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Abstract Ernest Sosa draws a distinction between animal knowledge and reflective knowledge, and this distinction forms the centerpiece of his new book, *A Virtue Epistemology*. This paper argues that the distinction cannot do the work which Sosa assigns to it.

Keywords Sosa · Animal knowledge · Reflective knowledge

Ernest Sosa's new book, *A Virtue Epistemology*,¹ is overflowing with interesting ideas. It would take more than the few hours of this symposium to discuss them all. In my contribution to the symposium, I will focus on one central distinction in Sosa's work: the distinction between animal knowledge and reflective knowledge. This distinction has played an increasingly prominent role in Sosa's work over the last two decades. I will argue that the distinction cannot do the work that Sosa wants it to do.

Before turning to Sosa's account in *A Virtue Epistemology*, let me just briefly discuss the way in which Sosa drew this key distinction in earlier work. In "Knowledge and Intellectual Virtue," Sosa drew the distinction as follows:

One has *animal knowledge* about one's environment, one's past, and one's own experience if one's judgments and beliefs about these are direct responses to their impact—e.g., through perception or memory—with little or no benefit of reflection or understanding.

¹ Sosa (2007).

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One has *reflective knowledge* if one's judgment or belief manifests not only such direct response to the fact known but also understanding of its place in a wider whole that includes one's belief and knowledge of it and how these come about.²

In drawing this distinction, and in emphasizing the importance of both animal and reflective knowledge, Sosa presented an account of knowledge which sought to accommodate the insights of both externalist and internalist epistemologies. The debate between externalists and internalists, which began in earnest in the nineteen eighties, seemed to present a stark choice about how knowledge is to be understood. Sosa, however, saw an important insight in each of these views, and sought to incorporate them both into his virtue epistemology. Roughly, animal knowledge, as characterized above, was a kind of externalist knowledge; reflective knowledge, on the other hand, was a kind of knowledge requiring the sorts of features emphasized by internalists. In emphasizing the importance of both sorts of knowledge, Sosa sought to provide a welcome resolution to the debate between externalism and internalism.

It is thus no surprise that we find the notions of animal and reflective knowledge playing a central role in Sosa's new book, but the characterization of these notions, and especially of the notion of reflective knowledge, has changed dramatically.

Sosa now presents the "core idea" of his virtue epistemology as follows:

- (a) affirm that knowledge entails belief;
- (b) understand "animal" knowledge as requiring apt belief *without* requiring *defensibly* apt belief, i.e. apt belief that the subject aptly believes to be apt, and whose aptness the subject can therefore defend against relevant skeptical doubts; and
- (c) understand "reflective" knowledge as requiring not only apt belief but *also* defensibly apt belief (p. 24).

This distinction between animal and reflective knowledge is absolutely central to his virtue epistemology, as Sosa himself points out. So let us examine it in some detail.

Animal knowledge is apt belief, but as the passage above indicates, it does not require defensibly apt belief. A subject's beliefs may be apt without that individual having any views about whether his beliefs are apt, and, indeed, without even being in a position to form such views. Remember, for example, Laurence Bonjour's famous Norman case.³ Norman is actually clairvoyant. He has a reliable capacity to form beliefs about the future, and on some particular occasion he forms a true belief about the President's future whereabouts as a result of the exercise of that capacity. In a word, his belief is apt. But Norman is in no position to reflectively defend his belief. He does not have evidence of having a reliable clairvoyant capacity, and he has no beliefs at all about whether he has such a capacity, nor does he have any

² This paper was originally published in 1985. It is reprinted in Sosa (1991, p. 240). A similar characterization is found in Sosa (1997).

³ Bonjour (1985, Chap. 3).

other beliefs, or evidence, about the source, or the reliability, of his belief about the President's future whereabouts. So Norman has animal knowledge about the President's whereabouts, but he does not have reflective knowledge.

