

Replies¹

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My replies will be brief and extemporaneous, and will comment briefly on each paper, while suggesting how I would elaborate on those brief responses. I am much obliged for the attention given to me and for the excellent remarks.

In many instances there is no real disagreement; the ostensible disagreement is only verbal. But there is some real disagreement as will emerge in due course.

1. I will start with a discussion of the paper by Felipe and Waldomiro. They raise the problem of the value of knowledge, given my conception of what knowledge is. They wonder what, if any, is the value of knowledge, and how it is possible to justify that it is better to possess knowledge than a corresponding belief that is merely true. Let me just say, very briefly, that, to my mind, the best way to approach this issue is to highlight the analogy between the domain of epistemology, that is to say, between the domain that includes knowledge and belief, and the domain of performances such as shots, of accurate shots that hit the target, and of shots in general, whatever their kind may be: gunshots, pistol shots, archery shots, etc.

1 This is a cleaned up transcript of extemporaneous replies delivered as part of a book symposium on *Judgment and Agency* held at the Federal University of Bahia, in Salvador, Brazil, on July 16, 2015. I am grateful to Modesto Gomez Alonso for the transcript from a recording and for the Spanish-to-English translation.

One way of exploring this analogy within the domain of shots would be to consider, following Plato's *Meno*, why an apt shot is better than a shot that is successful and accurate without being apt. An accurate shot will kill the prey, it will hit the target, as will an apt one. How then does the aptness of a shot contribute to its value? Why is an apt shot superior and more admirable than one that is only adroit? And why, in turn, is a shot a better shot for being adroit than it would be if merely successful? Why do its adroitness and its aptness bear on the worth of a shot? What do we mean in saying that an adroit shot is better than a merely accurate shot, and that it is even better to succeed aptly, to wit, to succeed in such a way that the shot's success, its hitting the target, either is rightly caused by the performer's adroitness or manifests such competence? Why is this so?

A first answer to this question argues that the very idea of the superior value of knowledge is analytic. After all, a shot is an intentional action, intended by an agent who, if normal and knowledgeable, aims at certain results. In this sense, a shot that fulfils the normal aims of the performer when shooting will be better the better it fulfils those aims.

It is important to notice that we are adopting here the individual first-person perspective, the standpoint of an agent who tries to succeed in certain intentional aims. The agent aims at the basic goal of hitting the target. However, usually she aims not only at this basic goal, but also at the attaining of that goal by means of a certain competence, of her agential competence. To be sure, a normal archer does not shoot while praying that a cooperative and benign agent will intervene and guide her arrow to the target. On the contrary, the normal agent's shot is based on her assessment of the situation as appropriate for her competence to succeed upon trying. She judges, for instance, that the target is not too distant, so that the risk is not too high. Then, on the basis of her assessment of those factors, she shoots. Hence, the archer tries not only to hit the target, but to hit it through competence, through her agential competence. If that is her aim, then it trivially and inevitably follows that an adroit shot is better than one that is successful without being adroit, and that an apt shot is still better than one that is merely adroit. So the previous analogy makes obvious what one means when saying that knowledge is always better than belief and than merely true belief. According to my proposed account of the nature of knowledge, that is in line with the view that an apt shot is better than a shot that is accurate without being even adroit, and that it is also better than a shot that is accurate and adroit without being apt.

This is so because, in my view, beliefs *are* attempts that aim at a target. They aim at the goal of truth in response to a whether-question faced by the believer. This is why, to my mind, the analogy is preserved. This is the way to deal with the problem of the value of knowledge and, more specifically, to tackle the questions raised by Plato both when he wondered about the value of knowledge in general and when he focused more precisely on how knowledge can be more valuable than its corresponding true belief. The answer to the latter question would be: because an apt shot is better than a successful shot that is not apt and that maybe is not even adroit.

