social epistemology has appeared in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Synthese*, *Episteme*, and *Philosophical Explorations*.

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To Monica
La bellezza ch'io vidi si trasmoda
non pur di là da noi, ma certo io credo
che solo il suo fattor tutta la goda.
(Dante, Paradiso XXX: 19–21)

Acknowledgments

In a book on social dependence and virtue, it is only fitting to include a full list of those from whom I have benefited over the years this project has developed and to acknowledge that whatever defects there may be in these pages, they have been in spite of some very generous and able assistance. Unfortunately, my list will be very imperfect.

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Material from the following four essays reappears in chapters of this book. All is reprinted with permission.

Chapters one and seven feature material drawn from "Extending the Credit Theory of Knowledge." *Philosophical Explorations* 15 (2012): 135–146.

Chapter two is based on "Deficient Testimony Is Deficient Teamwork." *Episteme* 11 (2014): 213–227.

Chapter three is largely comprised of "Monitoring, Testimony, and a Challenge from Social Psychology." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 51 (2014): 27–38.

Finally, chapter seven contains "Evaluating Distributed Cognition." *Synthese* 191 (2014): 79–95.

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Contents

1 The Basic Challenge and Basic View

"He was riding her coattails." "We stand on the shoulders of giants." We use turns of speech such as these to convey in humble or self-deprecating fashion that we owe an immense debt to others. As a philosopher, I'm told I'm just writing footnotes to Plato after all (or perhaps doodling in his margins). When acknowledging these debts we owe to others, we do so by deflecting credit from ourselves onto others. The saying is that we are dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, not that we are giants on the shoulders of still other giants.

The distinctive flavor of the thesis I want to elaborate and defend in the following pages is captured by the oddity of thinking of standing on the shoulders of others or riding others' coattails as an art form. In the following pages, I advance the claim that depending on others should be and is often a domain of skill. The claim is not that we are able to take advantage of others through our own cunning and that this is what makes our intercourse with others skillful. It is neither the Machiavellian manipulator nor the person who treats others as one might treat a thermometer or GPS device that I have in mind. Rather, I am thinking of the ways we relate to others as friends, family, colleagues, parishioners, or citizens, and the claim is that these relationships and the patterns of interaction that compose them are permeated with skillful interdependence, at least when things are going as they should. In particular, what I will have in mind is epistemic skill, which is to say, skill at relating one's mind to reality so as to arrive at truth and avoid error. Rather than attenuating or abrogating one's credit for success, I claim that skillful dependence on others is a way of generating such credit.

My strategy for the book is like reverse engineering an onion. In this first chapter, I will present the core of the view I would like to argue for. In each subsequent chapter, I will add an additional layer that nuances or extends the work done in previous chapters. In almost every chapter, I will present a challenge to either my view or related views, using that challenge as a guide to show us where to go to develop the view further. My hope in adopting this strategy is to be able to address two audiences at once. In presenting the view gradually, I hope to be able to engage those who are new to these issues in a natural and organic way, but by anchoring (almost) each chapter in a

contemporary debate, my hope is that each chapter will have something to offer the specialist as well as the novice. In this chapter, the challenge of note is the general conceptual challenge that testimony, believing something on the say-so of others, poses to what is called virtue epistemology. In responding to this challenge, I will offer the core of a view I will call "the extended credit view."

I. A Starting Point

This book will be defending a view that revises a prominent thread in contemporary epistemology. I take contemporary virtue epistemology and give it an anti-individualistic or pro-communitarian twist. The work of this book presumes the wide appeal and attractiveness of virtue epistemology and spends its time renovating what is already a very livable space rather than building up an epistemology from the ground up. Before introducing and motivating the revision I would like to make, then, let us introduce the view to be revised and briefly address what makes it an attractive option within epistemology. The epistemologists whose views will be our central focus here are the virtue theorists Ernest Sosa (cf. Sosa 2007a, 2007b, 2011, 2015) and John Greco (cf. Greco 2003, 2007, 2010, 2012), the most important proponents of "virtue reliabilism" or "performance epistemology."

