

## VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE GETTIER CHALLENGE

**Anthony Raphael Etuk, Ph.D.**

University of Uyo,  
Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.  
etuky4real@gmail.com  
ORCID id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7708-9061>

**Emmanuel Akaninyene Okon, PhD**

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages  
University of Uyo  
emmanuelokon@uniuyi.edu

&

**Inwang, Solomon Christopher**

University of Uyo,  
Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

### **Abstract**

*Virtue epistemologists keenly argue that the resources of their virtue theories can help to resolve the Gettier problem in epistemology. Edmund Gettier, in his 1963 short essay, had demonstrated the inadequacy of the tripartite conditions for knowledge. Proceeding by way counterexamples, he revealed that the conditions of justification, truth and belief in the traditional account of knowledge as “justified true belief”, were insufficient, because, a justified belief may happen to be true by virtue of mere coincidence or luck. In other words, a believer may happen to hold a justified belief but on the basis of facts irrelevant to the truth of the belief. This shows the possibility of a missing link between truth and knowledge. Known as the Gettier problem, this awareness, which has elicited a series of post-Gettier theories in contemporary epistemology, has, nevertheless, remained a difficult challenge to resolve. Virtue epistemology, a recent approach in epistemology, claims its virtue-theoretic analysis of knowledge has the capacity to resolve the problem. This paper explores the defining features of virtue epistemology and critically examines its attempt to resolve the Gettier problem. It concludes that despite its promising trailblazing quality, virtue epistemology lacks the capacity to adequately address the Gettier problem due to certain epistemic defects inherent in its account of knowledge, predisposing it to the Gettier-style cases. The expository and critical methods are adopted in the paper.*

**Keywords:** Virtue Epistemology, Edmund Gettier, Counterexamples, Intellectual Virtues, Justification, Knowledge.

### **Introduction**

Over the years, epistemologists have been engaged in the intellectual struggle not only to clarify what it means to know, how we reach knowledge, the basic criteria for knowledge, but also, whether we can have certain knowledge. In all, epistemologists agree that knowledge does not simply mean understanding or awareness of a fact, “but the

indubitable awareness of such a fact” (Ozumba 2015: 2). That is, “to know” implies the requirement of certainty and incontrovertibility. This understanding gave rise to the traditional analysis of propositional knowledge as “justified true belief”, as suggested in Plato's *Theaetetus* (201c-210d). According to this analysis, one knows that *P* if and only if one has a *justified* true belief that *P*. One might believe a true but groundless conjecture, but would not thereby *know* that this conjecture is true. Standardly construed then, knowledge requires not only that a *belief* and *truth* conditions be satisfied, but also that the satisfaction of the belief condition be *appropriately related* to the satisfaction of the truth condition (Moser, 1). The latter requirement implies the *justification* condition for knowledge.

However, despite its long history of prominence in epistemology history, this traditional account of knowledge as “justified true belief” was celebrated only but for a time. Its popularity was challenged by Edmund Gettier, who in 1963, stirred the hornet nest in the epistemology world with his short essay titled, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” With his two *counter-examples* that rocked the base of the traditional account of knowledge, he raised the curtain on the insufficiency or inadequacy of the tripartite conditions for knowledge (Etuk 2018: 53 – 54), revealing that justification is not always reliable as a criterion for knowledge because of the possibility of being mistaken or deceived about what we think we know as well as luck or coincidence masquerading as knowledge.

Gettier's analysis elicited a storm in the epistemology world, generating a long series of attempts to respond to his counterexamples without giving up the essence of the definition (Okeke 2013: 50). Such attempts include such post-Gettier theories of justification as the Defeasibility, Reliability and Causal as well as the Virtue Epistemology theories. A number of claims have been made on behalf of virtue epistemology, particularly, regarding its capacity to viably provides a foundation for an analysis of knowledge that is able to avoid the Gettier-style problem in epistemology (Sosa 2007: 42). The principal concern of this paper is with this claim by the proponents of virtue epistemology. The paper explores the defining features of virtue epistemology and critical examines the rational success of its attempt to viably resolve the Gettier problem in epistemology.

