

# Virtue Epistemology and Testimonial Knowledge\*†

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According to virtue epistemology, knowledge is a special kind of performance that a subject achieves through her cognitive capacity or virtue. On this view, what differentiates knowledge from beliefs that merely happen to be true is that the former mainly comes from the subject's intellectual virtues, so that it is the subject herself who deserves credit for true beliefs. But Jennifer Lackey claims that testimonial knowledge raises a problem against virtue epistemology, because in the case of testimonial knowledge, it is not the subject, but the person who gives testimony, who deserves credit. In this paper, I defend virtue epistemology against Lackey's objections. The main idea is that even in the case of testimonial knowledge, the subject's virtue is the most salient part of the causal explanation of the acquisition of the knowledge, when the normal condition of sincerity is presupposed.

**Subject** Epistemology

**Key words** Virtue epistemology, Testimonial knowledge, Sincerity

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## 1. Introduction

According to virtue epistemology, knowledge is a special kind of performance that a subject achieves through her own cognitive capacity, competence, or virtue. On this view, what differentiates knowledge from beliefs that merely happen to be true is that the former mainly comes from her intellectual competence, so that it is the subject herself who *deserves credit* for the true beliefs. Thus, according to virtue epistemology, a subject's deserving credit for her belief is a crucial factor in knowledge.

Intuitively, this looks like a reasonable condition on knowledge. As we all know, a main lesson we should learn from the Gettier problem (Gettier 1963) is that beliefs that happen to be true *by accident* or *luck* should not count as knowledge. The requirement that it be the subject, not any other condition external to the subject, who deserves credit, seems to be a promising way to characterize this point positively, although the details have to be filled in.

However, Jennifer Lackey, in her paper, "Why We Don't Deserve Credit for Everything We Know" (Lackey 2007), argues against the core idea of virtue epistemology. According to her, there is an important class of knowledge that virtue epistemology cannot handle properly. She claims that in the case of *testimonial* knowledge, a subject knows something while it is not the subject, but someone who gives her the testimony, who deserves credit. Lackey eventually concludes that "deserving credit cannot ... be what distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief since knowledge is not something for which a subject always deserves credit" (2007, 346). Considering the extent and importance of testimonial knowledge in our epistemic life, this, if successful, would be a

devastating objection to virtue epistemology.

In this paper, I will defend virtue epistemology against Lackey's objection. I think that once the notions of an intellectual virtue and deserving credits are properly understood, the testimonial knowledge can be adequately dealt with in the virtue epistemology framework. What I find promising is John Greco's account in his papers (Greco 1993; 2003). He analyzes credit attribution in terms of *causal explanation*. According to him, one deserves credit for acquiring a true belief only if his or her cognitive faculty is a *salient part* of the causal explanation of the acquisition of the belief. And he concludes, "Our intuition about knowledge seems to follow our intuitions about causal explanation" (Greco 2003, 132). I will argue that this approach, once properly developed, can save virtue epistemology from Lackey's seemingly devastating objection.

Here is the plan for what follows. In Section 2, I try to formulate virtue epistemology in a more precise way, mainly drawing on Greco. In Section 3, I introduce Lackey's supposed counterexample. In Section 4, I examine Lackey's arguments in details, and draw lessons from this examination. In Section 5, I develop these lessons further, and argue that a reasonable version of virtue epistemology can deal with testimonial knowledge in a systematic way. The main thrust of the argument is that causal explanation, and credit attribution based on this, are always *context-dependent*. I close the paper with briefly considering where virtue epistemology stands in the debate between internalism and externalism in epistemology.

## 2. Virtue Epistemology

The basic idea of virtue epistemology is that true beliefs become knowledge when they are *achieved through an intellectual virtue or ability*. To see whether a given true belief qualifies as knowledge, we ask whether it is achieved through the subject's intellectual virtue or ability, instead of asking what method a subject uses to acquire the belief (as in reliabilism), or how it is related to other beliefs that the subject possesses (as in evidentialism). Since the virtue or ability involved can be taken to be properly *his own*, it is the subject himself who *deserves credit*. Virtue epistemology is also assumed to provide a good explanation of why knowledge is more valuable than mere true beliefs in terms of this feature; it is because knowledge is the subject's own achievement that it is more valuable than true beliefs that merely happen to be true.<sup>1)</sup>

All this sounds intuitively plausible. But to make the idea precise, we need to clarify the two notions involved in it. First of all, there is the notion of *intellectual virtue or ability*. Second, there is the idea that true beliefs are *achieved through* a virtue or ability. Let us consider these two notions in turn.

