Sosa, “Reliabilism and Intellectual Virtue”

Sosa holds a view known as virtuerepictivism. This view is a modification of Goldman’s process reliabilism—we can call it virtue reliabilism. Let’s see what this amounts to.

1. Reminder: Three Problems with Reliabilism
   i. The generality problem
   ii. The new evil-demon problem
   iii. The meta-incoherence problem (i.e., the clairvoyance problem)

Sosa claims that he can solve these problems by introducing the notion of an intellectual virtue.

2. Intellectual Virtue

An intellectual virtue is a faculty enabling one to “mostly attain the truth and avoid error in a certain field of propositions F, when in conditions C” (82). We can think of intellectual virtues as dispositions that, by and large, bring about true beliefs.

A belief has positive epistemic status if it is formed by virtuous faculties and not by vicious ones.

Subject S believes proposition P and time t out of intellectual virtue only if there is a field of propositions F and there are conditions C, such that
   a. P is in F;
   b. S is in C with respect to P; and
   c. S would most likely be right if S believed a proposition X in field F when in conditions C with respect to X.

Examples of intellectual virtues: vision, hearing, introspection, memory, logical intuition, deduction and deduction.

So far this sounds like a version of process reliabilism.

Sosa’s ‘fuller, more explicit’ story includes further restrictions on what counts as an intellectual virtue. In particular, something in the inner nature (I) of the subject has to mesh with the subject’s environment (E) to ground her reliability on the topic in question. Sosa also uses the notion of field F to specify the degree of determination we require of the subject (so knowing something is a horse might require that you tend to get it right where the field of options covers common farm animals, but not that you be ultra-precise when confronted with slight genetic mutations and interbred creatures) (83).

According to Sosa, things can go wrong at different points, either in the environment or in the subject.

According to Sosa, we have virtues relative to various environments.

(ECT) that if in E and in C relative to X in F, then S would most likely be right in his belief or disbelief of X.

Sosa argues that this provides a response to the new evil-demon problem. Your counterpart in the demon world counts as intellectually virtuous with respect to the actual world, even though Countie is not intellectually virtuous with respect to Countie’s own environment. Countie is ‘internally’ reliable—given a normal environment, Countie’s beliefs would be reliable. This explains why we feel the tug of internalism when we consider the new evil-demon hypothesis, and consider Countie’s beliefs justified. If Countie were in the actual world, Countie’s beliefs would, in general, be true.

Important: Sosa’s view remains a version of externalism because it is not a requirement that a subject be aware of the fact that she believes as a result of intellectual virtue.
3. Aptness and Justification; Animal Knowledge and Reflective Knowledge

**Aptness**: the positive epistemic status that a belief has when it is caused by an intellectual virtue. This epistemic status is externalist.

**Justification**: the positive epistemic status that a belief has when: (i) it is caused by an intellectual virtue (i.e., it is apt) and (ii) the subject attains a "coherent perspective on her own situation in the relevant environment, and on her modes of reliable access to information about that environment" (86). This epistemic status is internalist.

**Animal knowledge**: when an apt belief is true, it is a piece of animal knowledge. Animal knowledge is an externalist conception of knowledge—it does not require that a subject know, or even believe, that her beliefs are produced by an intellectual virtue.

**Reflective knowledge**: when a justified belief is true, (i.e., (i) and (ii) are satisfied plus the belief is true), it is a piece of reflective knowledge. Reflective knowledge is an internalist conception of knowledge—it requires that a subject know, or even believe, that her beliefs are produced by an intellectual virtue. (It is, in fact, a version of internalism known as coherentism. We’ll talk more about coherentism next week.)

According to Sosa, the distinction between aptness and justification (and between animal and reflective knowledge) helps us with the meta-coherence problem. Our clairvoyant’s belief constitutes animal knowledge; it does not, however, constitute reflective knowledge.