### **Gettier's Counterexamples**

At a time when it was almost taken for granted that knowledge is “justified true belief” (Dancy 1991: 23), Edmund Gettier, in his 1963 short essay titled, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”, raise the attention of epistemologists to the insufficiency of these three but necessary conditions for knowledge. Advancing two counterexamples to prove his case, Gettier reveals the fact that in case of justification, there may be some facts unknown to us, but which if we were to take into consideration, would certainly weaken our justification. In other words, that our *justification* may be false even when our belief is true. Hence, we may have a case of “justified true belief”, which certainly cannot be regarded as knowledge, because what is considered as knowledge is nothing but mere coincidence or dump luck. Due to space constraints, we shall consider only one of such Gettier's counterexamples: About two job seekers – Smith and Jones.

Gettier (1963: 121) narrates the following: Suppose that Smith and Jones have applied for a certain job. And suppose that Smith had strong evidence for the following conjunctive proposition: (d) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Smith's evidence for (d) might be that the President of the company assured him that Jones would in the end be selected, and that he, Smith, had counted the coins in Jones' pocket ten minutes ago. Proposition (d) entails: (e) the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. Let us suppose that Smith sees the entailment from (d) to (e), and accept (e) on the grounds of (d), for which he has strong evidence. In this case, Smith is clearly justified in believing that (e) is true. However, it happens that Smith himself got the job, and coincidentally, but unknown to Smith, he has ten coins in his pocket. Thus (e) is true and Smith justifiably believes (e). Nevertheless, Gettier maintains further that: It is equally clear that Smith does not know that (e) is true; for (e) is true in virtue of the number of coins in Smith's pocket, and Smith bases his belief in (e) on the account of the coins in Jones' pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job (122–123).

With this counterexample, Gettier points out that the tripartite account of knowledge is insufficient because it is possible for someone not to know even when all the three conditions for knowledge are satisfied. This is what is commonly noted as the Gettier-problem in contemporary epistemology. The emphasis here is that it is possible for a man with a true belief to have evidence for his belief but at the same time not know. In the case above, Smith undoubtedly has a justified true belief, yet, he clearly does not have knowledge. His true belief is not based on conclusive evidence. What seems to be his knowledge here (e) is nothing but a mere coincidence or luck, because he holds a truly justified belief but on the basis of facts irrelevant to the truth of the belief.

This shows that our *justification* may be false even when our belief is true.

Though he does not refute the necessity of the three conditions for knowledge, Gettier is alluding to the fact that, whereas they are individually necessary, “they need supplementing” (Dancy 1991: 25). This awareness by Gettier's analysis, elicited a storm in the epistemology world, tilting the course of epistemological discussions in recent times to the search for the fourth and supplementing condition of knowledge as envisaged in his Paper. One of such post-Gettier theories is the Virtue Epistemology, which according to Church, “is meant to offer solution to the Gettier problem” (2021: 681).

### **Virtue Epistemology**

Virtue epistemology is a current philosophical approach to the problem of justification of knowledge in epistemology, which gives intellectual virtue concepts an important and fundamental role in the determination of knowledge (Baehr 2000: 1). It holds the view that “the ultimate source of epistemic normativity, and hence the central focus of epistemological inquiry, are cognitive agents and communities, along with the fundamental powers, traits and habits that constitute their intellect” (Turri and Sosa 2018: 2). Traits that promote good cognition or intellectual flourishing are called intellectual or cognitive or epistemic virtues, whence the name “virtue epistemology.” Virtue epistemology was partly inspired by a recent renewal of interest in virtue concepts among moral philosophers, the desire to resolve the controversy between foundationalism and coherentism, as well as by attempts to give a response to the intractability of the

competing analyses of knowledge that arose in response to the problem posed by Edmund Gettier on the adequacy of the traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief (Sosa 1980: 3).