It is clear that what virtue epistemologists mean by an intellectual virtue must be something in virtue of which the subject herself deserves credit; that is, it has to be something that can be properly regarded as *her own*. Greco characterizes a virtue in general, and an intellectual virtue in particular, in the following way:

“A virtue is a stable and successful disposition: an innate ability or an

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1) Prominent virtue epistemologists include Greco (1993), Sosa (1991) and Zagzebski (1996).

acquired habit, that allows one to reliably achieve some good. An intellectual virtue will then be a cognitive excellence: an innate ability or acquired habit that allows one to reliably achieve some intellectual good, such as truth in a relevant matter.” (Greco 1993, 3)

It may be controversial that this gives an adequate *analysis* of the notion of a (intellectual) virtue. But I think it gives important necessary conditions for something to be a virtue. A virtue has to be a *disposition*; for it will reveal itself only under certain conditions. It has to be *stable*; a virtue is something in virtue of which a *person* deserves credit, and it is not clear whether unstable dispositions can do this. And it has to be a *successful* disposition; if not, it will be a vice rather than a virtue. In the case of an intellectual virtue, a successful disposition will be a disposition that reliably yields true beliefs in ordinary conditions.

As our main concern in this paper is with testimonial knowledge, we need to stop to see what kind of virtue is involved in *testimonial* knowledge. This is particularly important because under a certain understanding of the notion of virtue, forming true beliefs from testimony may seem to involve no major intellectual virtue (except, of course, auditory faculty, linguistic competence, and so on). Indeed, Lackey seems to have such a concern, when she says, “there isn’t a *specific testimonial faculty* to which we can turn to shoulder the explanatory burden of why the subject holds the true belief in question” (Lackey 2007, 356). Here what Lackey means by “faculty” seems to be something like a cognitive mechanism comparable to, say, our *perceptual* mechanism. If this is what she means, it may be reasonable to think that there is no specific faculty devoted to testimonial belief formation. (It will be an empirical question whether there is such a mechanism). If Lackey were right on this, then detailed arguments against virtue epistemology would be unnecessary. For

virtue epistemology would fail to accommodate testimonial knowledge for a very simple reason: there would be no intellectual virtue involved in testimonial knowledge.<sup>2)</sup>

I don't want (and Lackey probably doesn't either) to make the whole issue trivial by limiting the notion of intellectual virtue to such a narrow sense. Fortunately, I think Greco's characterization of an intellectual virtue provides us with a way to understand the intellectual virtue involved in testimonial knowledge. The *practice* of forming belief upon hearing testimony is certainly a disposition that we have; it is either "an innate ability or an acquired habit." It will be also agreed that the disposition is pretty stable and successful.

Now let's turn to another important notion involved in virtue epistemology. What can it mean to say that knowledge is *achieved through* one's intellectual virtues? It is said that a true belief becomes knowledge when the subject "get things right *because* of her own abilities" (Greco 2003, 117), or when believing the truth "*reveals* her reliable cognitive character" (Greco 2003, 123). Following Greco, I think this notion is best seen as a *causal* notion. That is, the idea is that if a true belief is to qualify as knowledge, an intellectual virtue has to be a *cause* of the true belief. The task of clarifying this idea further faces two difficulties. First, it seems that *almost no* knowledge is caused by one's intellectual virtue *alone*. Second, even true beliefs that fall short of knowledge may involve some uses of one's intellectual virtue as a causal

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2) There is a related debate on *reductionism* about testimonial knowledge. According to reductionists, there is no special category of testimonial knowledge, and it is just knowledge based on perception, memory, and inference. If non-reductionism is true, then testimonial knowledge will not raise a special concern for virtue epistemology. So I will assume (perhaps with other participants of the debate) non-reductionism about testimonial knowledge. On reductionism and non-reductionism about testimonial knowledge, see Lackey (2010).

link. Let us consider these two points in detail.