Part of the answer lies in the former remarks. However, it seems to me that when asking about the value of knowledge, one might have in mind certain other questions. These include questions about a more objective aspect of performances. Consider an apt shot, one that is better than a shot that hits the mark without being apt. Both shots might import little value. They might have no value whatsoever. They might have even a negative value, since they might constitute, say, a murder. Even in such a case the apt shot would be a better shot, *better as a shot*, than the shot that is inapt. After all, the shot of a competent murderer is better *as a shot* than a flukey shot that hits the victim accidentally, by luck. Nevertheless, it remains an open question whether, when considered as a whole, the shot is valuable, and what the source of its value may be. To see this point, it is enough to imagine a case where the shot has no value, or where, since it is the murder of a great leader who does not deserve this, the shot is immensely detrimental for society at large, whatever might be the aptness of such a shot as a shot. The questions that thus remain are: How is it that knowledge can generally and objectively be more valuable than true belief? Is there any objective sense in which every instance of knowledge might be more valuable than a merely true belief when such a value is not the value that aptness confers on beliefs and judgments?

The point is that an intellectual performance – a belief – might have no worth at all. Take, for instance, a silly question, one as to the number of grains of sand that there is in your hand as you lie on a beach. It would be a waste of time to laboriously count the grains, to spend the whole morning counting and recounting them to be fully certain as to the n grains that comprise a certain quantity of sand in your hand. It is true that such a performance might be highly apt. However, and although such an action is not deplorable in the sense that a murder is deplorable, it still is a waste of time. This performance may have some value to the

agent, but the fact remains that the value of getting it right aptly on this kind of questions is negligible. Thus, the question remains as to what one means when saying that knowledge is objectively valuable.

What the example of the grains of sand – along with many others – suggests is that the question as to where the value of knowledge lies, that is, as to what it is that makes every instance of knowledge more valuable, is not a correct one. This is so because such a question is based on a false presupposition, on the presupposition that every instance of knowledge is valuable. It is enough to take into account the example of the grains of sand, and to consider the waste of time involved in counting and repeatedly, in order to appreciate that the above presupposition is at best problematic, if not outright false.

However, one could uphold the intuition that in some sense it is true that knowledge has value, and that, since some apt beliefs lack value, the value of knowledge is not reducible to the value that an apt intellectual shot has on its own. In what way then might knowledge be valuable for human beings? What is the logical form of the assertion that knowledge has value for human beings? What exactly is the meaning of that question? What are we saying when we claim such a thing?

I am still quite attracted by something that I have proposed elsewhere on this issue. My suggestion is that the logical form of the assertion that knowledge is valuable is akin to such a claim about friendship, or nourishment, or peacefulness, or a proper inflow of funds. Knowledge is valuable for human beings in the way these other goods are valuable for human beings. What I am suggesting on the logic of such attributions of value is that they are *general* attributions whose truth lies in the fact that they play an important role in a flourishing human life, to wit, in the fact that a certain pattern of those goods is required for the flourishing of a normal human life and a normal human community. This means that, along with friends, good health, a proper income, etc., knowledge is in general also required for a successful and flourishing life. To my mind, that is at least part of our meaning when we say that knowledge is valuable, to wit, that a flourishing life usually depends on the acquisition of various kinds of knowledge in a wide range of situations. And that is, of course, a normative judgment.

This is my response to people with the intuition that there is a truth out there to understand, that the value of knowledge is not reducible to the value of an apt belief. And yet, how is it

that the value of knowledge is not swamped by the value of apt belief, when not every instance of knowledge is valuable, when, as in the question about the grains of sand, a piece of knowledge might lack intrinsic as well as instrumental value? The point is that many apt beliefs might have no value, while still knowledge is valuable in general.

For many, the intuition that knowledge is valuable remains. My proposal is that the content of such intuition is better captured by saying that it has the logical form of general attributions of value, to the likes of friendship, welfare, health, etc.—all of them goods required for a flourishing human life. Notice, however, that, given its logical form, it is not required that every instance of those goods be valuable for the general assertion as to the valuable nature of those goods to be true. Not every case of friendship has value. Not every instance of nourishment is valuable. It would be easy to imagine circumstances where even to be well nourished does not pay off, because it gains you a shot in the head. In such circumstances, the value of proper nourishment would be small. Its value would be outweighed by the presence of the gunman, in such a way that, given such situation, it would be instrumentally disastrous to be nourished. However, this does not detract from the fact that nourishment plays in general an important role in a fulfilled human life.