Conceived as a distinctive movement within contemporary epistemology, virtue epistemology was propounded by Ernest Sosa in his attempt to grapple with the controversy between foundationalism and coherentism (Ozumba 2015: 172). Sosa introduced the concept of “intellectual virtue” into contemporary epistemology literature, proposed in his 1980 essay, “The Raft and the Pyramid”, and further promoted in his 2007 work, *A Virtue Epistemology*. he believes that “the concept of intellectual virtue could be used to bypass the controversy between foundationalists and coherentists” (2013: 51), as well as addressing other epistemological issues such as the Gettier problem (Sosa 2007: 25, Zagzebski 1996: 285). Though there are variants virtue theories in epistemology, yet, every form of virtue epistemology agrees on two basic commitments.

The first is the view that epistemology is a normative discipline, and thus, “epistemologists should focus their efforts on understanding epistemic norms, value, and evaluation” (Turri *et al.* 2021: 1). Just as virtue theories in ethics try to understand the normative properties of actions in terms of the normative properties of moral agents, so virtue epistemology tries to understand the normative properties of beliefs in terms of the normative properties of cognitive agents. Virtue epistemology insists that the problem of guaranteeing valid knowledge “can be solved by reference to the possession and application of intellectual virtue” (Ozumba 2015: 172). The second is that they all consider intellectual agents as the primary source of epistemic value and the primary focus of epistemic evaluation, with a focus on the intellectual virtues and vices embodied in and expressed by these agents (Turri *et al.*, 2021: 1). From these two basic commitments, all forms of virtue epistemology evaluate knowledge according to the intellectual virtues of the person who holds beliefs, instead of the properties of the propositions and beliefs. They focus on the knower as agent in a manner similar to how virtue ethics focuses on moral agents rather than moral acts.

Hence virtue epistemology has been described as “person-based rather than belief-based, just as virtue theories in ethics have been described as person-based rather than act-based” (Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2023: 1). In simple terms, for virtue epistemology, “a belief is justified, just in case it is has its source in intellectual virtue (Sosa 1991: 189). Or, “in cases of knowledge, *S* has true belief because *S* believes from intellectual virtue” (Greco 2002: 311). Prominent proponents of the virtue epistemology include Ernest Sosa, Alvin Goldman, John Greco, Heather Battaly, Lorraine Code, Christopher Hookway, James Montmarquet, and Linda Zagzebski.

### **The Nature of Intellectual Virtue**

Intellectual virtue has been a subject of philosophy since the work of Aristotle, who “talks of the virtue of moral excellence as depicted in courage, temperance and wisdom” (Ozumba 2015: 172). However, theorizing about intellectual virtue in the virtue

epistemology tradition is characterized by efforts to solve problems of special concern to modern epistemology by focusing on this quality in the knower as agent in a manner similar to how virtue ethics focuses on moral virtue of the moral agents rather than moral acts. For virtue epistemologists, there are intellectual virtues, which are “characteristics that promote intellectual flourishing, or which make for an excellent cognizer” (Turri *et al.*, 2021: 3). Such virtuous intellectual agency defines thinking that is appropriately competent, responsible, and otherwise excellent. On the other hand, nonvirtuous intellectual agency is thinking that falls short of relevant excellence in significant ways (Greco 2002: 311). But what specifically constitutes the nature of intellectual virtue? Virtue epistemologists are split into two variants camps regarding the nature of intellectual virtue: Virtue Reliabilists and Virtue Responsibilists.