About the first point. Most of us agree that there is some truth in “the causal theory of knowledge.”<sup>3)</sup> That a belief is causally connected to the fact believed in an appropriate way seems to be at least a necessary condition for knowledge. If this is right, then all knowledge about external facts will involve some causal connections that reach *up to* the facts. Were it not for the connections, there would be no knowledge. Hence, it cannot be the subject’s virtues *alone* that contribute to his acquiring knowledge. About the second point. Suppose that I believe that *p*, but that belief doesn’t quite qualify as knowledge. Still, it can happen that I got that belief partly through a successful use of my cognitive faculty. For example, I saw Mary in the library on Monday, and came to (truly) believe that Mary was in the library. But then due to a memory failure, on Tuesday, I come to believe that Jane was in the library on Monday, which happens to be true by coincidence. A full causal history of my true belief on Tuesday certainly involves a successful exercise of an intellectual virtue, that is, the perceptual faculty (although that was cancelled out by a misuse of another intellectual virtue, that is, the memory faculty). But we wouldn’t take this to be an instance of knowledge.

What we learn from these considerations is this: A virtue needs to be only a *part* of a causal process leading up to the acquisition of a true belief, but it is not that whenever a virtue is a part of the causal process, the resulting true belief counts as knowledge. So a virtue’s being a part of the causal process is a *necessary*, but not a *sufficient* condition for knowledge. Greco suggests the following:

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3) Cf. Goldman (1967).

“S’s reliable cognitive character is an *important* [or salient] *necessary part* of the total set of causal factors that give rise to S’s believing the truth regarding p.” (Greco 2003, 123, my emphases)

Lackey reformulates Greco’s criterion in the following way.

“S’s reliable cognitive character must be *the most salient part* of the cause explaining why S holds the true belief in question.” (Lackey, 2007, 348)

I will work with Lackey’s formulation of the criterion of credit attribution.<sup>4</sup> I think that it is the most promising line of analysis of credit attribution, although the notion of *salience* needs to be understood carefully. In fact, I will argue below that once this notion is properly understood, we can successfully handle Lackey’s objection to virtue epistemology.

### 3. Lackey’s Counterexample

Lackey claims that there is a class of counterexamples to virtue epistemology. She introduces a case where a person can be said to know something while the person doesn’t deserve credit, or the person’s intellectual virtue is not the most salient part of the causal explanation of

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4) The two formulations are not equivalent to each other. Some virtue epistemologists (in effect) try to meet Lackey’s objection (which we will consider shortly) by weakening the condition that the cognitive character involved should be the *most* salient part. As I understand them, Sosa (2007) and Greco (2007)’s responses to Lackey’s objection can be understood as taking such a line. In response, Lackey (2009; 2013) criticizes their view for not being able to deal with Gettier cases properly. I am inclined to agree with Lackey on this point. In any case, my response developed in Section 4 will take a different approach.



the true belief acquisition. Knowledge based on *testimony* is claimed to be such a case. Here is a case that Lackey mainly discusses:

“Having just arrived at the train station in Chicago, Morris wishes to obtain directions to the Sears Tower. He looks around, randomly approaches the first passerby that he sees, and asks how to get to his desired destination. The passerby, who happens to be a Chicago resident who knows the city extraordinarily well, provides Morris with impeccable directions to the Sears Tower by telling him that it is located two blocks east of the train station. Morris unhesitatingly forms the corresponding true belief.” (Lackey 2007, 352)

Lackey claims that in the case of testimonial knowledge, a subject’s reliable cognitive character is not the most salient part in the explanation of why she comes to have a true belief. In such a case, the salient credit has to be attributed not to the subject (hearer), but to the speaker, from whom the testimony originates. The subject’s cognitive capacity certainly plays *some* role in her acquiring a true belief, but this cannot be the *salient* factor of such an explanation. She says, “there seems to be no substantive sense in which Morris deserves credit for holding the true belief he does” (Lackey 2007, p. 352). Rather, the person who deserves credit is the one from whom Morris gains information. So Lackey claims that testimonial knowledge is a counterexample to virtue epistemology.

If Lackey’s claim is right, then this cannot be treated as a minor problem for virtue epistemology; for knowledge by testimony seems to constitute a significant portion of our knowledge.