In short, this is my idea about the problem of the value of knowledge.

2. I turn next to the second paper, Hilan's paper, and here it seems to me that there is no substantial disagreement. This is because what Hilan highlights is the following: that knowledge has a modal character, to wit, that it is not only required for knowledge that one's belief is true, or even that it be a true and justified belief, but that in so believing the agent must also be sensitive to the conditions pertaining to the situation, conditions that might easily be partially or fully different. This means that one really knows that *p* only if one is disposed to take those factors into account, so as to change one's belief in line with the changes in the situation. In brief, the agent must be modally sensitive in a certain way.

Leaving aside the case of a priori knowledge of necessary truths, and possibly also that of introspective knowledge, if we focus on perceptual knowledge of the external world, it seems to me that we are broadly in agreement.

Hilan raised the example of how one knows that it is going to rain on the basis of the cloud pattern, of their colour, of the wind direction, and so on. His point was that in order to know that it is going to rain one has to be informed, for instance, of whether the wind speed has an effect on whether clouds are present, and of how in combination with other factors it plays a role in the given situation. For example, strong winds can literally blow clouds out of an area, so that it does not rain after all. In this sense, to make an accurate prediction of rain, one has to be sensitive not only to the present pattern of the clouds, but to several other factors. And that seems clearly correct. What this means is that the judgment that it is going to rain is competent only if the subject who judges takes into account those factors that may be contextually relevant to the question as to whether it is going to rain or not. A competent judgment of that sort requires sensitivity to such conditions.

So, I do agree that such modal sensitivity is required for perceptual knowledge. There must be a properly based disposition on the part of the agent to change her belief in response to the data she is aware of. The agent needs to be aware of the factors that may exert an influence on the truth-value of the question she takes up. Thus, when the question is raised as to whether it is going to rain in my current location, such factors include the role played by the wind speed and direction, the presence or absence of clouds, etc. In my view, a *complete competence* has a triple-S constitution with three components: the basic skills that constitute the innermost seat of the pertinent competence, the inner shape that one might be in as an agent, i.e., sober or drunk, and the situation that one occupies. Given that those three factors are required for a complete competence, and that the situation is one of them, this clearly bears on competent judgments about one's environment.

In the end, I would say that we are broadly in agreement on this condition for knowledge.

3. Next we turn to the joint presentation by Flávio and Eros. In fact, I mainly agree with Flávio's suggestions, remarks that were not intended as criticisms. They were presented as suggestions for inclusion in a broader and more comprehensive view. I certainly accept the idea that emotions may play an important role in the acquisition of knowledge, and that, as an example of how they can have a cognitive function, they might be notably helpful in making one aware of relevant factors pertaining to the situation that one should take into account to

form an apt judgment. This means that one's emotional response might be valuable by indicating possible signs to the contrary, so that one will then exercise caution and will inquire deeper on the issue. Fear and suspicion might be tell-tale signs that warn the agent that she should dig deeper into the issue at hand, helping her thus to proceed on a better basis. And it seems to me quite plausible that there are cases of this sort.

On the other hand, Eros raised some thorny questions, his presentation being somewhat more critical. However, here again ostensible disagreement might be more verbal than real. A case in point is our ostensible disagreement over the place and importance of *reflective knowledge*.

Usually, when we think of reflection we do tend to think of a full meditative conscious awareness, of something like a careful, sustained and thorough meditation on some issue. That is what we usually understand by reflection. It is a private and conscious process. However, the British Empiricists conceived of reflection as an operation whereby the mind turns back on itself, as the operation by which the mind is consciously aware of its own contents and operations, passions, reasonings, etc.—of whatever happens on the surface of one's consciousness. This means that reflection has two aspects: first, reflection as *conscious* thought; second, reflection as thought that *turns back on itself*. Since then we have left behind the idea that the mind has access only to the surface of consciousness, and we allow that the mind has depths below the surface of consciousness.