Virtue epistemology at least began its contemporary career as a via media. Aristotle is the historical touchstone for virtue epistemology, but, until the 1980s, the idea that one's account of knowledge or other epistemic goods should essentially involve the notion of virtue was, for all intents and purposes, buried in history.[1] The contenders at the time were evidentialism and reliabilism. Neither was a particular view so much as a family of views. There was and is diversity in both. Evidentialists tend to affirm that epistemic goods are a matter of correctly assessing what one's evidence is and then believing only what one can tell that the evidence affirms.[2] Evidentialists tend to be internalists, emphasizing what can be seen to be rational from within one's own first-person viewpoint. The biggest challenge for such views has always been showing that there is a robust connection between what can be seen to be rational from the inside due to the marshaling of evidence and the actual state of the world (cf. Greco 2010, chps. 3 and 4). A brain in a vat, as is perhaps all too familiar to those who know the literature, can have internalist and evidentialist excellences while still being poorly positioned to know things about the external world.

Reliabilists, on the other hand, took the opposite approach (cf. Alvin Goldman's formative articles Goldman 1967, 1976, 1979). For the typical reliabilist, evidence is only valuable to the extent that it reliably indicates what is true. The connection between one's belief and whatever it is in the world that makes one's belief true is primary. Moreover, a belief can be formed in a way that reliably indicates what is true without it having to do so via the having or marshaling of evidence. Whereas the paradigmatic

evidentialist is also an internalist, reliabilism is an externalist theory. Consider memory, for instance. We know many things from memory even when we don't remember how we came by the information that we remember. One might well think that, for many things we take ourselves to know via memory, evidentialism and internalism don't offer us much that would explain why we think we know these things. It is easy to imagine not being able to tell the difference between a true memory and a false memory, for instance. The reliabilist, by contrast, can say that our true memories provide us knowledge because they provide reliably formed true beliefs.

Whereas evidentialism typically has to worry about the connection between one's beliefs and the world, worries for reliabilism tend to in one way or another concern the connection between the conscious agent and the true beliefs they form.[3] Evidentialism typically has strict (if sometimes implicit) requirements on this score, but, by contrast, one could in principle come by true beliefs in a reliable way that completely bypasses conscious agency, making it functionally epiphenomenal.[4] One might be concerned that this vulnerability drains the domain of epistemology of its normative power. In what sense, one might wonder, does it reflect well or poorly on a person that they have knowledge if what makes for knowledge is not something that can be accessed from the inside and if knowledge can come about from processes that bypass the agency of the person who has the knowledge? One might wonder why exactly one should value knowledge over mere true belief in the way we typically do if this is the case.[5]

Evidentialists and reliabilists have come up with many different responses to the natural worries for their views, but it is against the backdrop of the basic problematics for these two families that one can see how virtue epistemology offers a via media between the two. On the one hand, like the evidentialist, in virtue epistemology, a great deal of emphasis is put on the way conscious agency is put to work in pursuing what is true and avoiding what is false. On the other hand, the connection with the world that reliabilists start from is held onto as the ultimate arbiter of whether one's epistemic agency has done its work well or poorly.

In motivating his virtue theory, Ernest Sosa uses an archery example to introduce what he calls his AAA structure (cf. Sosa 2007a, 22–43; 2015, 1). A shot fired by an archer can be evaluated along three different lines. One can ask whether the shot was accurate—that is, whether it hit the target. One can ask whether the shot was adroit, with an adroit shot being one that is well fired. An adroit shot would have good form, be aimed well, and be released at an appropriate time. One can also ask whether a shot is apt, where an apt shot is one that is accurate because adroit (Sosa 2007a, 22). A gust of wind might blow a well-shot arrow off course and then back on course, for instance; in which case, the shot would be accurate and adroit but not apt. Sosa points out that one can use this AAA structure for beliefs as well.