#### 4. Examination of Lackey’s Arguments

Let us look more closely at Lackey’s grounds for claiming that “there

seems to be no substantive sense in which Morris deserves credit for holding the true belief that he does” (Lackey 2007, 352). Lackey says:

“[A]re Morris’s reliable cognitive faculties the most salient part of the cause explaining why he truly believes that the Sears Tower is two blocks east? Not at all. Indeed, what explains why Morris got things right has nearly nothing of epistemic interest to do with him and nearly everything of epistemic interest to do with the passerby. In particular, it is the passerby’s experience with and knowledge of the city of Chicago that explains why Morris ended up with a true belief rather than a false belief. Moreover, notice that Morris ‘randomly’ chose the passerby that he did, and so even the fact that he received the information from one source rather than another cannot be attributed to Morris.” (Lackey 2007, 352)

I think that in this passage Lackey bases her objection on two grounds. The first is her *intuitive judgment* about causal explanation. It is the intuition we can state in the following way: the passerby’s knowledge *plays a more important role in*, and *contributes more to*, Morris’s acquisition of the true belief than Morris’s cognitive faculty. And the second ground Lackey relies on seems to be that Morris *randomly* chose the passerby, as in many cases of knowledge by testimony. And the randomness somehow contributes to the element of *luck*, the very thing that virtue epistemology is designed to rule out. I will examine whether these two considerations really support Lackey’s claim.

#### 4-1 Explanatory Saliency

I can readily agree that there is an intuitive sense in which the passerby did contribute *more* to Morris’s acquisition of the true information than Morris did. To dramatize the point, let’s take a different example.

Imagine a person in the 15<sup>th</sup> century who learned about America from what he heard in person from Christopher Columbus. The person trusts him and forms some true beliefs about America. Who contributed *more* to the person's having true beliefs? Obviously, it is Columbus: Just think of all the hardships he went through in his voyage to the world unknown thus far! Compared to his adventurous and laborious explorations, the hearer's own contribution is almost nothing. There seems to be a robust sense in which the credit should go to Columbus himself. Lackey's case of Morris seems different from the Columbus case only in degree. It is the passerby who really did all the hard work to find out the information; Morris merely casually picked up the information. There seems to be a robust reason to attribute the credit to the passerby.

Thus, we can admit that Lackey's objection makes a lot of intuitive sense. However, I will argue, this intuition of "who did more work?" is a rather *poor guide to explanatory saliency* in the sense relevant in our present context. That is, the senses of explanatory saliency and credit attribution in which virtue epistemologists should be interested don't have to coincide with such intuitive judgments.

Consider the following example. Imagine a biologist who knows a lot about cells. She built her vast knowledge through diligently observing cells, and theorizing on the basis of them. We will have to admit that the credit for the true beliefs she acquired in this way has to go to the biologist herself, not anyone or anything else. But if we think about the whole process through which she acquires knowledge in details, I think, it may not be the biologist who contributes most to her acquisition of true beliefs, or plays the most important role in the process. The biologist observes certain cells through a newly-invented high-tech microscope, and gains knowledge that could not be achieved without the new invention.

The biologist just sits and looks through the microscope. But it might have taken numerous scientists several decades' study to put together the new microscope. Then doesn't the inventor of the microscope contribute "more" to the biologist's true belief? After all, the biologist's new knowledge wouldn't be possible without the microscope.<sup>5)</sup>

I think that even in most casual cases of knowledge, this intuition of "who or what contributes more" is quite unstable. Consider knowledge from perception. I am looking at a red tomato, and form the true belief that there is a red tomato in front of me. Presumably, there are various factors that contribute to the acquisition of the true belief. If we try to see things *disinterestedly*, we realize that these factors are *equally* significant. My perceptual faculty of course plays an important role, but the lightening condition is no less important; after all, if the lightening condition had been deceptive, then I might have ended up with a false belief. Then don't the two—my perceptual faculty and the lightening condition—contribute *equally* to my acquisition of the true belief? And consequently, isn't it that we cannot say that the use of my perceptual faculty is the *most* salient part in the causal explanation?

I think that we need a more systematic way to distinguish the most salient part from less salient parts. We can approach this issue by considering the biologist case and the perception case. Despite the significant roles of the inventors of the microscope, and of the lightening condition, why are we willing to attribute the credit to the subjects? I think it is because some things are already being *taken for granted* as *normal conditions*. The microscopes and the lightening condition are in the background of the whole stories; their workings are somehow taken

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5) Sosa (2006) too observes that there are important parallels between knowledge acquired from testimony and knowledge acquired through the use of instruments.

for granted or presupposed. But once we lift what has been presupposed, the situation becomes different. The role of the inventor of the microscope may look greater, and more valuable than the biologist's. By the same logic, while the passerby's role looks more important and greater than Morris's, I think, there is a sense in which Morris's virtue is the most salient part of the causal explanation, hence deserves credit. Again, this is when some things are taken for granted. What are the things that are taken for granted in this case? The answer will reveal itself as we consider Lackey's second ground for her objection. So let's turn to that.