Now let us look back at Sosa's characterization of animal knowledge: Sosa says it requires "apt belief *without* [emphasis in original] requiring *defensibly* [emphasis in original] apt belief, i.e., apt belief that the subject aptly believes to be apt, and whose aptness the subject can *therefore* [emphasis added] defend against relevant skeptical doubts." So Sosa suggests that when someone aptly believes a belief of his to be apt, he is therefore in a position to defend it. Now we've just seen that in the BonJour case, a subject has a first-order belief which is apt and yet the subject is in no position to defend it. The same, it seems, should be possible with second-order beliefs. One might have a second-order belief which is itself aptly formed, without being in a position to defend it. And if one had such a second-order belief, it would provide one with little by way of defense for the first-order belief which is its object. Thus, just as Norman's belief about the President's whereabouts is apt, but, when asked to defend it, he has nothing to offer—"I just believe he'll be in New York," Norman might say—we can imagine a souped up Norman—we may call him Aptly Apt Norman—who not only has an apt belief about the President's whereabouts, but has an apt belief that his belief about the President's whereabouts is apt, without, however, being in any position to defend that aptly apt belief. "I just believe my belief about the President's whereabouts is apt," he'll say. Norman is in no position to defend either his second-order belief or his first-order belief, though each is apt. So we cannot legitimately make the move from "aptly believed to be apt" to "defensible."

Now one might point out that when Aptly Apt Norman says that his first-order belief is apt, he is not only saying something which is true, and known to be true; he is also saying something which entails the truth of his first-order belief. And one might think that this therefore counts as some sort of defense. It is not, to be sure, a terribly elaborate defense. Nonetheless, one might claim, in at least some minimal sense, it does constitute a defense of the first-order belief.

If the bare assertion by Aptly Apt Norman that his first-order belief is apt is to count as a defense of that belief on these grounds, however, then we must also allow that when BonJour's Norman merely states his first-order belief, that too counts as a defense. Note, after all, that BonJour's Norman has an apt first-order belief, and that belief, in virtue of being apt, is true and known by him to be true. So when he simply states his first-order belief, what he states is both known and entails the truth of the first-order belief. And in this respect, it is exactly like the "defense" which Aptly Apt Norman may offer.

But surely this is no defense at all of the belief, if the term "defense" is to have any epistemological bite. So I will insist, from now on, that apt belief aptly noted, just like apt belief, need bring with it no guarantee of any meaningful sort of defense.⁴

But there is more to it than this. In the above passage, Sosa actually goes still further. Sosa not only makes the move from "aptly believed to be apt" to "defensible"; he moves from "aptly believed to be apt" to "defensible against

⁴ I owe the discussion of the last three paragraphs to a conversation with Ed Gettier.

relevant skeptical doubt.” This, of course, requires a good deal more. One might be in a position to defend one of one’s first-order beliefs without being in a position to defend it against skeptical doubts. And if we should not move from “apt belief aptly noted” to “defensible,” then we certainly should not move from “apt belief aptly noted” to “defensible against relevant skeptical doubts.”

This will prove to be important, for this transition is one which is central to Sosa’s view. While in the above passage, Sosa indicates that reflective knowledge requires defensibly apt belief, elsewhere, in commenting on the distinction between animal and reflective knowledge, he remarks, “The key component of the distinction is the difference between apt belief *simpliciter*, and apt belief aptly noted.” (p. 32) So here the defining feature of reflective knowledge is that it has the property of being apt belief aptly noted,⁵ and its being defensible against skeptical challenge is thought to flow from that property. But as we’ve seen, apt belief aptly noted need bring with it no defensibility of any kind.

Thus, although the notion of reflective knowledge in Sosa’s earlier work seemed to provide a kind of knowledge which incorporated certain internalist ideas, Sosa’s new conception of reflective knowledge, namely apt belief aptly noted, has little to do with internalism. Reflective knowledge, on this new conception, is really just animal knowledge twice over: it is animal knowledge of some particular fact, together with animal knowledge that one has such animal knowledge. And this is nothing like Sosa’s earlier idea that reflective knowledge should include, not only animal knowledge, “but also understanding of its place in a wider whole that includes one’s belief and knowledge of it and how these come about.”