The virtue reliabilists, represented by such figures as Ernest Sosa, Alvin Goldman and John Greco, conceive of intellectual virtues as “stable, reliable and truth-conducive cognitive faculties or powers, and regards vision, introspection, memory, or what might be called 'faculty virtues' or 'a reliable belief-forming faculty’” (Okeke 2013: 51). According to them, these are “paradigm cases of intellectual virtue and they count as such because of their epistemic reliability (Baehr, 2000: 2). Virtue reliabilists see only loose analogy between virtue in ethics and virtue in epistemology, insisting that “intellectual virtue needs not be viewed from the moral but from the cognitive perspective” (Sosa 1991: 189). Their major concern, therefore, is with cognitive capacity through which one deploys his intellectual virtuous agency to contribute to reliable knowledge in a manner that is truth-conducting.

For virtue reliabilists, therefore, a true belief is knowledge only if its truth is explainable in terms of (or is creditable to or manifests) certain qualities of the knower, in particular, in terms of the knower's cognitive faculties, which include vision, introspection, memory, etc. These, according to Sosa, constitute intellectual virtue – a reliable belief-forming faculty – “a quality bound to help maximize one's surplus of truth over error” (Sosa 1985: 227): Such intellectual virtues, Sosa believes, translate into our having the requisite internal and external equipment that will put us in a better position to determine the truth of our beliefs. Sosa also distinguished animal knowledge from reflective knowledge. For the former it is sufficient that the belief was caused by a reliable truth-producing faculty. For the latter he adds an internalist component. The believer must have a reliable grasp of the fact that their belief is grounded in a reliable cognitive faculty (1991: 189).

The second variant, virtue responsibilism, defended by the likes of Linda Zagzebski, James Montmarquet, Heather Battaly, Lorraine Code, does not consider intellectual virtues in terms of cognitive faculties, but as certain cultivated intellectual character traits of a *responsible* knower or inquirer valued as more virtuous than others (Baehr 2000: 2). Here, intellectual virtue is conceived of on the model of moral virtues; that is, as good intellectual character traits which include attentiveness, inquisitiveness, open-mindedness, fair-mindedness, intellectual courage intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, intellectual tenacity, intellectual honesty, and intellectual rigor (Baehr 2013: 1). According to Zagzebski, intellectual virtues are distinguishable from moral virtues only on account of having an intrinsic epistemic aim: an intellectually virtuous person, she argues, desires epistemic goods like knowledge and understanding at least

partly for their own sake (1996: 166-67).

The approach of the virtue reliabilists is broadly aligned with internalist sympathies in epistemology and deeply concerned with cognition's ethical dimensions and implications (Turri *et al.*, 2021: 3). Internalist epistemology holds that what appeals to justification in knowledge, must be internal to the individual's first-person's cognitive experience; that is, “it must be cognitively accessible to the person in question” (Bonjour 2002: 234). In line with this internalist disposition, virtue responsibilists treat intellectual virtue on the classical model of virtue as a trait of cultivated intellectual character. They stress the importance of being a responsible believer in a manner modelled after virtue ethics. Code, for instance, claims that epistemologists should pay considerably more attention to the personal, active, and social dimensions of the cognitive life, arguing that an epistemically responsible person is especially likely to succeed in the areas of the cognitive life (Code 1987: 44). For Zagzebski, the concept of justified belief is defined in terms of the concept of a person who is motivated by intellectual virtue, while the concept of knowledge is defined in terms of that of an act of intellectual virtue. She says that a virtue, whether moral or intellectual, is “a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person” (1999: 137). She sees intellectual virtues as traits of *character*, which constitute a subset of moral virtues (1999: 137). Such traits of character, as cited in Okeke, include such intellectual autonomy and courage, intellectual carefulness and fairness, and open-mindedness (2013: 52).

Zagzebski claims that an intellectually courageous person, for instance, is *motivated* to persist in certain beliefs or inquiries out of a desire for truth and is reliably *successful* at doing so, and that knowledge is belief arising from “acts of intellectual virtue.” An “act of intellectual virtue” is an act that “gets everything right”: it involves having an intellectually virtuous motive, doing what an intellectually virtuous person would do in the situation, and reaching the truth as a result (1996: 270-71). One performs an act of fair-mindedness, for example, just in case one exhibits the motivational state characteristic of this virtue, does what a fair-minded person would do in the situation, and reaches the truth as a result. Knowledge is acquired when one forms a belief out of one or more acts of this sort.