#### 4-2 Does Randomness Necessarily Make for Luck?

Lackey emphasizes that Morris *randomly* chose the passerby, and this fact is used to boost her point that Morris doesn't deserve credit for his true belief acquisition. Why does this randomness matter? She seems to think that the kind of randomness involved makes for "luck." She says, "there is a sense in which he is simply *lucky* that he happened to ask someone who knows the city of Chicago very well" (Lackey 2007, 356, my emphasis). As some virtue epistemologists have emphasized, virtue epistemology is mainly motivated by "the desire to eliminate epistemic luck" (Pritchard 2003, 106). But if Lackey were right, then her argument would show that virtue epistemologists' "desire to eliminate epistemic luck" was misguided in the first place. That is, the Morris case would show that there is such a thing as *lucky knowledge*, and that luck is not something to be eliminated.

However, I think we have to examine more closely the sense in which Morris is lucky in his acquiring a true belief. It may look as if the Morris case is quite similar to the well known Fake Barn Case due to Alvin

Goldman (Goldman 1976). Henry sees a barn in the countryside and forms the belief that it is a real barn. But, as it happens, the barn was in the middle of the area dotted with many barn façades. Although he got that particular belief right, the subject *randomly* chose one among numerous façade, and so Henry was merely *lucky*. This randomness makes for epistemic luck, and it keeps the subjects in the Fake Barn Case from deserving credit, and from knowing it. Then, one may naturally infer, the randomness involved in the Morris case and other testimonial cases also keeps the subject from deserving credit.

But I think there is an important difference that makes testimonial knowledge special. Let's ask this question: If Morris had been "unlucky" so that the passerby he had asked hadn't known the direction, what would have happened? If the subject in the Fake Barn Case were unlucky so that what he chose was a barn façade, then he would have formed the same belief and ended up with having a *false* belief. But would Morris have ended up with a false belief if he had been unlucky? This seems very unlikely. Rather, he would have gotten *no information*; for the passerby, being *uninformed but sincere*, would probably have said something like, "I am sorry, but I am also new to the town." That is, the absence of luck would have resulted in *the lack of information* (or the lack of belief), rather than *misinformation* (or a false belief). If Morris had been "unlucky" in this sense, then Morris would have gone on to ask some other passerby, and, it is reasonable to think, he would have eventually gotten the information he wanted. This is a significance difference between the luck in the Morris case on the one hand, and the luck in the Fake Barn Case on the other. The second kind of luck clearly is opposed to knowledge, and I presume that virtue epistemology can correctly rule it out (although we can't go into detail here).<sup>6</sup> But I don't see any reason

to think that knowledge is opposed to the first kind of luck.

It will take a considerable contrivance to make up a scenario in the testimonial case that is parallel to the fake barn case. But it will help to design such a case in order to see how our intuitive judgment changes in such a case. Consider the following scenario: CIA is trying to mislead Morris so as to delay his arrival at the Sears Tower. So it has dozens of its agents masquerade as ordinary passersby, so that when they are asked direction by Morris, they give him false information and mislead him. But CIA fails to control the entire area, and there happens to be one real Chicago resident in the middle of disguised CIA agents. Morris is not aware of any of this. Now suppose that it happens to be that real Chicago resident, standing in the middle of masquerading CIA agents, that Morris asked the direction. The resident, being sincere, will give the true information asked. In this case, would Morris count as knowing the direction to the Sears Tower? The answer seems “No” to me. The case is a lot like the fake barn case, in that among dominant possible paths to a *false* belief that a subject might have taken, the subject *luckily* chose the path to the truth. But the case is significantly different from the original Morris case, where no one intentionally tries to deceive him. For the paths to a false belief in the original Morris case, we may assume, aren’t dominant at all.

So in the original Morris case and other ordinary cases of testimonial knowledge, the sense of “luck” involved seems quite different from that involved in the Fake Barn Case. And from the fact that the latter keeps the subjects from deserving credit, we cannot infer that Morris doesn’t deserve credit.

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6) See Greco (2003), 129-130, for a promising virtue epistemological account of the case.

