

THE BOUNDARIES OF GNOSEOLOGY

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Abstract:

According to Sosa (2015, 2021), the domain of epistemic normativity divides into gnoseology and intellectual ethics, a boundary that results from the key notion that gnoseological assessments are telic. We share this view here and highlight the implications that the telic claim has for different debates in contemporary epistemology. However, we also raise the complaint that Sosa's analogy of the archer has suggested that this boundary aligns with those of the instant of cognitive performance and its attributability to an individual, as featured in the Cartesian fundamental epistemic question: *What should I believe now?* Against this Cartesian imprint, we claim that temporality and sociality may be constitutive features of gnoseology. In order to show this, we introduce alternative analogies of belief formation processes that illustrate how cognitive achievements may be collectively attained across time, features that may manifest as an epistemology of conversation.

Keywords:

Gnoseology, intellectual ethics, inquiry, diachronicity, group epistemology.

1. Introduction

A substantial portion of Sosa's recent works (2015, 2021) has been dedicated to demonstrating the existence of a boundary within the domain of epistemic normativity. On its internal side resides gnoseology, or the theory of knowledge in the strictest sense, governed by telic normativity. On its external side lies intellectual ethics, or the theory of knowledge in the broadest sense, which encompasses at least two sub-domains: the ethics of belief and the theory of inquiry.

We align here with this proposal, and we highlight the implications that it bears for various contemporary debates in epistemology. However, we also contend that Sosa establishes this boundary based on a disputable double assumption. Specifically, he assumes that gnoseological assessment is confined to the moment of cognitive performance and that it must be understood as an individual feat, taking the form of the question *What should I believe now?* Challenging this Cartesian imprint, we show that gnoseological performances may extend over time and involve collective agents, encompassing features that, according to Sosa, should pertain to intellectual ethics. The well-known analogy of the archer, emphasizing an individual instantaneous act, may have hindered him from acknowledging this. For this reason, we propose alternative diachronic and collective analogies that elucidate our perspective.

The structure of the paper is as follows: in §2, we present the boundary between gnoseology and intellectual ethics and illustrate its connection to the telic claim. In §3, we highlight the implications that this claim has for different debates in contemporary epistemology. Moving on to §4, we underscore how Sosa’s use of the analogy of the archer suggests that the boundaries of gnoseology align with the instant of cognitive performance and its attributability to an individual. This, we argue, may have prevented Sosa from acknowledging temporality and sociality as constitutive features of gnoseology. §5 highlights the significant roles that both the temporal and social dimensions do already occupy in Sosa’s epistemology, but it also contends that they have been regarded as somewhat unrelated to the strictly gnoseological aspect of cognitive performances. In §6, we introduce a first alternative analogy to that of the archer—*the slalom skier*—emphasizing how cognitive attitudes evolve over time. In §7, we propose a second alternative analogy—*the football team*—illustrating how cognitive achievements may be collectively attained. §8 synthesizes these ideas and demonstrates how an understanding of gnoseology recognizing its diachronic and collective features may manifest as an epistemology of conversation. Finally, §9 concludes.

2. Compartmentalising epistemic normativity

Broadly understood, ‘epistemic normativity’ is a domain that encompasses all normative assessments related to epistemic concerns. Under this interpretation, ‘epistemic’ pertains to the content of this domain, while ‘normativity’ characterizes its nature. The content is epistemic as it pertains to questions such as what we should believe and whether we possess knowledge¹. The nature is normative, in the sense that it includes value assessments (axiology) or considerations of permissions and obligations (deontology)².

Sosa’s perspective pivots on the tenet that epistemic normativity comprises a core and a periphery, delineated by a clear boundary. At its core lies gnoseology, the theory of knowledge *sensu stricto*, delving into the processes of belief formation (whether functional or judgmental) with a focus on their internal goal of achieving truth³. The normative assessment in this context hinges on whether the agent succeeds in getting things right (accurately, adroitly, and aptly), demonstrating full competence (in the appropriate seat, shape, and situation) in the pursuit of the internal goal of

¹ For the sake of simplicity, we will omit other epistemic goods, such as understanding or know-how, even though we recognize their significance.

² Thus considered, the nature of the values and norms within that domain does not have to be epistemic. As Simion asserts, “The fact that a norm has epistemic content does not make it an epistemic norm” (2018, 233). Epistemic norms, in Simion’s sense, appear to specifically belong to the sub-domain of gnoseology, as will be defined below.

³ Those processes and the resulting knowledge-states, as outlined in (2015), represent a refinement from Sosa’s earlier renowned distinction between animal and reflective knowledge (2007). Functional belief-formation processes would be teleological and rather spontaneous, akin to perception, and merely a matter of degrees of confidence that may be implicit. In contrast, judgmental beliefs would arise from intentional cognitive actions, specifically judgment, which inherently seeks to aptly arrive at the correct answer to the question addressed.

epistemic performances. Both axiological and deontological assessments, originating from a gnoseological perspective, revolve around how the agent accomplishes this goal. For example, a true belief is deemed more *valuable*, from a gnoseological standpoint, when it showcases cognitive competence rather than when the agent fortuitously gets things right. Additionally, the agent may be *permitted* or even *obliged* to form beliefs based on their likelihood of aptly getting things right. The boundaries of this normative domain are thus sharply defined as it specifically addresses the issue of whether the agent would form a belief whose truth manifests competence.

On the peripheral side of the boundary is intellectual ethics, the theory of knowledge *sensu lato*, which explores other normative values and deontological statuses with epistemic content. The external boundaries of this domain are not as clearly defined in Sosa's work. This is not to be taken as a complaint, as those boundaries remain in the background of his work and are therefore out of focus. However, these boundaries are also blurred in a more substantial sense. The distinctions between intellectual ethics and other normative domains are blurred because they are essentially vague and imprecise.