If a belief is true, it satisfies the accuracy condition. If believing manifests the competence of the agent, then it is adroit. For instance, a valid or cogent

inference is adroit. Hasty generalization and wishful thinking are not. One could, of course, form a true belief and manifest competence in seeking the truth without the two being connected in the right way. This is exactly what happens in Gettier cases[6] (Sosa 2007a, 31–36, 42–43, 95–111; cf. Greco 2002, 2003, 2010, 73ff). When one's forming a belief that manifests cognitive competence is what explains why one forms a true belief, then one's belief counts as apt as well. Knowledge, for Sosa, is apt belief.[7] This concept of apt belief captures the idea, shared with reliabilism, that one's beliefs need a robust connection to the world while also doing more than generic reliabilism to incorporate conscious agency through Sosa's emphasis on the competence of the agent.

Sosa's views, at least at the level of the features covered so far, have much in common with those of John Greco. For Greco, knowledge is a kind of achievement. Knowledge being an achievement means that it is a success that comes about because of or through ability. Alternatively, it is a success for which one deserves credit because one's ability explains why the belief formed is true.

> [I]n cases of knowledge S deserves credit for believing the truth. This is because, necessarily, a special sort of credit accrues to success from ability. And on the present account, knowledge is an instance of success from ability.
>
> (Greco 2010, 140)

Positing that knowledge is a kind of achievement puts one in a good position to account for the value and normativity of knowledge. We value achievements in general more than mere success. All other things being equal, we would rather win a chess match due to our own skill than the distractedness of our opponent, for instance. Just so, it is intuitive to suppose that we value knowledge more than mere true belief because knowledge is a kind of achievement (Greco 2007b, 2010, 91ff). Thinking of knowledge as an achievement helps us honor our feeling that knowledge is good for its own sake and is not merely an instrumental good. We also guard what counts as an achievement, requiring that a true achievement satisfy standards appropriate to the kind of endeavor in question before being considered a true achievement. Thus, if knowledge is a kind of achievement, one expects the epistemic domain to be a normative domain. Given that externalist theories often struggle to provide a convincing account of the normativity of the epistemic domain that can compete with internalist theories in this regard, this is an important consequence of thinking of knowledge as a kind of achievement.[8]

For Sosa and Greco, epistemic virtues are enduring cognitive dispositions of agents that allow them to form beliefs in a competent, skillful manner (Sosa 2007a, 29; Greco 2010, 77).[9] Being the beneficiary of a process that happens to be reliable is not enough to qualify one for knowledge on Sosa

or Greco's views. Rather, knowledge is reflective of agent-level excellences of the person who is credited with knowledge.[10] To predicate knowledge of an agent is also to imply that the person has certain competences, skills, or abilities.[11] If one were to turn to soccer for an analogy, the proper analogue of knowledge for these theorists is the goal that arises from and testifies to a player's competence as a soccer player (cf. Greco 2010, 76–78, 82–83).

With this much introduction to virtue epistemology and, specifically, the brand of virtue epistemology espoused by Sosa and Greco, we are now in position to appreciate the challenge that testimony poses for these views. It is in examining and answering this challenge that I will introduce my own preferred account.

II. Testimony as a Challenge for Virtue Theories

For the past couple of decades, testimony has been a hot topic in epistemology.[12] One of the reasons for this is the importance and ubiquity of acquiring information from other people. Our knowledge of history, geography, science, and even ourselves depends heavily on the information others pass along to us. It is commonly noted in the literature that even one's beliefs about one's birthday and name are taken on the word of others (cf. Lackey 2006, 432). Arguably, another reason for the surge of interest in testimony has been a suddenly acute awareness that testimony challenges our standard epistemic paradigms. It challenges some more than others, and, as we shall see, one of the epistemic paradigms that it is thought to pose an especially potent challenge for is virtue epistemology.