What makes this difference then? I think it is the following fact: *When an ordinary person on the street is asked a direction by a stranger, he tends to tell the stranger what he knows.* This involves two factors: First, the person can tell whether he knows the direction or not. Second, the person is *sincere*. I think most of us will agree that these are true; after all, anyone who doesn't agree wouldn't ask a direction from strangers, but most of us are willing to do so. Now, the question is how these facts contribute to make the epistemic difference we have just seen. This is the question we will consider in the next section.

In this section, we examined Lackey's arguments in detail, and there have emerged two important ideas: First, explanatory salience that matters to virtue epistemologists is not the "amount" of contribution to the acquisition of true belief that we intuitively measure. Rather, it has to presuppose some sort of *normal conditions*. Second, randomness involved in testimonial knowledge is not quite an element that contributes to epistemic *luck*, since *sincerity* of persons can be usually presupposed. Combining the two ideas, I will claim that in testimonial cases, *sincerity* constitutes *normal conditions* for credit attributions. Hence when the normal condition of sincerity is presupposed, Morris's own contribution may stand out as the salient part of explanation of his acquiring the true belief.

## 5. Normal Conditions and Sincerity

Let us go back to the perception case. A subject has an experience as of a red tomato, and comes to believe that there is a red tomato in front of her. I said that if we try to see things *disinterestedly*, two factors of the casual history of her belief should look equally important: the causal



process from the red tomato to the subject's visual system, and the working of the perceptual system leading up to the formation of the belief. Both of these factors, and their interplay, seem to be indispensable to causing the subject to have a true belief. Yet, in ordinary situations, we don't hesitate to pick up the perceptual system as the most salient part of the explanation of the acquisition of a true belief, and something deserving credit for it. Why is this so?

In fact, the problem is quite general. If we look at any *causal* process, every single step is indispensably important; for it is likely that if any of the causal links had been absent, the effect would have not happened. It will be impossible to pick out a single step as "the most salient" part of the causal explanation, unless something is *presupposed* as already known, or somehow *ruled out as unimportant* or *uninteresting*. In short, the notions of "because" and "saliency" are all *context-dependent*.

If this is correct, then everyone who tries to analyze knowledge in terms of causal explanation should have expected all along that knowledge attribution is also context-dependent. In fact, this is the conclusion Greco himself arrives at, although I am not sure whether he pushes the point far enough (Greco 2003).<sup>7)</sup>

Explanatory salience makes sense only *against the background of* what is (or what is *taken* to be) *normal*. And hence, the question of what deserves credit in acquiring true beliefs also makes sense against the background of the normal. Usually, we take the lightening condition to be normal. Although normal lightening conditions are extremely important for our perceptual ability to yield true beliefs, cases are indeed rare where

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7) However, as he deals with Lackey's case in his more recent paper (Greco 2007), Greco does not utilize the fact that "deserving credit" is a context-dependent notion.

we are misled by deceptive lightening conditions. And when rare cases really occur, we take something to be *abnormal*. If we are asked to explain how a subject gains a true belief by seeing a tomato, we just don't feel that it's necessary even to mention the lightening condition; for everyone—including the one who asks the explanation, and the one who explains—will *presuppose* that the condition is normal. So the subject's perceptual system becomes the most salient part of the explanation, and hence it is the subject who deserves credit.

We can think of opposite situations as well. Suppose that a museum curator is trying to design lightening devices that will best reveal the subtle color patterns of a certain piece of fine art. A subject will be placed under various lightening conditions. Suppose that the subject can recognize the subtle color pattern only under a certain lightening condition, but not under others. Now if the subject forms a true belief about the piece under a right kind of condition, I think, the most salient part of the explanation of the subject's true belief will be the lightening condition, not the subject's faculty. We will *praise* the curator for the design of the lightening condition. It is because in this case, it is the subject's visual faculty, not the lightening condition, that is taken to be normal. Moreover, if the subject got the subtle color pattern right under some lightening conditions, we will be unwilling to ascribe knowledge to the subject in this situation.

Now return to the testimony case. I claim that in usual situations of knowledge attribution, the fact that *people tend to tell what they know* constitutes normal condition. It is not that we can always safely assume that people don't lie—as we know, people sometimes do. But in many typical situations of simple testimonial knowledge attributions, we presuppose that speakers are sincere. Thus, when Morris finally meets his

friend and is asked “how did you find out (that is, know) the direction?”, he will unhesitatingly answer, “I just asked a direction from a passerby.” And that explains all, and Morris’ friend would find the explanation satisfactory. This is because under the presupposition that ordinary passersby are sincere, the most salient part of explanation of the true belief acquisition should be the hearer’s practice (or virtue) of forming belief of *p* upon hearing *p* from others.