### **Virtue Epistemology and Knowledge**

Virtue epistemologists believe there is the need for the reversal of the direction of the analysis of knowledge-first approach by starting with competences to know and then understanding belief as potentially-defective knowledge (Miracchi 2015: 29). Accordingly, “knowledge is non-accidentally true belief” (Turri *et al.*, 2021: 5); but to know is to believe the truth because of your intellectual virtue (Sosa 1991: 277; Zagzebski 1996: 271–2, Greco 2003: 111). Knowledge is a kind of success from one's intellectual virtue. Therefore, a successful inquiry in knowledge determination depends upon the subject's epistemic character – intellectual virtue – which includes wisdom embodied in the judgments, cognitive habits, skills, and dispositions acquired through education and experience (Trybulec 2017: 39). Knowledge is true belief resulting from intellectual virtue: “knowledge is true belief manifesting epistemic virtue” (Turri and Sosa 2018: 2). The intellectual virtues are reliable dispositions: either reliable powers, such as accurate perception and sound reasoning, or reliable character traits, such as intellectual honesty

and intellectual carefulness. for arriving at true beliefs and avoiding false beliefs.

For virtue epistemologists, therefore, if we think of intellectual virtues as reliable powers, and think of knowledge as true belief grounded in such powers, then beliefs caused by such reliable dispositions or character traits will typically have positive epistemic value than those caused by wishful thinking, superstition, and hasty generalization, and such other intellectual vices. Sosa says that a given belief is knowledge iff the belief it is “true because competent”—belief where the truth is “derived from,” “attributable to,” or “because [of]” a cognitive competence (Sosa 2007, 23, 33). This concept of knowledge as success from one's intellectual virtue is further explained with Sosa's AAA-model of performance assessment, where according to him, all human behaviours, performances and attempts, can be assessed for accuracy, adroitness, and aptness (Sosa 2007: 22–3). In this regard, accurate performances achieve their aim, adroit performances manifest competence, and apt performances are accurate because it is adroit. This AAA-model applies to all conduct and performances with an aim including knowledge determination.

Hence, as it applies to epistemology, belief-formation is a psychological performance with an aim for knowledge. For beliefs, accuracy is identified with truth, adroitness with manifesting intellectual competence, and aptness with being “true because competent”. Apt belief, then, is belief that is true because competent. And, competence, in turn, is a disposition, one with a basis resident in the competent agent, one that would in appropriately normal conditions ensure (or make highly likely) the success of any relevant performance issued by it (Sosa 2007: 29). Knowledge is then identified with an apt belief, which is true because it is competent – coming from an agent manifesting intellectual competence – which is just “a special case” of “creditable, apt performance”, a status common across the gamut of human activities. In sum, for virtue epistemologists, the chief difference between knowledge and mere true belief is that knowledge involves securing a true belief out of an exercise of (or in a way that is creditable to, explainable in terms of, or that manifests) the knower's intellectual virtues. And, there is greater value in securing a worthy end like true belief out of an exercise of one's virtues than there is in securing it by some other means (e.g. by accident).

### **Confronting the Gettier Challenge**

Virtue epistemologists believe that their intellectual virtue-theoretic analyses of knowledge certainly “enables a solution... for the Gettier Problem” (Sosa 2007: 42; Greco 2010: 13). Ian Church submits that, one of the benefits of the virtue epistemology is that, “it is meant to offer solution to the Gettier problem” (2021: 681). As earlier indicated, interest in virtue epistemology was partly motivated by the growing dissatisfaction with post-Gettier epistemology seeking for supplementing condition for knowledge. Instead of incorporating an additional condition into the definition of knowledge, virtue epistemologists argue that, in order to know, the subject should form a true belief on the basis of his intellectual virtue. Given that Gettier cases or counterexamples (as one represented above) are quintessentially scenarios where a given belief is true merely by accident or dumb luck, what is, required is a proposal that can relevantly and necessarily bridge the gap between true belief and knowledge. For virtue epistemologists, this proposal is the agent's intellectual virtue.