In cases of testimonial knowledge, one comes to know things on trust as it were (cf. Faulkner 2011). For our other doxastic sources, we explain what it takes for these sources to provide us with knowledge in terms of the properties of the information processing that happens between our ears.[13] Our mental processing takes as input some raw data and sifts it for the truths it might imply. The raw data underdetermines the belief state we eventually come to possess, and the quality of that belief state is a reflection of what we do with the raw data. Whatever good-making property one might posit that perception, memory, deduction, or induction have in common, it looks, at least at first glance, as if that property couldn't be what explains how we come to have testimonial knowledge. In testimony, at least a large portion of the data processing that we normally expect ourselves to have to do has been done for us. We are simply offered the results of this process. There are, of course, views that argue that testimony has more in common with our other sources of knowledge than one might initially think, at least when it yields knowledge, but at first glance at least, testimony seems uniquely different.

It is useful to think of what happens in a case of testimony as a kind of cognitive outsourcing. If I am told the truth by a competent testifier, if some sophisticate tells me that the box in front of me is a first-class humidor for

instance, then, intuitively, the true belief I form as a result is a reflection of a good property had by the mind of that testifier. Normally, to count as knowing that the box is a first-class humidor I would need at least two things. I would need some data from the world that is a reliable indicator of what is and is not a first-class humidor, and I would need to do something with this indicator so as to discern the relevance of such an indicator to the proposition I end up believing. In the testimony case, I might not have any special facility within the domain testified about. In fact, one of the common, though challenged, ways of talking about what happens in a case of successful testimony is that the knowledge had by one person is "transmitted" to the mind of the hearer. The way in which testimony resembles outsourcing is part of what makes testimony so useful. I get to take advantage of the abilities of others.

Since epistemology is used to explain knowledge and other desirable states in terms of what is good about the mental processes of the agent who ends up with the true belief, the outsourcing component of testimony challenges epistemology by appearing to move the good-making properties of interest from the mind of the believer into the mind of the testifier. Consider what happens in analogous cases of outsourcing. If a hospital outsources its tech support to an independent IT company, then, if the hospital has good IT, that state is due to a property of the IT company, not to a property of the hospital.

Testimony challenges all epistemologies to tell an at least slightly different story than the one they would normally tell to account for other sources of knowledge such as perception or introspection. It is not hard to see how testimony could pose a special challenge to virtue epistemology (cf. Lackey 2007, Pritchard 2010a, section 2.6ff; Pritchard 2012, 23ff; Pritchard and Kallestrup 2012). Virtue epistemology, as I am construing it, asserts that knowledge is a kind of achievement. It is a success through ability—the forming of a true belief through competence. It is a success for which one deserves credit. The lofty rhetoric of virtue, ability, and competence appears an ill fit for something that amounts to cognitive outsourcing. If I fire an arrow and it hits the bull's eye, then I deserve the accolades that follow. If I have someone else fire an arrow in my stead, then to him or her go the rewards. In the case of testimonial knowledge, it seems that my knowledge comes about due to the competence or ability of the testifier. In short, the testifier appears to be the one who deserves credit for my success, if, indeed, we can even call it my success.

One's first reaction to this challenge for virtue epistemology might be to offer the virtue epistemologist a way out along the following lines. One can always choose to construe *legitimate* outsourcing along lines that make it into something skillful. Outsourcing does not have to be skillful, but it can be. One expects that the hospital that outsources its tech support will not have done so at random. Presumably, a good deal of research and effort went into shopping for the IT team they ended up hiring. Perhaps there are

procedures in place to keep track of the quality of the IT being provided to the hospital (e.g., via internal survey or periodic external reviews).

One might think that one can beef up the cognitive outsourcing one sees in testimony along the same lines. A recipient of testimony could monitor testifiers for reliability, only trusting those who are likely to be telling the truth. The recipient might only believe those testifiers who prove themselves to be both sincere and competent, for example. This monitoring could be construed along different lines, some more demanding than others, but there is no need to think that testimony involves passively accepting what others say.

Indeed, one of the master intuitions that guides the testimony literature is a conviction on the part of most epistemologists that an adequate epistemology of testimony needs to honor the fact that gullibility is an epistemic vice. In a review of a book on testimony by C. A. J. Coady, Elizabeth Fricker gives clear expression to the anti-gullibility intuition.