Intellectual ethics has two prominent sub-fields (perhaps among others): the ethics of belief and the theory of inquiry. The former examines other normative assessments of our intellectual performances (prudential, instrumental, moral, political, etc.), either axiologically or deontologically. It informs us about other aspects in which we should believe this or that besides the sheer fact that we would get things right aptly. The latter, which seems to be more specific and perhaps included in the previous one⁴, investigates what we should do to put ourselves in a position to know. In this respect, inquiry is instrumental to the gnoseological assessment, but it is not constitutive of it (Sosa 2021, 26 and 44).

One of the most distinctive and delightful features of Sosa's epistemology is how it is presented with numerous illuminating analogies that help us make sense of the distinctions he introduces. Analogies play a fundamental role in the development of philosophical investigation, enabling us to understand a target concept through its resemblance to a source concept that is purportedly clearer. The advent of contemporary virtue epistemology brought about a profound renewal of epistemological analogies, and Sosa played a pivotal role in this development. Until then, these analogies were mostly grounded in the comparison of knowledge with different *things*, such as statues, trees, ships, rafts, or pyramids. However, virtue epistemology introduced a new set of analogies related to sports and other kinds of performances, ranging from tennis players to baseball fielders or fighter pilots. This shift directs our attention from the epistemic state as a thing to the epistemic performance as a deed. Such a change in analogies significantly underscores the extent to which the agential turn has become entrenched in epistemology.

⁴ This seems to be implied by Sosa's claim that gnoseology is "essential in defining those central objectives of intellectual ethics in general, and of proper inquiry in particular" (2021, 44).

Among the sports analogies the one of the archer was prominent for the early defence of Sosa's virtue epistemology (2007, 22), and it remains crucial even now to understanding how he currently interprets the boundary between gnoseology and intellectual ethics:

Take an archer who not only wishes or hopes but *decides* to release her arrow *here and now* and implements that decision by actually *trying*. The trying might either be constituted by, or directly yield, a certain brain state with the following property. If the subject were in good shape, that state *would* reliably enough eventuate in the arrow's leaving the bow with good orientation and speed (Sosa 2021, 195).

Regardless of other factors, we can evaluate the quality of an archer's attempt at shooting by considering how it aligns with the principles of archery. Questions may arise about how precise the shot would be, how hitting the bullseye would demonstrate the archer's competence, or about the prudence or recklessness of her decision to shoot, considering the difficulty of the task and circumstances such as wind or other expectable disturbances. This perspective prompts us to consider archery as a *telic* domain: one whose internal assessment is strictly related to how well the constitutive *telos* of the attempt is attained. This domain is sealed-off (Sosa 2021, 22) from other considerations regarding the value or disvalue of the chosen target (is it a bull's eye, an animal, or a child?), the quality of the archer's motivations (was the shot taken for the sake of sport, to earn a living, or out of spurious arrogance?), or the way the archer attained the level of competences that she thus manifested (did she just happen to be that good or were her capacities the result of hard-earned skills acquired through long, tough training?). A general, substantial assessment of the performance will encompass all of this, but a specific assessment of the attempt at shooting, *qua* such attempt, holds specific features and significance.

Sosa's distinction between gnoseology and intellectual ethics is rooted in the idea that, akin to archery, gnoseology is a telic domain, defined by the goal of believing aptly, i.e., manifesting cognitive competence. In contrast, intellectual ethics pertains to all other normative aspects of that same practice. The telic claim implies that the core of epistemic normativity, gnoseology, sanctions the attempt at belief formation as valuable, permissible or obligatory, depending on how aptly its internal goal is attained, which is figuring out the truth on a certain issue. The value of the question addressed is inessential, since a good answer is a good answer, no matter if the question is a bad one, even epistemically speaking, perhaps because it leads to a dead end where nothing interesting follows, or because it takes us further away from our best epistemic interests. Such assessment is sealed-off from other normative considerations and it is not 'substantial,' in the sense that it doesn't consider the agent's motivation or commitment, but only the way their success manifests competence.

As a result, the gnoseological assessment tells us whether the agent ought to believe the proposition in question and whether she knows it, but it has nothing to say about the quality of her choice of that particular issue as her concern, and it has nothing to say on whether the agent forms a belief for the sake of knowledge or with spurious intentions.

3. The relevance of the telic claim in contemporary debates

Understood as a sealed-off telic domain, gnoseology is clearly deficient, requiring intellectual ethics to provide substantial assessments. But that impoverishment has consequences that make the sacrifice worthwhile, having important theoretical implications in countless contemporary debates in epistemology. Let us consider just five examples.

The first one is the dispute, internal to virtue epistemologists, between responsibilists (Zagzebski 1998, Baehr 2011), and reliabilists (Greco 2010, Carter 2023), with Sosa as prominent figure among the latter. According to Sosa's telic virtue epistemology, epistemic character and motivation does not matter at the core of gnoseological assessment, but it does at the periphery of intellectual ethics (2015, ch. 2).

A second case is the possibility of pragmatic encroachment (Fantl and McGrath 2009), which would imply that practical stakes may internally affect epistemic normativity. Sosa's telic claim allows him to defend a nuanced position here: particular practical interests of agents are left outside the domain of gnoseology, but general practical concerns of human beings set an invariant threshold for how reliable judgmental belief must be to attain the status of knowledge as a social good (2015, Ch. 8)⁵.

A third aspect affects the proper locus of inter-personal duties related to political inequalities, such as epistemic injustices (Fricker, 2007), epistemic privileges and standpoints derived from oppression (Harding, 1992), or what we owe each other epistemically speaking (Goldberg 2021; Lackey 2023). Sosa's telic claim would in principle motivate a denial that this influence may affect gnoseology, being only appropriate with respect to the constitutive dimensions of cognitive assessments (2021, 42-3).