Virtue epistemologists believe that from the perspective of virtue theories, there is a natural way to think about the Gettier cases or counterexamples: It is natural to distinguish between achieving some end by luck or accident, and achieving the end through the exercise of one's abilities (or virtues). Accordingly, knowledge is "an achievement for which the knower deserves credit" (Riggs 2007: 341). And knowers deserve credit because they believe the truth due of their intellectual virtue (Greco 2002: 311). In Gettier cases, *S* believes the truth, but only by accident (luck). However, for the virtue epistemologists, in cases of knowledge, it is no accident that *S* believes the truth. Rather, *S*'s believing the truth is the result of *S*'s own cognitive abilities – believing the truth can be credited to *S*. To put this another way, in cases of knowledge, *S* believes the truth because *S* is intellectually virtuous. Sosa declares: "We have reached the view that knowledge is true belief out of intellectual virtue, belief that turns out right by reason of the virtue and not just by coincidence (Sosa 1991: 227). Zagzebski adds that "Knowledge is a state of true belief arising out of acts of intellectual virtue" (1996: 285). In the words of Greco: "When we say that *S* knows *p*, we imply that it is not just an accident that *S* believes the truth with respect to *p*. On the contrary, we mean to say that *S* gets things right with respect to *p* because *S* has reasoned in an appropriate way, or perceived things accurately, or remembered things well, etc. We mean to say that getting it right can be put down to *S*'s own abilities, rather than to dumb luck, or blind chance, or something else" (2002: 311).

For virtue epistemologists, the benefit of their approach to knowledge – as success from intellectual virtue – is that it provides an intuitive account of why knowledge is inconsistent with luck of any sort, which is the mainstay of the Gettier problem. Hence, with particular reverence to the Gettier's counterexample above, virtue epistemologists hold that Gettier's subject, Smith, does not believe the truth because of his intellectual virtues, so he does not know (Zagzebski 1996: 285; Greco 2003; Sosa 2007: 5). Since knowledge is an achievement for which the knower deserves credit; and, knowers deserve credit because they believe the truth as a result of their intellectual virtue, what is required to bridge the gap between true belief and knowledge in the Gettier-style case is Smith's intellectual virtue. For, although Smith's belief is true, it is not formed not through an exercise of his cognitive ability or intellectual virtue; and so long as this is absent, it would be wrong to credit Smith with knowledge. Virtue epistemologists believe that such a solution can be easily generalized across all Gettier cases. It would seem that with this proposal, virtue epistemology has a solution to the Gettier problem. However, a critical look at it reveals certain inherent epistemic deficiencies that clearly nettle the viability of virtue epistemology to diffuse the Gettier problem.

### **Critique of Virtue Epistemology's Proposal**

If knowledge, according to the virtue epistemologists, requires having a belief that is successful because of agent's cognitive ability (intellectual virtues), then, apparently, it would seem difficult to maintain that this concept of knowledge can avoid the Gettier-style problem in epistemology for certain obvious reasons. In the first instance, there is nothing in the concept of knowledge that suggests that it could not be possible for someone to have a belief that is successful and produced by a cognitive ability (intellectual virtues) and still not be vulnerable to Gettier counterexamples. Consider the

following case of Stephen's visit to an animal exhibition:

*Stephen, a zoologist is attending a local exhibition of animals. While perusing the various booths and exhibits, he comes to some animals labeled "hares". Stephen then, excited, forms the belief that "there are hares at this exhibition!" Unfortunately, the hares Stephen was looking at had been misidentified – they were actually rabbits – animals that can easily be mistaken for hares. Nevertheless, his belief turns out to be true – in the far corner of the exhibition building, unknown to Stephen, there are real hares hidden amidst a very large koi exhibit.*