If we accept that the mind has a subconscious part, then *extended reflection* can come in four varieties. It may be a conscious reflection on a subconscious item, a conscious reflection on a conscious item, a subconscious reflection on something conscious, or a subconscious reflection on something subconscious. There are four possible combinations. Notice, thus, that when I talk about reflection what I am highlighting with such a concept is the idea of the mind's turning back on itself. The point is that, according to this extended conception of reflection, there need be no conscious noticing involved in reflection. In reflection the mind can but need not turn itself to its conscious part, whether consciously or subconsciously. The extended notion includes much more than such consciousness-involving operations.

It seems to me that there is an important and interesting reason both to extend the notion of reflection and to introduce such extended notion in philosophy. The reason for this is that the circularity and the infinite regress arguments used by scepticism would apply as well to the tra-

ditional conception of reflection as a conscious noticing of the conscious contents of the mind as to the extended notion of reflection, so that such a sceptical critique applies no matter how wide our concept of reflection is. And, as emerged in our colloquium discussion, it is epistemologically important to include the subconsciously reflective, given that scepticism threatens reflective knowledge irrespective of whether it is conscious or subconscious. Such scepticism would block every sort of reflective ascent. Every well-informed response to scepticism should take this fact into account.

That is why I prefer to extend the notion of reflection. And that is how I would respond to the first and third questions posed by Eros.

The second question remains, however: the question as to whether a potential regress is instituted by full aptness. Here the problem seemingly arises from the idea that a first-order intellectual performance – a first-order belief – gets a boost of epistemic standing when properly endorsed on the basis of a second-order competence. That is, the problem derives from the idea that the epistemic status of a first-order belief is improved when the formation or sustenance of that belief is guided by a second-order competence. This second-order level involves a second-order belief regarding the reliability of the first-order competence aimed at answering correctly the relevant first-order question. And the problem is that one might then get a further boost of epistemic standing by a further ascent to the third-order, such that one acquires a third-order belief regarding the reliability of the second-order competence, improving thus its epistemic status. And this process keeps going forever.

We can address this problem by noting that a performance could be better without this showing the performer to be at fault: that is, without being a performance that redounds to the discredit of the performer, who is thus at fault.

If it can be made plausible that a performance can fall short of some higher level of performance without being either discreditable or flawed, then we can respond to the regress problem as follows. We cannot be expected to do what we are incapable of doing; failure to surpass the limits of human ability is no human flaw; maybe only God, or anyhow some better endowed being, could fully ascend through the higher orders, possibly infinitely many. The idea would be that, since *ought implies can*, there is a limit to human performance, one that involves no *flaw* whatsoever.

In addition, a performance can fall short of a higher level that *it might have attained* without being thereby flawed. Thus, there can be cases in which, although it would be better to spend more time and resources, or to be fully attentive on the issue at hand, so as to improve one's belief, that is not required for apt performance. Yes, it would of course be *better* if the agent could improve her belief. But perhaps she cannot do so, or is not required to do so. If up to a certain level the agent has performed in an acceptable or even admirable way, then there it may be that nothing else can properly be demanded of her.

So, that is my suggestion regarding the regress problem.

4. And so I finally come to the comments of Carlos Sartori. Once more I am not sure that we disagree on any really substantive point.

The question raised is about how foundationalism, or about how a particular kind of foundationalism advanced by Audi and Huemer, can be given its due within a virtue epistemology. Huemer's version of foundationalism is invoked as a possible way to explain the justification of beliefs and to provide a basis for them. According to Huemer, it is rational to assume by default that things are the way they appear, so that if it seems to the agent that such and such is the case, then the agent has an a priori reason to believe it. Of course, appearances are here understood in a broader sense than perceptual appearances. It might thus happen that it seems to you that it is going to rain because of the testimony of a trusted friend who tells you that the weather forecast predicts rain. Based on such a seeming one believes that it is going to rain, and the seeming is based on testimony. There are thus three factors to consider: the *belief* that it is going to rain, the *seeming* on which such belief is based, and the *testimony* of the friend who tells you as to the weather forecast.