Fourthly, the demarcation of gnoseology as a telic domain may also have implications for the dispute on consequentialism and the source and nature of epistemic normativity. At issue here is whether beliefs' positive epistemic normative status derives from their good epistemic consequences. According to the telic claim, brutally consequentialist assessments fail to genuinely track the way the internal goal of the domain is attained, as indirect epistemic consequences are irrelevant when considering the aptness of the act of believing, *thereby* one knows (Sosa 2021, 41 note 18, 165).

And finally, the telic claim would also hint at a solution to the potential conflict between the norms of inquiry (or 'zetetic' norms) and the classical norms of epistemology (Friedman 2020, Falbo 2023). Such normative clash would be solved by the fact that the gnoseological assessment would be isolated from the assessment on the quality of the inquiry that put the agent in a position to know (Sosa 2021, 106).

These are just five examples of how the telic claim allows Sosa to defend distinctive positions in different open debates in epistemology, positions that we consider worthwhile and reasonable. As a result of the telic claim, gnoseology pays the price of not having a proper say on many trendy

⁵ The implications of this form of pragmatic encroachment have been discussed in Navarro (2016).

epistemological problems. Epistemic motivation and character, practical stakes, interpersonal epistemic duties, epistemic consequentialist evaluations, or zetetic normativity all end up outside its boundaries. However, this sacrifice reinforces what Sosa dubs “the charmed inner circle for traditional epistemology” (2015, 42). Gnoseology may not have anything to say on those issues, which seems to be bad news, but fortunately, those issues will not interfere with gnoseology, which seems to be good news. Let us illustrate this with an analogy (one of many to come): Sosa is proposing to narrow down the walls of Rome to bolster its dominance over provinces and colonies (such as intellectual ethics, the theory of inquiry), as well as to enhance its independence from other empires (such as moral or political normativity). As a consequence, the city sacrifices its extension but gains impregnability, aiding in the preservation of its continuity. We find this strategic choice prudent, and nothing in what follows should be understood as an attempt at undermining those positions. However, we also think that the specific way in which Sosa develops his project hinges on some assumptions that are disputable and may be dropped without any significant loss for the overall project.

4. Three Walls — the Cartesian imprint

Important as they are for philosophical theorizing, all analogies are two-sided swords, since some unwanted features of the source concept may always be transferred to the target concept. In particular, we will defend in what follows that the archer analogy should be used with care because the source concept, archery, transfers to the target concept, believing, the idea that it is an instantaneous and individual performance when it may not be⁶.

The analogy of the archer makes it seem as if the timing pertinent to gnoseological assessment is one whose “focus is strictly on a given instant” (Sosa 2021, 119). The archer’s training over years, or the relaxation and concentration exercises that she performed just before the shot, might have been instrumental to put her in a position to shoot well, but none of this constitutes the shot itself, which could be excellent despite terrible training and neglected preparation. By the same token, what happens afterward, its consequences, would also be inessential: the archer may have earned a fortune or killed an innocent, or she may thus earn a position where she will then be able to make many more shots that will be successful. Only the present moment of the shot matters.

⁶ Strictly speaking, the archer analogy does not seem to be presented by Sosa with the intention of providing analogical support for his conception of gnoseology, but only to provide an illustration of his view, which is defended on grounds independent of the illustration (we are grateful to an anonymous reviewer of *Philosophical Studies* for the suggestion to elaborate on this). Nevertheless, every light has its shadows, and we feel that the illustration provided by the archer analogy distracts our attention from other features of telic evaluation that can be brought to the fore by the use of alternative analogies. These alternative analogies will help us propose a conception of gnoseology which, of course, will have to be defended on grounds independent of the merely analogical illustration. In any case, the skier analogy is intended to provide a *broader* perspective on the concept being illustrated, rather than merely substituting the archer analogy.

Likewise, the analogy of the archer makes it appear as if only what the individual does matters in gnoseology. Others may have given good advice and provided the archer with the conditions required to acquire and manifest their competence, but they may not intervene in the final feat, where the archer is all alone. Two people attempting to make one same shot could only impede each other. Perhaps this would be advisable due to its pedagogic benefits, in the process of training; or in the context of disabilities, where the shooter requires help from another. In any case, such collaborations would always diminish the resulting credit of each of the shooters (Sosa 2011, 89; 2021, 13). The ideal situation of the practice is one where only what the archer does, as an individual, matters.

According to this analogy, Sosa's virtue epistemology assumes what we take to be a Cartesian imprint: the consideration of epistemic performances as attempts at answering a very specific kind question, of the form: *What should I believe now?* Frozen in time, the individual cogniser wonders if her belief is permissible in the light of the available evidence (deontology) and if it would be valuable as knowledge (axiology), making a decision that is essentially for her alone to make⁷.

Understood in this way, the analogy of the archer suggests that the boundaries of Sosa's Rome, gnoseology, have a triple wall, with their outline essentially coinciding:

A first wall would concern types of normativity, as we highlighted in §2. On its internal side would be the telic assessment of the performance, whereas on the external one would be the other normative evaluations we may make about it.

The second wall would pertain to temporality. Gnoseological assessments focus on the instant when the agent makes up her mind and believes, whereas intellectual ethics would focus either on what happened before (how her position resulted from inquiry, or in which other way she got to a position to know) or later (such as what consequences the belief would have when retrieved from memory).

Finally, the third wall concerns the attributability of the performance. Gnoseology assesses the individual's cognitive performance, not the interventions of others, whose contribution may either change the conditions of the assessment (as when a testifier contributes with new evidence) or affect the performance as an autonomous feat.