Now in this case, Stephen is a specialist in the study of animals (zoologist), and his belief is formed through an exercise of a cognitive ability, and his belief is true. However, his belief does not hit upon the truth because of his cognitive competence – the success of Stephen's belief has nothing to do with his epistemic abilities as a zoologist, despite being successful and produced by one with a cognitive ability and competence in the study of animals. Stephen's belief is only true by dumb luck; it is true for reasons that his given exercise of epistemic abilities would not have predicted. This is similar to the Gettier cases above, because Gettier scenarios are those cases where a given belief is true because of luck.

This case of Stephen shows the weakness of the virtue epistemologists' analysis of knowledge as success from cognitive ability; for, despite his cognitive ability as a zoologist and ability to read signs, Stephen does not know that "there are hares at this exhibition". His belief is only true by virtue of luck. This shows that "it is possible for someone to have a belief that is successful and produced by a cognitive ability (intellectual virtues) and still be vulnerable to Gettier counterexamples" (Church 2021: 681). Thus, possession of an intellectual virtue does not seem capable of rendering an agent so reliable as to completely immune him from any possibility of error between his true belief and knowledge. This demonstrates the vulnerability of virtue epistemology to the Gettier-style cases.

Furthermore, if knowledge requires a belief to be true because it is produced from an ability – one's reliable cognitive faculties or excellent intellectual character traits, then it may be difficult for virtue epistemologists to escape being "Gettiered", especially, considering the consequences of this analysis on testimonial knowledge. Consider the following case of an Abuja Visitor:

*Having just arrived at the motor park in Abuja, Peter wishes to obtain directions to the Eagle Square. 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 an Abuja resident who knows the city extraordinarily well, provides Peter with impeccable directions to the Eagle Square.*

The emergent questions here are: Is the success of Peter's belief attributable to his cognitive abilities? Is his belief true because competent? Certainly not; for, even if Peter is appropriately attentive to the speaker (intellectual carefulness or attentiveness), and even

if his reception of the speaker's testimony is appropriately discriminating (open-mindedness), it is obvious that he forms a true belief because of the speaker's testimony rather than his own efforts. In other words, Peter knows where the Eagle Square is based on the impeccable directions of the passerby. Thus, based on the virtue epistemologists' success from cognitive ability (intellectual virtue) account of knowledge, it would be wrong to attribute knowledge to Peter, since the success of his belief is primarily attributable to the passerby's competency rather than his own intellectual virtue.

Perhaps, virtue epistemologists might argue that Peter's cognitive abilities still play an important role in the success of his belief; after all, he would not have known where the Eagle Square was had he not paid close attention (attentiveness or intellectual carefulness), so he deserves the credit. Nevertheless, according to virtue epistemology's account of knowledge as success from intellectual virtue or cognitive abilities, the success of Peter's belief may not be *strongly* attributable to his cognitive abilities or intellectual virtue. That may only be done in a rather *weaker* sense. In other words, if we understand the attribution relationship strongly – such that a belief needs to be mostly (if not entirely) true as a result of the given agent's cognitive abilities – then virtue epistemology can avoid Gettier counterexamples; so understood, however, virtue epistemology will wrongfully preclude knowledge in cases of testimony. Church captures this point more succinctly when he explains that: “if (a) having a belief that is successful because of a cognitive ability is what bridges the gap between true belief and knowledge and (b) this is strong enough to rule out the possibility of having a belief that is successful for any other reasons (such as epistemic luck), then it will be too strong for knowledge from testimony and extended cognition” (2021:682).