How does Sosa put this distinction to work? Sosa’s ultimate goal is to provide a defense of the claim that we may have perceptual knowledge even in the face of the dream problem. And Sosa is not content to suggest that we may have mere animal knowledge in these cases; he wants to show that, even in the face of the dream problem, we may have reflective knowledge of the physical world. But we will need to get to this conclusion by first considering a less threatening case.

So let us consider Sosa’s example of the jokester and the kaleidoscope perceiver. Imagine that Lucky Jim is looking at a red surface in normal lighting and comes to believe, on the basis of the exercise of his reliable perceptual faculties, that there is a red surface in front of him. So far, this sounds like a straightforward case of perceptual knowledge. But in Sosa’s example, there is a jokester afoot. The jokester controls both the lighting in the room and the color of the surface. The surface, it seems, is much like a kaleidoscope: at the whim of the jokester, it can be changed from one color to another, to another. The jokester is constantly changing both the lighting and the color of the surface, and he can do this in ways that go undetected: sometimes he presents the red surface in normal light, but at other times he presents a white surface under lighting that makes it look red. Had Lucky Jim been looking at the surface a moment earlier or a moment later, he would have still formed the belief that the surface is red, but the belief would have been false.

⁵ The identification is made again on p. 34: “It helps to distinguish between animal and reflective knowledge, between apt belief *simpliciter*, and apt belief aptly noted.” It is made again on p. 113: “There is also a higher level of knowledge—reflective knowledge, apt belief aptly noted...” See also pp. 43 and 98.

What are we to say about examples of this sort? We should note that this example is just a variation on the much-discussed fake barn example.⁶ Most epistemologists have held that the subject in these kinds of cases does not have knowledge. Sosa, however, wishes to split the difference here: he argues that Lucky Jim does have animal knowledge, although he lacks reflective knowledge (pp. 32, 109). Why should this be?

Sosa argues that Lucky Jim has animal knowledge that the surface is red because his true belief is the product of an underlying competence (due to his reliable perceptual faculties) which is exercised in proper conditions (the good lighting), resulting in a true belief (pp. 33, 108). It is certainly true that Jim's belief might easily have been false, since the jokester might easily have changed the color of the surface in ways that would have gone undetected. But this kind of safety condition is no part of Sosa's account of apt belief, the condition required for animal knowledge. So even though Jim's belief might easily have been false—we don't call him Lucky Jim for nothing—on Sosa's view he counts as having animal knowledge.

Let me pause to remark on how counterintuitive this is. Remember that the jokester is constantly changing the color of the surface that Jim is looking at. Jim might just as easily have formed a belief that the surface is red when the surface was, in fact, white. His belief is a paradigm, it seems, of accidentally true belief. Indeed, the case might have been made worse still. Imagine that Jim walks into a building with a thousand rooms; he randomly walks into one of those and forms a perceptual judgment about the color of the walls in the room before leaving the building. As it turns out, the one room he walks into has normal lighting and ideal viewing conditions. Every other room in the building has lighting which would have misled Jim about the color of the walls he looked at. In this case, it is not just that Jim might just as easily have had a false belief. Here, Jim's belief was overwhelmingly lucky. Background conditions were such that in 999 out of a thousand cases, Jim would have formed a mistaken belief about the color of the walls. But on Sosa's account, he has animal knowledge nonetheless, since his true belief is the product of an underlying competence exercised in normal conditions. It seems to me, however, that this is no kind of knowledge at all.