However, in our view, the idea that these three walls coincide is disputable. Where Sosa sees three walls with a common draw up, we observe three different walls with orthogonal relations. We agree that narrowing down the first wall may be a good strategy for the aforementioned reasons, but we do not think that it has to imply narrowing down the other two with the very same limits. On the contrary, we think that, on occasions, we ought to allow time and society a prominent place *inside* the domain of gnoseological assessments.

⁷ This is of course the initial state described by Descartes in his first meditation (2008, p. 13).

5. The relevance of time and society in Sosa's epistemology

Considering how much attention Sosa has devoted to both the temporal and the social dimensions of epistemic normativity, it may seem unfair for us to hold that he did not grant them their proper space. But let us consider some of the specific ways in which this attention has been driven.

On the one hand, with respect to temporality, a first aspect concerns the fixation and preservation of belief. Preserving a belief diachronically is, in Sosa's opinion, akin to the willful sustainment of a driving policy with the aim of driving safely and controlling risk, only that the policy would be in pursuit of an epistemic aim (2021, 25). This fundamental capacity allows us to store beliefs in our memory when we consider them apt performances safe enough from epistemic risk, perhaps forgetting their sources and their epistemic credentials (who told us so or where we learnt that). This possibility enables a possible conflict, namely a confrontation of information available at the present moment (via perception, testimony, etc.) and the one proceeding from this diachronic source, which is also recognised as a fundamental support of gnoseological assessments (2021, 106-8).

A second aspect of temporality in Sosa's epistemology is tied to his recognition that the overall epistemic evaluation of the quality of a belief at a specific moment may depend on the quality of the choices the agent made *before* that moment, which either put her in a position to judge appropriately or not. Sosa's analogy at this point is also illuminating: it could be the case that, while driving with the intention of getting home for dinner time, one finds oneself at a juncture where none of the options will do because one should have acted otherwise *before* that (2021, 106). But a similar point may be made with archery as well. For instance: if the archer did not choose the correctly weighted arrow in the past, perhaps her performance now may suffer. Analogously, in the epistemic case, what the agent should have done in the past (regarding how she conducted inquiry, for instance) may affect the quality of her cognitive performance *now*, in the light, for instance, of the poor or biased evidence that she gathered.

Thirdly, and relatedly, appropriate doxastic suspension, according to Sosa, does not only depend on one's current possession of a body of evidence but on the question of whether that is the one's *total* body of evidence, which invites a future consideration of the way evidence will evolve along time, an argument that he puts forward against evidentialism (2021, 60). Nevertheless, this perspective should align with the synchronic nature of the epistemological assessment, which Sosa consistently emphasizes, as being focused on a particular moment:

The focus here is on the moment of the assessed performance, the moment of abstaining. What may or may not happen in the future is irrelevant to that assessment, as we here conceive of it. Of course, inquiry into a question might be ongoing. But our assessment of the thinker's performance assesses their performance *at a moment*. (Of course, one could also assess their diachronic performance over a stretch, but that is another matter; we here focus on what a thinker does at a given moment. Although we can generalize from the latter to assessing their performance at *every* moment in a stretch, or at

most moments, etc., we here focus on the assessment of their performance at a given moment) (2021, 78).

On the other hand, the social aspects of belief formation also feature prominently in Sosa's telic virtue epistemology. Indeed, he is explicit throughout (2021) and other writings that the idea of a purely gnoseological assessment is crucial *to our social life*, since its very possibility lies at the root of our ability to properly rely on one another for shared information. This is, for instance, how Sosa concludes the section devoted to establishing the boundaries between gnoseology and intellectual ethics:

Exceptions there may be, but if we're to coordinate on properly shared information, we must commit to basing our deliberations on shared knowledge. Plato's noble lies might exceptionally serve a community well, but the corresponding risk is the fake news that destroys democracy. So long as a community is not riven into enemy camps, so long as we want and need to collaborate with underlying respect, proper deliberative cooperation will generally require that we must still judge, rather than quasi-judge, and believe rather than make-believe. And what we need to understand these desiderata is a proper understanding of what this desirable judgment is and how to assess it properly. That is why, despite the importance of broader intellectual ethics and a theory of proper inquiry, there is also a prior gnoseology essential in defining those central objectives of intellectual ethics in general, and of proper inquiry in particular (2021, 44)⁸.

According to this passage, not purely gnoseological assessments may occasionally be prudential, but their proliferation may end up damaging our democratic system with superficial judgments or pretended beliefs, in what sounds like an allusion to what is often called "post-truth". This explains why, despite the importance of broader intellectual ethics, the need for a purely gnoseological perspective remains essential *for social reasons*.

This social concern comes to the fore in Sosa's approach to several issues. Most obviously, in the importance that he gives to testimony as a social competence that enables hearers the sensitive transmission and reception of epistemic goods (important recent passages are 2011, 86-90, or 2021, 214). As we previously mentioned, the formation and preservation of judgmental belief as a piece of *known* information ready for social transmission depends on how we set the threshold for acceptable epistemic risk assessment, which is a social matter, since mistakes may affect others (2021, 165). On occasions, that threshold will depend on professional roles or situations, due to the expectations that our assertions will generate among potential recipients, but there must be a threshold that is not contingent upon specific contexts because stored beliefs, functioning as policies, may be invoked in numerous unforeseeable contexts and conveyed to indeterminate hearers through testimony. For that reason, society is instrumental in the settlement of a threshold for 'human knowledge,' which cannot be determined only considering the practical necessities of the individual (2015, 60).

⁸ We would like to thank an anonymous referee for *Philosophical Studies* for raising this specific idea and for drawing our attention towards the following passage.