Alternatively, if we understand the attribution relation weakly – such that an agent's cognitive abilities merely need to be a contributing factor in the given belief's success – then virtue epistemology can rightly attribute knowledge in cases of testimony; so understood, however, virtue epistemology will remain vulnerable to Gettier counterexamples because this seems to be true in Gettier counterexamples. Insofar as beliefs in Gettier counterexamples are true on the basis of any other reason than his intellectual virtue such as luck, Peter's belief in this case is similar, because it is true for any other reason rather than his own intellectual virtue or cognitive abilities, namely: the passer-by's competence. Clearly, in both cases, knowledge cannot be attributed because the agents' true beliefs are not based on conclusive evidence – success from intellectual virtue or cognitive abilities – but on accident or facts irrelevant to the truth of the belief. This, again, demonstrates the vulnerability of virtue epistemology to the Gettier problem.

Furthermore, the virtue epistemology's characterization of knowledge as true belief that manifests intellectual virtue invariably implies that to the extent that people's cognitive dispositions do not qualify as virtues (because they are unreliable or irresponsible, for instance), then the true beliefs they produce will not count as knowledge. However, the truth is that manifesting intellectual virtue is a matter of degree, since a cognitive ability can be responsible for a given belief being successful to a greater or lesser degree. Just like how a footballer's shot can be accurate as a result of his abilities as a footballer to a greater or lesser degree, so too can an agent's belief be true as a result of his cognitive abilities to a greater or lesser degree. Besides, the cognitive abilities and powers can

achieve success only in relevantly close possible worlds. To say, for instance, that someone has an ability to achieve *X* (playing baseballs, for example) is to say that he would be successful in achieving *X* in a range of situations relevantly similar to those in which he typically finds himself.

But then possibilities that do not occur in relevantly similar situations. It does not, for example, count against Leonel Messi's ability to score goals that he cannot do so in the dark. Likewise, it does not count against our perceptual powers that we cannot discriminate real fires from demon-induced hallucinations. The fact that our intellectual faculties would be unreliable in worlds where demons induce perceptions, for instance, is irrelevant to whether they count as epistemically virtuous in the actual world. And based on research by the "situationist critique" in psychology "human epistemic dispositions or character do change depending on contexts, even when that change is epistemically irrelevant" (Doris 1998: 504). Such research constrains the cognitive dispositions or character that can be epistemically demanded of people.

For this reason, to maintain that knowledge is true belief grounded in intellectual virtue, is not only to deny such contextual changes that may be epistemically irrelevant to the agent's cognitive disposition, but to imply that most of our true beliefs do not count as knowledge, and that knowledge is a matter of luck – depending only on the accidental contexts that may be epistemically relevant to the agent's cognitive disposition at a time. Thus, luck looks to be able to penetrate some distance into the inner, justificatory core of virtue epistemology in a manner similar to the Gettier counterexamples. Of course, virtue reliabilists might characterize this as effecting a drop in reliable functioning, and, virtue responsibilists would consider it as negating one's excellent cognitive character. Nevertheless, virtue epistemologists should either amend their conception of knowledge to accommodate this or explain how the result of situationist psychological research does not contradict their theory and expose their vulnerability to the Gettier challenge.

## **Conclusion**

Virtue epistemology, a recent approach in epistemology adopts the virtue-theoretic model of justifying knowledge, where the primary source of epistemic evaluation is the agent's intellectual virtue. On this model, knowledge is construed as true belief resulting from the agent's intellectual virtue. An important motivation for this virtue-theoretic model in epistemology is the belief that its epistemic resources can help to resolve a range of important kinds of problems in contemporary epistemology, especially the Gettier-style problem – where luck masquerades as knowledge. However, as evident in the paper, this claim is unrealistic due to the identified inherent epistemic weaknesses in virtue epistemology's analysis of knowledge, which show its vulnerability to the Gettier-style cases. The attempt to analyze in the virtue theoretic model as success from intellectual virtue may deserve some credit as a creative reversal of the traditional direction of the analysis of knowledge-first approach to starting with competences to know. However, the success of this attempt leaves much to be desired, as virtue epistemology does not really have the theoretical purchase to address the Gettier problem.

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