Let us continue, however, to follow Sosa. If Jim has animal knowledge in this case, why doesn't he also have reflective knowledge? Jim believes that the surface is red, and he also believes that he knows that the surface is red; that is, he believes that he has animal knowledge that the surface is red. This latter belief is certainly true, and Jim has arrived at this belief in the way in which he normally arrives at beliefs about whether he has knowledge. Let us suppose that Jim's judgment about when he does in fact know is actually quite good: Jim is not only a reliable judge of the color of objects in his environment; he is also a reliable judge of when he has (animal) knowledge of the color of objects in his environment. So if Jim's second-order belief that his belief about the color of the object in front of him is a case of

⁶ This was originally introduced by Alvin Goldman—the example was suggested to him by Carl Ginet—in "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge," originally published in 1976 and reprinted in Goldman (1992, pp. 85–103). Sosa notes the similarity between these examples in note 1 on p. 96.

animal knowledge is itself the product of an underlying competence (as it seems to be), doesn't this mean that Sosa must hold that Jim has reflective knowledge here too?

Here is what Sosa says:

If [Lucky Jim's] meta-competence is to yield knowledge... it must *not* be excessively liable to yield a falsehood when exercised in its appropriate conditions. Given the jokester, however, this requirement is not met, since too easily then might the perceiver have been misled in trusting the conditions to be appropriate in that default way. The kaleidoscope perceiver has animal knowledge but lacks reflective knowledge. He has apt belief *simpliciter*, but lacks apt belief aptly presumed to be apt. (p. 109)

But why should we say that Lucky Jim's meta-competence, his faculty of making judgments about when he has knowledge, is "excessively liable to yield a falsehood when exercised in its appropriate conditions"? Sosa says that "too easily ... might the perceiver have been misled in trusting the conditions" given the presence of the jokester. But if the presence of the jokester shows that the meta-judgment might too easily have been false, then surely the presence of the jokester also shows that the first-order judgment might too easily have been false. And this would have us say, as I think we should, that Lucky Jim has neither reflective knowledge nor animal knowledge. If on the other hand, we follow what Sosa says about the issue of animal knowledge, and say that the presence of the jokester does not show that in normal conditions the judgment reached might easily have been false (since, presumably, it is not normal to have a jokester around), then it seems that we should say the very same thing about Lucky Jim's use of his reasoning capacities to decide whether he has animal knowledge: his belief that his first-order belief was aptly formed was itself aptly formed, precisely because it was exercised in conditions that were normal (namely, ones which have not been tampered with by the jokester). And if we say this, then we have to say that Lucky Jim has both animal knowledge and reflective knowledge. What I don't see is how we can say that Jim has animal knowledge but not reflective knowledge. Either the presence of the jokester makes conditions abnormal—in which case he has neither sort of knowledge—or they don't—in which case he has both.

Sosa does say one more thing about this case. Consider the difference between Lucky Jim and an ordinary perceiver, that is, someone looking at a red object in good lighting when there are no jokesters anywhere to be found. Sosa wants to say that Lucky Jim has animal knowledge but not reflective knowledge, while the ordinary perceiver has both. Why is this?

...the kaleidoscope perceiver and the ordinary perceiver are still dramatically different epistemically. They differ in whether they can know their respective conditions to be appropriately normal for the exercise of their perceptual competence. (p. 105)

Let us suppose, for the moment, that Sosa is right and that these two individuals do differ in this respect. Even if this were so, it is hard to see how this bears on the issue of whether Lucky Jim has reflective knowledge. Remember that, on Sosa's view,

Lucky Jim does have animal knowledge. So his belief that the surface before him is red is apt, on Sosa's view. In order to have reflective knowledge, then, all he needs in addition is that his meta-belief, his belief that the first order belief is aptly formed, should itself be aptly formed. But this belief might well be aptly formed even in the absence of any propositional knowledge about the normal conditions for the proper exercise of his perceptual judgment. Remember, once again, BonJour's Norman. He has an apt belief that the President will be in New York tomorrow even though he has no knowledge about his clairvoyant powers. One can have apt belief in the absence of any knowledge about the way in which one's beliefs are formed or the conditions in which one's intellectual competences are exercised. And if this is true about first-order belief, it is surely true about second-order belief as well. So even if we grant that Lucky Jim is in no position to know certain things about his environment which the ordinary perceiver in fact knows, this does nothing to undermine the claim that Lucky Jim has reflective knowledge.