Furthermore, Sosa's attention to the social dimensions of knowledge also becomes evident in the way he acknowledges that epistemic competences may not be exclusively confined to the individual but can also be manifested by a group, provided that the group is appropriately constituted and interconnected to a minimal extent. To illustrate this perspective, he draws an analogy to the immaculate state of a park after a bustling day, where all its users have diligently maintained cleanliness and order. In such a scenario, the condition of the park is considered a group achievement, "without being seated in a social organization," as it results from the informal collaboration of numerous individuals (Sosa 2007, 94). When extended to the social epistemic context, this implies that an individual's cognitive success may legitimately rely on a social dynamic for which no particular individual bears responsibility, yet it can be recognized as a genuine accomplishment of a collective kind. Thus, while rejecting a robust, non-reducible conception of collective competences, Sosa does acknowledge that groups may instantiate cognitive achievements⁹.

This overview indicates that Sosa has not overlooked the temporal or social dimensions of our epistemic life. Nevertheless, a pertinent question arises: have these approaches effectively captured any aspect in which either time or society influences the *gnoseological* aspect of cognitive performances? Our contention is that they have not¹⁰.

With respect to the temporal dimension, Sosa still assumes that the formation of belief, whether functionally or judgmentally, takes place as an instantaneous performance, one that does not itself persist over time, or only very minimally, even if its effects may well do. From Sosa's diachronic perspective, the agent may choose to preserve the result of her performance in time, but in a manner that does not impact the content of the commitment or its intensity. In this model, belief may not undergo evolution over time; instead, it is generated in an instant and subsequently sustained or reconsidered on another instantaneous occasion. In contrast, we will argue in §6 that there may be aspects of belief formation itself that unfold over time, requiring it to be considered as an ongoing process.

With respect to the social dimension, the process of belief formation is construed by Sosa as an individual accomplishment and may not be understood as an irreducibly collective achievement. The duty to preserve, so to speak, our social environment free from epistemic rubbish, is to each one of us independently to meet. In contrast, we will argue in §7 that there may be cases where apt beliefs are generated by collective agents, a possibility that demonstrates that social features permeate the *gnoseological* domain itself.

⁹ Sosa's attitudes towards groups are non-robust in the sense that he does not deem them to meet any organic criterion, unlike individuals. Whereas the fundamental aptitude of an individual's cognitive dispositions is "seated in one's brain, nervous system, and body" (Sosa 2017, p. 191), groups and social organizations lack an independent brain, and their alignment with cognitive processes may only meet a distributive criterion. For discussion, see Kallestrup (2020) and Pino (2021).

¹⁰ Some of these tensions were already highlighted by Kvanvig (1992, ch.7), which serves as a source of inspiration for what follows.

To be fair, Sosa does not explicitly reject the possibility that the features he excludes from the gnoseological and telic perspective *may* be examined within these frameworks, which allows for the possibility we are suggesting here. Here is a relevant passage:

In my view [...] there are distinctive competences whose exercise can *constitute* knowledge. And a competence whose exercise reliably aids our search for truth—even so as to be the salient explanation of why truth is then attained—might easily be one whose exercise would *not* constitute knowledge. It may just fail to be of the right sort to be thus constitutive (2015, 41; see also 2021, 200 note 18).

Sosa's employment of modal ("might easily be", "may just fail to be") imply the possibility that competencies that reliably assist in our quest for truth (perhaps occurring in moments preceding cognitive performance or involving agents other than the individual) *may* in fact *be* constitutive to the gnoseological performance, even if contingently so. In that case, those features could also be evaluated telically, based on their effectiveness in constituting the goal of apt belief. This is what we aim to propose in the next section, where we will not assert that *all* cognitive performances extend over time and involve collaboration with others, but only that *some* do, in a manner that makes gnoseological assessment appropriate for them¹¹.

Under this interpretation, the rest of this paper should be understood as an invitation to explore these possibilities more thoroughly. If they do exist, we will argue that the three walls of Sosa's Rome do not align. Perhaps we can preserve and even narrow down the first wall (gnoseology), as Sosa attempts to do, while rejecting its coincidence with the limits of the other two, time and individuality. We argue that this possibility has been obscured by the analogy of the archer, a sport focused on the instant release of an arrow by an individual in isolation. Hence, we have good reasons to explore alternative analogies for apt belief formation, free of these burdens.

6. First alternative analogy: *the slalom skier*

In contrast to archery, many sports involve extended athletic feats requiring strategic planning and control over time. Take slalom skiing as an example; the moment the skier crosses the finish line, though significant, is relatively inconsequential compared to the dynamic events unfolding during the descent. From the initial jump out of the starting gate to swift transitions between pole plants punctuating the descent, the skier skillfully absorbs terrain variations, adjusting speed based on her

¹¹ Here is another illuminative analogy by Sosa: "Suppose a mysterious box lies closed before us, and we wonder what it contains. How can we find out? We might of course just open the lid. In pursuit of this objective we will then exercise certain competences, perhaps even character traits (if the box is locked, or the lid stuck), such as persistence and resourcefulness. And perhaps these qualities (in certain contexts, and in certain combinations) do lead us reliably to the truth. Nevertheless, the exercise of *such* intellectual virtues need not and normally will not *constitute* knowledge, not even when that exercise does indirectly lead us to the truth." (2015, 42). Regarding the idea that they "need not and normally will not," we agree with the former but not with the latter. In any case, this leaves open the possibility that it *may well do*, which is the aspect we will explore in what follows.

perception of the snow quality that particular day, and competitors' performance. This makes successive decisions throughout her journey integral to the achievement, rather than being auxiliary or preparatory to it.

Forming a belief, we argue, often resembles slalom skiing more than archery, involving a prolonged change of attitude that demands control and care. The distinction between instrumental preparation and the constitutive features of the practice remains valid: actions that the skier undertakes before or after her performance are not inherent components of it, similar to the archer's case. These actions include training and practices that may span over years, concentration exercises occurring before the performance, or consequences thereof. While these activities may play an instrumental role in her success, none of these factors would be part of the teleological assessment of the performance itself. Nonetheless, this does not prevent the feat itself from taking place over time.