> Coady maintains that the felt need not to take others' trustworthiness on trust is a merely cultural phenomenon from which we can be weaned. But . . . does not mere logic, plus our commonsense knowledge of what kind of an act an assertion is, and what other people are like, entail that we should not just believe whatever we are told, without critically assessing the speaker for trustworthiness? We know too much about human nature to want to trust anyone, let alone everyone, uncritically. As Hume emphasizes in his celebrated discussion of miracles, and even Thomas Reid acknowledges, we know too well how, and how easily, what we are told may fail to be true.
>
> (Fricker 1995, 400; cf. Coady 1992)

One might then suppose that the virtue epistemologist ought to make outsourcing something that is only allowed if it meets a demanding standard.

Although, as we'll see, I think outsourcing is something that we should do with skill, making outsourcing into something that is demanding is not the quick fix the virtue epistemologist might have hoped for. It leaves several serious problems on the table. A first problem, that I think doesn't get paid enough attention, has to do with how to make sense of the credit due to the other people in testimony cases. There is something untoward about invoking the notions of credit and achievement individualistically in a case of outsourcing. This is clear in the case of other instances of outsourcing, and there's no reason to think that there is a relevant difference in the case of testimony. If, again, you fire an arrow in my stead and it wins an archery contest, it would be a little cheeky of me to claim that we should share the prize, but it would be downright unjust of me to claim the prize as my own sole possession because it was I who skillfully picked out an archer to defer to who was capable of hitting the target. If we are to speak of knowledge as a kind of achievement, then it is very awkward to give the knower credit for

having a competence only indirectly related to the believed proposition while withholding credit from the one who has a competence that directly bears on that proposition. It is not clear, however, in what way one can honor the contribution of the testifier on an individualistic virtue epistemology.

Granted, in the testimony case, the testifier does not and cannot possess my true belief, but there is something unjust about giving normative heft and value to my skill at outsourcing while treating the superior skills of the testifier as mere background conditions for my success. For any other doxastic source, an analysis of knowledge in the given domain will take the following form: my skill + background conditions = true belief. The skills of the other person clearly are not identical to my skills, so they must be put into the other slot, that of background conditions. They are of no more epistemic significance than a sunny day is to perception. This is, at least, an exceedingly odd result for an epistemology that distinguishes itself by way of its grounding epistemic normativity in the information-processing skill of agents.

A second problem has to do with establishing exactly how much credit a recipient of testimony needs in order to count as knowing.[14] Clearly, the credit owed to an agent for obtaining a true belief shouldn't fall too low. If it does, Gettier problems ensue. Take a version of the well-known sheep case (Chisholm 1966). One looks out into a field, and one sees what appears to be a sheep in the distance. It is, in fact, a rock in the shape of a sheep. Based on seeing the sheep-shaped rock, one concludes that there is at least one sheep in the field. Unbeknownst to one, there is in fact a sheep in the field out of sight. One's true belief is not knowledge. Nonetheless, one's true belief has come about because of ability in some sense. After all, without perceptual ability, no belief would have been formed. One can even stipulate that it took a great deal of visual acuity to spot that rock and discern its shape. The virtue epistemologist, however, should say that the ability in question does not play a large enough role in explaining why the belief was true even if it plays some role in explaining why the belief was formed.[15]

If the standard for knowledge falls too low, one also puts in jeopardy many of the features that make virtue epistemology attractive in the first place. For instance, take virtue epistemology's account of the value of knowledge. One of the ways in which the inquiry into the value of knowledge is focused is by asking why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief.[16] Knowledge, for the virtue epistemologist, is valuable because it is an achievement, and we typically value achievements for their own sake. Mere true belief, by contrast, is not an achievement. If the standard for credit sinks too low, then one cheapens the value of knowledge as well by shrinking the distance between knowledge and mere true belief. We do not, after all, value trivial achievements, such as a soccer goal scored by an adult against children.

How much credit then is needed in order to have knowledge? Many have thought that where the virtue epistemologist should set the bar is at the level of primary credit (cf. the explication and critique of this view in Pritchard