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# Extended Cognition and Robust Virtue Epistemology: Response to Vaesen

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## Abstract

In a recent exchange, Vaesen [2011, Forthcoming] and I [2013a] have argued over whether cases of extended cognition pose (part of) a problem for robust virtue epistemology. This paper responds to Vaesen's most recent [i.e. Forthcoming] contribution to this exchange. I argue that Vaesen latest argument against the kind of virtue epistemology I favour fails.

In his [2011] Synthese paper, Krist Vaesen argues that certain cases of weakly extended cognition (WEC) constitute a problem for robust virtue epistemology (RVE). Cases of WEC are cases in which cognition relies heavily on external resources such as thermometers, watches and the like [Vaesen 2011, 521]. RVE is the view that knowledge is a kind of cognitive success (typically: true belief) due to ability or competence. According to the version of RVE Vaesen addresses, 'due to' is unpacked in terms of causal salience: cognitive success is due to competence if and only if competence is "the most salient part of the total set of causal factors that give rise to [one's] believing the truth that  $p$ " [Vaesen 2011, 518].

In Vaesen's WEC case ('SISSICASE'), the protagonist, Sissi, comes to know that there is a bomb in a suitcase via the use of a novel type of baggage scanner that allows operators to remain alert for longer periods of time. Vaesen construes the case in such a way that had Sissi been working with the old type of scanner, she would now not be concentrated and hence would have formed a false belief instead. In this situation, what's most salient in the explanation of Sissi's cognitive success is not Sissi's cognitive competence, but the fact that she is working with upgraded technology. Thus, Sissi knows even though her cognitive success is not due to her cognitive competence [Vaesen 2011, §4].

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In a response to Vaesen [Kelp 2013a], I argue that SISSICASE case does not pose a new problem for RVE. Rather, it instantiates the familiar problem for RVE that salience is context-sensitive in a way in which attributions of knowledge appear not to be, which can be generated with the help of non-WEC cases just as well. In that paper, I offer a non-WEC version of SISSICASE. However, Lackey [2007, 2009] and Pritchard [e.g. 2008] latched onto this problem a while ago. It's just that they developed it by means of cases of testimonial knowledge. Of course, even if Vaesen's WEC case is not new, the question remains whether RVE can deal with it. In the last section of my paper, I briefly review a couple of options on behalf of RVE, one for causal salience versions of RVE [e.g. Greco 2003, 2010], the other for competence manifestation versions of RVE [e.g. Sosa 2007, 2010, 2011 and Kelp 2011, 2013b, Forthcoming].

Now Vaesen has offered a rejoinder to my paper. He claims that I am missing a core point of his argument, *viz.* that it does not aim to refute RVE by counterexample but to present its champions with a dilemma concerning how to interpret RVE's crucial 'due to': either they give 'due to' a strong interpretation or a weak one. In the former case, RVE may get Gettier cases right but will fail to accommodate the intuition of knowledge in SISSICASE. In the latter case, RVE may get SISSICASE right but will fail to accommodate the intuition of ignorance in Gettier cases. Vaesen goes on to argue that the account of SISSICASE I outline on behalf of competence manifestation versions of RVE succumbs to this dilemma [Vaesen Forthcoming, §2].

While I do not share Vaesen's assessment that I missed something important about his argument, I am now convinced that it is best not to delve into this issue here. What I am willing to concede to Vaesen is that I did not address the dilemma explicitly and that I may not have been as clear on my preferred account of competence manifestation as I could have been. For that reason, in what follows, I will catch up on both of these counts and argue that RVE can escape Vaesen's dilemma.

Let me begin by saying a few words about how I understand competences and competence manifestation. Following Sosa, I will assume that competences are dispositions to perform well. More specifically, three elements of competences can be discerned: constitutional (= CO), inner (= IN) and situational (= SI). In the case of archery competence, the constitutional element includes the seat of the disposition within the agent, the inner being awake and sober, and the situational there being enough light and normal winds [Sosa 2010, 465].

Crucially, a success manifests competence only if the competence's IN and SI actually obtain [Sosa 2010, 470]. When an archer's shot is blown off target by a gust of wind, the competence's SI are not satisfied. As a result, his shot won't qualify as a success that manifests competence, not even if it does

after all hit the target, say because a second gust of wind brings it back on target. The same is true of the cognitive competences required for knowing. This serves to explain why beliefs of agents in standard Gettier cases do not qualify as knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Here, too, the belief is brought off target, as it were, e.g. by the agent's looking at a non-sheep that looks just like a sheep, at footprints that are not the murderer's, etc. The relevant SI for the cognitive competences are not in place. For that reason, the belief does not count as true because competent even when, as in any proper Gettier case, it turns out to be true after all.

It is now fairly straightforward to show that this account of Gettier cases is compatible with the account of SISSICASE I suggested in the earlier paper. To see this, notice that competences' SI may (and often do) involve suitable equipment. Most archers have the competence to hit the target only with sufficiently well crafted bows and arrows. They tend not to have the competence to hit the target when the arrow-tips are fitted with heavy weights. What's more, the quality of one's equipment may affect the time during which IN continue to be satisfied. When a set of bow and arrows, *BA*, are so heavy that after fifteen minutes of continued use even the strongest archers are fatigued to the point of insufficient reliability, even skilled archers only have the competence to hit the target with *BA* for at most some fifteen minutes. In contrast, a lighter set of bow and arrows, *BA\**, may allow even weaker archers to maintain IN for a longer period of time. Many skilled archers, even weaker ones, may have the competence to hit the target with *BA\** for hours on end. The same holds for Sissi's competence in Vaesen's case. Sissi has the competence to detect bombs with the old scanner for a limited period of time. After that period of time, the quality of the equipment causes Sissi's concentration ( $\in$  IN) to be degraded to the point of insufficient reliability. At the same time, she has the competence to detect bombs with the new scanner for a much longer period of time. The improved quality of the equipment allows Sissi to retain the IN relative to which she has the competence to detect bombs over this longer period of time. In SISSICASE, when, with the help of the new scanner, Sissi forms the true belief that the suitcase contains a bomb, the relevant IN (concentration, etc.) and SI (new scanner, etc.) of her competence to detect bombs are in place. Hence, by the above account, her cognitive success may manifest this competence.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Standard* Gettier cases are Gettier cases involving what Pritchard [2009, 591] calls 'intervening luck', such as the sheep case Vaesen also discusses. Notice that the present account does not claim to deal with *non-standard* Gettier cases, i.e. Gettier cases involving what Pritchard [2009, 591] calls 'environmental luck', such as the fake barn case. Notice, however, that Sosa [2010] offers one account of these cases and, in [Kelp 2011, 2013b, Forthcoming], I consider three alternatives that are compatible with the present account of competence manifestation.

<sup>2</sup> Note that it is compatible with this Sissi's cognitive competence is not what's most

It thus comes to light that in SISSICASE but not in Gettier cases the relevant cognitive competence's SI are satisfied. Since competence manifestation requires that SI be in place, Sissi's success may manifest competence, while Gettiered agents' successes won't. Competence manifestation versions of RVE can thus escape Vaesen's dilemma.<sup>3</sup>

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salient in the causal explanation of her cognitive success. In fact, this is plausibly what happens in SISSICASE: the case is set up in such a way that causal salience lies with the upgraded technology, not with her competence. This is how competence manifestation and causal salience differ (as Sosa already notes in his earlier work [Sosa 2007, 86-7]).

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of the dilemma, including an argument that the above account of competence manifestation can accommodate Pritchard and Lackey's cases of testimonial knowledge, see [Kelp 2011, 2013b].

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