Then what will happen in the situation where sincerity cannot be presupposed? The following examples will be illustrative. Consider a belief I formed from reading a *New York Times* article this morning. Everyone will count that as knowledge. Despite all the hard work the reporter may have taken to get the correct information, that’s something that can be presupposed in most contexts. And when this is presupposed, the credit has to go to the reader: He took trouble to look at the article, picked up the information and didn’t forget it.

In contrast, suppose that one forms a true belief after reading an article in a local newspaper with terrible reputations; it is well known that the newspaper doesn’t care much about truths, but only about sensationalizing stories. But suppose that a rookie reporter of the newspaper, obsessive with truths, wrote a well-researched article, which happens to be what the reader read this morning. I think in this case, we should be unwilling to ascribe knowledge to the reader. This is because “sincerity” of the newspaper is something that cannot be presupposed. But when this is not presupposed, what will be the most salient part of the causal explanation of the true belief acquisition on the reader’s part? I think the credit should go to the reporter, not to the reader. So the reader’s picking up the information from the newspaper becomes less salient on the whole. And this explains why we are unwilling to attribute knowledge to the reader.

I conclude that virtue epistemology can handle Lackey's case successfully by invoking context-dependence of credit attribution. There is nothing *ad hoc* about this solution; for as we have emphasized, as far as credit attribution is something causal, we need something to guide our sorting out the more salient and the less salient. And I don't see anything other than context that is up to this task.<sup>8)</sup>

## 6. Is Virtue Epistemology Internalism?

As Lackey diagnoses the problems of virtue epistemology, she says this:

“What these considerations suggest is that attempting to distinguish knowledge from other kinds of true belief merely by luck via a feature that is *attributable* to the subject is fundamentally misguided. For in all of these cases, the reliability relevant to the true belief acquired lies *outside* of the subject in question—in [the Morris Case], it lies in the speaker.” (Lackey 2007, 358)

Here Lackey seems to be suggesting that the fundamental mistake of virtue epistemology is that it implies *internalism* in epistemology, roughly, the view that only what is “internal” to a subject makes difference to the epistemic status of the subject's beliefs. But I think that this understanding of virtue epistemology is mistaken, and that my discussion in the paper can reveal where it goes wrong. So let me close

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8) The observation that knowledge attribution is context-dependent is in no way new. For example, see Lewis (1996). I believe that virtue epistemology is in a particularly good position to explain why knowledge attribution *has to* be context-dependent. A knowledge attribution is context-dependent, because knowledge attribution is basically a cause attribution, and the latter is context-dependent.

the paper with brief remarks about this.

As we saw, there is an intuitive sense in which Morris himself contributes less to his acquiring the true belief than the passerby. But since we are still willing to count Morris's true belief as knowledge, Lackey is suggesting that a subject's intellectual virtue, and more generally, what is *internal*, cannot distinguish knowledge from mere true beliefs. Of course, intellectual virtues are internal. And as far as virtue epistemology emphasizes the role of one's cognitive abilities as demarcating knowledge and mere true beliefs, it may look as if virtue epistemology is committed to *internalism*.

But I think this is mistaken. Earlier, we saw that we can somehow measure the amount of contribution intuitively. So Columbus' contribution is more than the hearer's, and the contribution of the inventor of the microscope is more than the biologist's, and the passerby's contribution is more than Morris's. And hence, we can also agree that what is *external* to the subject may make a real difference to knowledge. By agreeing on this, I think, we are also admitting that there is some truth in *externalism* in epistemology. But if one recognizes that this intuitive measure doesn't coincide with the explanatory saliency we are interested in, one can be a virtue epistemologist while still respecting the externalist idea. Virtue epistemology doesn't imply that the internal is more important in the intuitive sense, let alone that the internal is *all* that matters. At best, what it implies is this: *All things being equal*, what matters is the internal.

I think that it is hard to deny that there are some grains of truth both in internalism and externalism. It seems to me that virtue epistemology helps us sort out the internal and the external aspects of knowledge, rather than endorsing one of them as the exclusive truth.

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