Let us move on. Sosa's goal here is to show that the ordinary perceiver is in a superior position to Lucky Jim. In particular, Sosa wishes to show that, despite the kind of worry about dreaming which Descartes raised in the *First Meditation*, our susceptibility to false belief⁷ during dreams does not undermine the possibility of reflective knowledge in the way that the presence of jokester does for Lucky Jim. So let us suppose that the presence of the jokester does, as Sosa argues, undermine Lucky Jim's ability to have reflective knowledge even though he doesn't undermine Jim's ability to have animal knowledge. Why doesn't the occurrence of dreams undermine the possibility of reflective knowledge for ordinary perceivers in exactly the same way that the existence of the jokester does for Lucky Jim?

This problem is especially pressing for Sosa because he rightly emphasizes that the dream problem presents a far more disturbing form of skepticism than does, for example, the problem of the evil demon. While Descartes' evil demon is certainly a logical possibility, there are in fact no evil demons about, and worlds which contain them are very dissimilar to the one we inhabit. Accounts of knowledge which require no more than apt belief need not worry about such remote possibilities.⁸ A world in which we dream, however, is not remote; indeed, the actual world is such a world. And on the orthodox conception of dreams, we form beliefs about the world around us while dreaming, beliefs which, in the typical case, are simply false. But now it seems that the fact that we dream so frequently, and are, in dreams, so frequently deceived, shows that our epistemic situation when awake is exactly like that of Lucky Jim: we are fortunate enough to be having accurate perceptual beliefs by way of reliable processes acting in suitable environments, at least some of the

⁷ I am assuming here what Sosa calls "the orthodox conception" of dreaming. In chapter one of *A Virtue Epistemology*, Sosa offers an alternative to the orthodox conception, arguing that when one dreams that, for example, one is rushing across campus in order to take an exam, one does not actually form the belief that one is rushing across campus in order to take an exam. In Sosa's discussion following chapter one, however, the orthodox conception is taken for granted.

⁸ Such a response will not satisfy epistemologists attracted to internalism, but Sosa's notion of animal knowledge, quite clearly, does not present an internalist conception of knowledge. The point here is that, even for externalists, who may dismiss the evil demon out of hand, the problem of dreaming is not so easily dismissed.

time, but we might just as easily have been forming false beliefs (in dreams). Whatever is true about Lucky Jim's epistemic situation, it seems, is true of our own. And if Sosa says that Lucky Jim can have animal knowledge but not reflective knowledge, then it seems he has to say the same of us.

What is Sosa's solution to this problem? Sosa suggests that there are two important differences between Lucky Jim and ordinary perceivers (p. 111). First, Lucky Jim has exactly the same experience when he is forming accurate beliefs by way of perception that he does when the jokester is fooling him; there are no features of his experience which distinguish these two situations. But Sosa holds that this is not true in the dreaming case. And second, Lucky Jim uses the very same faculties to form beliefs when he is perceiving accurately and when he is misperceiving, and these faculties are operating in a way which is unimpaired in both cases. But, Sosa argues, this is not true in the dreaming case either. Let us look at each of these claims.

It is certainly true that the dreaming problem is often presented in a way which simply assumes that the experience one has while dreaming is in no way different, phenomenally, than waking experience. But following suggestions of Austin and Descartes, Sosa suggests that this may not be so (pp. 38, 111). It is certainly true that we may not notice these phenomenal differences while dreaming; we notice them only retrospectively. But this is not to say, of course, that these differences do not exist. And if this is correct, then this is an important difference between the case of Lucky Jim and the case of the ordinary perceiver. Even retrospectively, after Jim has been informed that he was being fooled by the trickster, he will not notice any phenomenal difference between veridical perception and the cases in which he is fooled. He will not notice such differences, even retrospectively, because there are none.