Not all thoughts and actions that the skier engages in *during* the performance are inherent to the practice itself. She may be humming a particular tune in her head or making decisions about her upcoming holidays, for instance. While these incidental thoughts may be relevant in contributing to her concentration and final success, they are not constitutive of her feat. The value of her achievement would not diminish if she had different thoughts or none at all, as long as such changes did not affect her performance. However, many of the actions that occur during the descent are constitutive of the practice. For instance, had she not been so precise in her initial jump, or had she not shifted her position with such agility between turns, she would have performed less proficiently. Unlike the archer, who releases her arrow and observes the outcome, it is as if the skilled skier controls the arrow's flight.

With this analogy in mind, we can now transition to the epistemic domain. Inquiry emerges within it as a temporal performance with a final goal: unraveling the answer to a specific question¹². This goal seems to be constitutive in the sense that the agent engages in inquiry only to the extent that she aims at it, organizing and structuring her performance towards it¹³. Moreover, inquiry encompasses the appropriate development of cognitive attitudes, which can be evaluated telically based on the effectiveness with which the goal is achieved and how this attainment reflects competence.

Consider how a police inspector conducts her inquiry: she engages in various actions over time, including interviewing witnesses, meticulously searching for clues and traces, or scouring old news on the internet, among other tasks. Each of these actions potentially has numerous sub-goals, all structured towards the final goal of figuring out, say, who committed the murder. Throughout the

¹² We consider judgmental belief as only contingently resulting from inquiry, but the issue is contentious, and we will not rely on this here.

¹³ For a defence of the idea that inquiry has a constitutive goal see Kelp (2021, 4), but see Friedman (2023) for discussion.

process, she becomes more convinced of a certain possibility, such as the identification of a suspect or the perceived trustworthiness of specific sources, in light of the evolving evidence.

Fundamental to our argument is that not only do her actions evolve over time, but her cognitive attitudes do as well. Perhaps she starts with a faint suspicion that gradually transforms into a hunch, tempered with hesitation as she senses the possibility of deception, prompting further exploration of alternative possibilities. Finally, the inspector forms a certain belief as an attempt at solving the case, but there may not be any precise moment when this happens. At any event, this final step, in Sosa's terms, explicit "alethic affirmation," may be only minimally responsible for the cognitive success, which gradually occurred as her attitudes implicitly evolved over time, intertwined with her actions during the inquiry.

An objection, aligned with Sosa's perspective, might argue that, instead of full-blown beliefs, the inquirer would instantiate other kinds of zetetic attitudes over time, including, for instance, degrees of confidence or credences (Sosa 2015, 80-85, 113), transitional attitudes (Staffel 2021), hypotheses (Palmira 2020), or endorsements (Fleisher 2018). While the appropriate formation of each of those attitudes would be analogous to the skier crossing one gate after the other until the finishing line, only that final step would represent the settled belief and may constitute knowledge.

In response, we might argue that while this may well be true, the formation of the cognitive attitude of full belief can also occur over time, as the agent's inclination towards its adoption is progressively influenced by the zetetic attitudes mentioned above. Coming to believe is a process that gradually evolves and settles thanks to the appearance of various cues, new information, or reflected intuitions. This diachronic conception of belief formation is what gives the skier analogy its argumentative advantage over those based on synchronous, instantaneous performances, such as archery, where the agent cannot influence the fly of the arrow.

Indeed, the notion that judgment may take time seems to be already incorporated into Sosa's view, given his consideration of belief formation as an agential performance, in contrast with the a-temporal logical implications that are the focus in the theory of justification. Consider the structure of judgmental belief: it is a complex intentional action requiring the implementation of means toward an end, namely, the consideration of evidence toward the formation of the attitude. This structured occurrence requires time. Judgment could be likened to a tennis serve, consisting of two distinct moments: the toss of the ball in the air and the hit of the ball, which would be akin to affirmation in judgment¹⁴. If this analogy is on the right track, not only would the consideration of the evidence (the toss of the ball) take time, but also the actual hit, the affirmation. Picture a slow-motion recording of the entire serve: the hit does last for at least some milliseconds. The question is: why should it not

¹⁴ We owe this suggestion to J. Adam Carter.

last anything longer than that? Why not a second or two? Why not a minute, or one hour, or a year? If affirmation actually occurs across a stretch of time, where is the limit?

Our case is even stronger if we realize that, as a matter of fact, judgment does not necessarily occur upon the conclusion of inquiry. On the contrary, it is highly likely that, on many occasions, the agent will come to believe *as the inquiry develops*, as the slalom skier analogy illustrates: the cognitive achievement that constitutes knowledge possesses a temporal dimension. The diachronic settlement of the inquirer's attitudes progressively influences and is driven by inquiry. While there may be eventual "Aha!" moments, similar to instances where the skier executes a particularly brilliant move that ultimately secures victory, in most cases, the success of apt belief is achieved in tandem with the evolution of evidence and experience, the confirmation of hypotheses, and the transition from temporary attitudes to settling ones, spanning time periods rather than instants, and not necessarily short periods.

If all of this is correct, the diachronic perspective of gnoseology should not only concern how we store and preserve something that is originally an instantaneous achievement, but also how that cognitive accomplishment is actually attained throughout a temporally extended process that ought to be assessed in telic terms¹⁵. In other words, the boundaries of gnoseology are not confined to those of the instant.