Well, surely seemings can only confer prima facie justification, justification in the absence of defeaters. To take the example just mentioned, it might happen that a second friend tells you that the first friend is a liar, or that he made a serious mistake, or that he was ill-informed about the forecast, etc. Perhaps you are then no longer justified in believing that it is going to rain. The idea is, however, that one can acquire knowledge provided the belief is true, and is based on foundational seemings, while there are no grounds for doubt. Let me stress that foundations can be perceptual, intellectual, based on testimony, etc.

If this is the view, then it seems to me that we can agree to a large extent. To be sure, I think that those foundations should be understood in terms of a virtue epistemology. This means that, to my mind, it is not correct to represent virtues as subordinated to foundations in such a way that their acquisition must be explained in terms of foundations of knowledge which are not themselves virtues. My point is that, although I agree with Huemer and Audi to the extent of granting that foundations are more or less as they describe them, the epistemic status of seemings depends on basic virtues such as a virtue epistemology understands them, rather than the other way around.

There is reason for taking this view. For, consider the opposing, foundationalist theory according to which, absent defeaters, seemings are the *basic* source of justification for the corresponding beliefs. The problem is that seemings could either be reliable or unreliable, rational or irrational. Consider, for example, bigots who consider certain others to be generally inferior, and who conduct their lives according to seemings of that sort. Those seemings are not the result of proper reasoning based on available data. They are acquired in childhood through the pressure exercised by one's community. The trouble is that the way in which, through cultural assimilation, prejudices are inculcated is not very different from the way we come to take many perceptual seemings at face value, that is, to be automatically inclined to accept perceptual seemings, absent special reason for caution. From early childhood one begins to develop certain general attitudes and dispositions, attractions to assent that are not the result of reasoning. On the contrary, they either result from a process of cultural assimilation or are installed through sub-personal mechanisms specific to the species through normal brain development. This is why, in my view, such groundless seemings, which are not based on reasons, can vary widely both in kind and epistemic quality.

Thus, seemings sourced arationally might have inferior and unreliable sources, as happens with prejudices inculcated by a biased society. Some seemings are imbibed with the culture, while others are specific to the human species, such as the spatiotemporal basic framework, the visible spectrum of colours, shades, etc. The latter seemings come from natural evolution. They are inevitable through normal brain development. Seemings thus vary in epistemic quality, in the sorts of ways suggested.

How to distinguish, then, between seemings with a high status and those whose status

is lower? This sort of question arises in both ethics and epistemology. Within the epistemic domain we can plausibly distinguish the epistemic quality of seemings by reference to their *reliability*: in other words, by appealing to the reliability of the competences from which those seemings derive.

Without the benefit of reliable virtues, foundationalism would allow unreliable processes to provide justification for beliefs. Is it true that the members of a target group are really inferior? What is your reason for their seeming so to you? Or are they nothing but prejudice inculcated by a biased culture? It might easily happen that a prejudicial belief is based on seemings inculcated through cultural assimilation, so that, absent defeaters, one's belief would be *prima facie* justified on the foundationalist account.

This way of understanding justification does deliver the right results. For that we need to move from seemings to their epistemic quality. And, in my view, a sensible and plausible way to distinguish the epistemic quality of seemings would be by reference to reliable competences, which may *in addition* be endorsed through a rational metacompetence that assigns them proper weight.

This is why, although I would accept that foundations are more or less as dogmatist foundationalist view them, I would want a deeper account of the wide variety of seemings and their epistemic status, based on the epistemic status of their respective reliable sources.

That concludes my replies, and I thank my commentators warmly for their stimulating input!