Second, Sosa holds that "when asleep we would not be using unimpaired the same relevant faculties that we use when we perceive our environment when awake." (p. 111) When awake, our perceptual faculties are engaged, but, quite clearly, they are not engaged while we are asleep. This too is unlike Lucky Jim, whose beliefs are formed by the very same faculties in the very same ways both in the veridical case and in the deceptive case. So here too we have a respect in which the cases differ.

These differences, Sosa argues, allow us to say that the ordinary perceiver has not only animal knowledge about the physical world, but reflective knowledge as well, while Lucky Jim has nothing but animal knowledge. And we are thus, as he sees it, in a position to respond to the skeptic.

I want to skip over the details here involved in seeing how the differences highlighted help to make this case because I believe that there is something deeper at issue.

As Sosa notes, "the skeptic restricts us to bases for belief that are purely internal and psychological, by contrast with those that are external." (p. 27) In order to provide a response to the skeptic on his own terms, Sosa grants this restriction for the sake of argument (p. 27). More than that, as Sosa also notes, any attempt to respond to the skeptic by showing that some sort of externalist condition on knowledge is met, such as showing that we often have animal knowledge,

“is superficial.” (p. 116, n. 2) It is all too easy to show that we meet externalist conditions for knowledge. This merely ignores, rather than addresses, the traditional skeptical problematic.

All of this may well be so. But if it is, then Sosa’s response is superficial as well. Not only animal knowledge, but reflective knowledge, as Sosa defines it now, is an externalist notion. If apt belief is an externalist notion, as it surely is, then apt belief aptly noted is an externalist notion as well. Sosa’s earlier conception of reflective knowledge—quoted at the beginning of this paper—certainly has an internalist dimension to it. But his current conception of reflective knowledge is externalist through and through: it is just animal knowledge twice over.

When Sosa notes that “the skeptic restricts us to bases for belief that are purely internal and psychological, by contrast with those that are external,” one might think that his solution to the skeptical problem falls squarely within this restriction since he appeals to phenomenal features of our experience and features of the faculties by way of which we arrive at our beliefs, both of which are clearly “internal and psychological”. But the skeptical restriction is not merely to features which are internal and psychological. The early stages of perceptual processing and the early stages of speech perception, for example, are internal and psychological, but they are inaccessible to introspection, and thus, from the skeptic’s perspective, they can be no more relevant to epistemic evaluation than can states of the physical world. Because these states are not ones to which we have direct cognitive access, they cannot feature in a reply to the skeptic which accepts the terms in which the skeptical challenge is issued. By the same token, once we allow, as Sosa does, that our phenomenal experience may have features which we fail to notice, and which may only be noticed retrospectively, these features too may play no role in a reply to the skeptic. And the same is true of features of the processes by way of which we arrive at our belief, when those features are inaccessible to introspection. This amounts to an externalist reply to the skeptic, but Sosa promised to deliver us more.

I don’t believe, in the end, that we should be setting out to reply to the skeptic in his own terms. I don’t think we can do this, but neither do I believe that this shows some defect or shortcoming in human knowledge. Rather, I believe that the traditional skeptical challenge itself presupposes certain mistaken views about the nature of knowledge. But this is not the place to argue for that conclusion. Sosa is trying to respond to the skeptic on the skeptic’s own terms, and I have argued that he has not succeeded. More than this, I have argued that the distinction Sosa brings to bear on the problem—the distinction between apt belief and apt belief aptly noted—could not possibly serve to respond to the skeptic on the skeptic’s terms.

Let me conclude on a more positive note. As I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, this book is filled with interesting ideas on a wide range of fundamental problems in epistemology. We will all be occupied for some time to come in working through these issues, and we will have Ernest Sosa to thank for his challenging and provocative contributions.

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