7. Second alternative analogy: *the football match*

Archery is not only a sport of the instant; it is also highly individualistic. As a team sport, the points earned by each member simply aggregate, and the effects of belonging to a team seem to be merely psychological. Perhaps we could make sense of archery as a collective achievement by envisioning the situation of an army's squadron of archers; but even in this context, when evaluating the squadron's performance, we observe only individual archers coordinating to release their arrows on the orders of their commander but, strictly speaking, each archer would be creditable for the release of her own arrow, not those of others.

In contrast, irreducibly collective sports, such as football, cannot be played individually. Consider the way a complex, rehearsed move unfolds as a symphony orchestrated by the manager: one player skillfully passes the ball to a teammate who anticipates the moves and positions of others strategically; meanwhile, another player makes a well-timed run, drawing defenders away to create space, while an unmarked fourth player receives the ball at the right time, effortlessly scoring with a skilled kick. Instead of being a succession of solo performances, the final goal is a collaborative masterpiece, where individual skills harmonize to achieve a common goal. The history of football highlights

¹⁵ Relatedly, not all rational assessment is time-sliced and synchronic; we assess the quality of processes, as Podgorski (2016) has defended against Hedden (2015).

exceptional individual players renowned for their skills, but no individual can win a match on her own. On the contrary, team performance results from individuals' engagement in what Raimo Tuomela refers to as the "we-mode", requiring "that they understand what the group ethos is, that is to say, what its central or constitutive goals, values, beliefs, norms, and standards are and what it is to take it, or its ingredients, as one's reason for action" (2007, 5).

Similar to the skier who could have attitudes and make decisions during the slalom descent that were not part of the practice, group members may also act during the match based on reasons unrelated to the group ethos, moved by individual motivations, as long as these actions do not contradict their primary commitment to the group. However, it is only to the extent that they engage in the we-mode that the cooperative and coordinated efforts of individuals work together harmoniously to advance the group ethos. Described in this way, group sport performances are not just a matter of individual task allocation structured towards a common goal, but of genuinely collective actions aimed at achieving irreducibly collective accomplishments.

Let's now shift our focus to the epistemic side of the analogy. As in the case of sports, epistemic feats are often attributed to individual excellence, such as our imagined police inspector in the previous section, and the history of science showcases figures—from Galileo to Curie or Einstein—whose genius has made a significant impact. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that epistemic practices, including scientific ones, are driven by objectives that surpass individual performances, and cognitive achievements often arise from social collaboration performed in the we-mode. Scientific teams working in Big Science, for instance, collaborate according to methods, standards, and protocols, often involving hundreds or even thousands of people working together as a whole towards the resolution of specific questions¹⁶. But this collaborative approach extends beyond formally established scientific teams to encompass entities with differing degrees of organization, from states and business companies to unions, civic associations, or even rather informal groups, such as classmates, families, or neighbours.

Consider the less formal scenario: a group of friends engaged in a lively conversation, sparked by a specific question, whose answer is far from evident—perhaps something like, *What is the song that our favorite band has played live the most over the years?* Intrigued by the question, the friends proceed to a series of interventions where various perspectives and opinions are exchanged. One of them suggests that it must be one of the band's earliest tunes, while another enumerates the most popular ones, and a third one passionately reminds the rest of how spectacular some particular theme is in the live version. Simultaneously, one of them searches the internet for information that may contribute to the quest,

¹⁶ Two famous cases are the research conducted at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) in Geneva or the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO), whose efforts were eventually recognized with the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2013 and 2017, respectively. François Englert and Peter Higgs were awarded for the former, and Rainer Weiss, Barry Barish, and Kip Thorne for the latter, but it was the collective efforts of thousands of scientists that led to those groundbreaking discoveries.

even if not conclusively, while another one is messaging a knowledgeable acquaintance who offers some ideas that motivate a certain answer. In the midst of this collaborative effort, one of them struggles to remember a crucial fact, and eventually succeeds thanks to some clever clues provided by a nearby colleague¹⁷. Informal as the situation is, not anything goes; the group is seriously engaged in the quest, and negligence or quirkiness are hardly tolerated. As a result of this collaborative effort, just as the football team managed to score, our group of friends finally conclude and correctly identify the song.

In this example, the relevant question is not *What do I believe now?* but *What do we believe now?* The deliberation itself is an irreducibly collective endeavor. Groups with shared epistemic goals, just as football teams, are to be understood as chartered groups (Schmitt, 1994)¹⁸ formed and sustained with specific epistemic goals, while the attainment of these goals depends on norms, rules, and standards governing the activity of the members while acting in the we-mode. The ideal group epistemic dynamic, from this perspective, would not be one that aggregates the individual contributions as votes are counted in an election, aiming just at blunt consensus, all-cost agreement, or cordial disagreement. On the contrary, epistemically virtuous groups would require its components to perform together in a coordinated way towards the shared objective of getting things aptly right, convincing others and being convinced by them through rational deliberation.

Within this perspective, the relevant aspects of the group's performance should be evaluated telically, considering the way the group accomplishes the specific epistemic objective that it aims at. This prompts us to reconsider Sosa's analogy of the park as social dynamics resulting from individual performances. According to that analogy, the existence of valuable knowledge in society is rooted in responsible processes of belief-formation and testimony that were performed by each individual. In contrast, what we want to emphasize is that social groups are actually coordinated in the very *production* of knowledge, by virtue of the members' commitment to a certain group ethos¹⁹. If this perspective

¹⁷ All of these interactions represent the functioning of a dynamical distributed cognitive system, as described by Palermos (2016, 418). In fact, the conversational scenario described resembles the working of *transactional memory systems* (TMS), where a group of people can collaboratively encode, store, and retrieve pieces of information through active communication to which no single individual has access on their own, forming a system that goes beyond its individual composition (Wegner, 1987, 190; Theiner, 2013, 66; Tollefsen et al., 2013, 55).

¹⁸ According to Schmitt, a chartered group is "one founded to perform a particular action or actions of a certain kind" (1994, 272). For a chartered group to be recognized as such, it must meet three conditions. First, group members must express their willingness to act together or jointly. Secondly, such a group must work towards a goal or office as specified by its charter (1994, 273). Finally, since "[a] chartered group has no life apart from its office," it must make every effort at hand to fulfill it—regardless of whether the group succeeds in achieving it or not. Thus, both the group epistemic agent and football teams should be envisioned as chartered groups whose actions are directed towards a specific objective or office as set by their respective charters and manifest no activity other than that which is elicited by their office.

¹⁹ At this juncture, two distinct questions emerge, each representing different chapters of social epistemology, both supported by extensive literature. The first question concerns the normative standards that should govern the epistemic performance of individual agents within social contexts. The second question addresses the foundations of an epistemology of groups. Despite their differences, we hold that these concerns can be addressed concurrently through a noseological lens, as encompassed within a broader telic perspective.

is accurate, summativist accounts of group belief and knowledge fall short in explaining how we may collectively attain our cognitive goals. The credit for success belongs to the collective in ways that cannot be reduced to the credit of the individuals, and the individuals' ability to know what the group first discovered is contingent upon that original collective achievement²⁰.

8. Implications: towards an epistemology of conversation

In contrast to the archer analogy, our alternatives have highlighted the diachronic and collective dimensions of belief formation. There are attempts that may be constitutive of apt beliefs, unfolding over time and collectively. Furthermore, our two points complement each other, with each perspective boosting the effects of the other: precisely when we acknowledge the significance of time for gnoseological assessment, we also realize that different agents may contribute significantly at different moments in a temporal succession of coordinated contributions in pursue of the group's epistemic goal. The transitional cognitive attitudes of different individuals—suggestions, hypotheses, doubts, intuitions, and so on—are interwoven through the conversation, altering the group's stance towards the question, contributing to the reliability of the process and, eventually, the aptness of the belief.

Our intention has not been to challenge Sosa's demarcation between gnoseology and intellectual ethics. Quite the opposite: we believe that the effort to establish that boundary is suitable. However, we deny that the limits of this boundary align precisely with those of individual instantaneous assessment—namely, *What do I believe now?* On the contrary, a gnoseological assessment targets something that may happen over time, thanks to the collaboration of different agents that instantiate epistemic virtues that yield reliable cognitive attitudes and policies.

Until now, social epistemology has predominantly focused on phenomena such as testimony and disagreement, both associated with the immediate transmission of knowledge from one individual to another, but it is time to shift our focus towards how we collaboratively pursue knowledge over time, even across history, through the evolution of cognitive attitudes formed with others in conversation²¹. This social perspective underscores our epistemic competencies in the diachronic collective pursuit of knowledge, moving beyond our role as mere punctual conveyors of known information. Specifically, the envisioned perspectives would aid us in illuminating conversations from a gnoseological standpoint, interpreting them as dynamic epistemic processes where speakers share

²⁰ One of us (Pino 2021) has offered additional insights into the conditions under which group competence can be situated within the framework of Sosa's virtue reliabilism. For a more detailed description of the constitution of group epistemic agency, refer to (Pino 2023).

²¹ Two important recent contributions in this direction are Goldberg (2020) and Greco (2021). In particular, at the heart of Goldberg's (2020) is the claim that conversational exchanges are influenced by two kinds of rational pressures: those that derive strictly from epistemology and those that derive from the norms that govern our interpersonal relationships — a divide that echoes the one between gnoseology and intellectual ethics that we have discussed here.

perspectives on a topic. This process unfolds over time, is inherently social, and is often guided by a shared epistemic goal pursued collectively, of the form *What do we think about this?* In contrast to the Cartesian imprint, which confined genuine gnoseological assessment to what an isolated self could think about a topic in a particular instant, our proposed approach seeks to understand how collective subjects aim at knowing over time²².

9. Conclusions

Two conclusions encapsulate our proposal. Firstly, gnoseology possesses a temporal dimension that extends beyond the diachronic storage of synchronic cognitive success; *knowledge is achieved over time*. Secondly, gnoseology exhibits a social dimension that surpasses the individual responsibility of contributing to knowledge and testimony for the epistemic common good; *knowledge is achieved by collective agents*. These temporal and social perspectives not only highlight features that are instrumental or preparatory with respect to belief formation but may be constitutive of the telic cognitive performance.

Returning to our analogy, we align with Sosa's strategy of narrowing down the walls of Rome, but perhaps the moment has come to transform Rome's empire into something like a deliberative democracy. A clear boundary must be established between gnoseology and intellectual ethics, one that will prove decisive in many current discussions in normative epistemology, but it does not have to align with the boundaries of instantaneous or individual belief formation processes. On the contrary, gnoseology has temporal and social aspects that are worth studying²³.

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²² Our historical inspiration at this point, rather than from Descartes' *Meditations*, would come from Montaigne's *Art de conférer* (see Navarro 2009) or from Spinoza's idea that *the bodies encounter in the multitude* (Pino 2023).

²³ This paper revisits and develops the central ideas of Navarro and Pino (2021). It benefited from the feedback received at the workshop "The Epistemology of Ernest Sosa" held at the University of Seville, co-organised by Cogito Glasgow, in October 2023. The authors would like to thank the Spanish Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes for supporting a stay by Jesús Navarro at the University of Glasgow (Cogito Epistemology Research Centre), made possible by the European Union's NextGenerationEU initiative. The authors are involved in two different research projects Nanorin (PID2021-123938NB-I00), and Metaprodes (PID2021-124152NB-I00), both funded by MCIN/ AEI / <https://doi.org/10.13039/501100011033> / FEDER, UE.

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