AN EPISTEMIC NON-INDIVIDUALISTIC CONCEPTION OF REFLECTION: AN ESSAY*

ENSAIO SOBRE UM PONTO DE VISTA EPISTÊMICO NÃO INDIVIDUALISTA ACERCA DA REFLEXÃO

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ABSTRACT *This essay aims to motivate an epistemic non-individualistic conception of reflection. The proposal is non-individualistic because (a) it addresses more than individual metacognitive performance and (b) it refers to a situation in which two or more people are in dialogical disagreement about the same subject matter or target proposition; (c) their dispute is based on conversational space and they are entitled to expect one another to be engaged in attempts at truth, avoidance of error, and understanding. I call this proposal a Dialectical account of Reflection (DaR). According to (DaR), reflection is a conscious and intentional intellectual operation through which an individual becomes aware of the contents of disputed beliefs in a dialogical or interpersonal exchange, involving both her own beliefs and the beliefs of her interlocutors. In (DaR), reflection produces the epistemic good of avoiding epistemic vices and promoting epistemic moderation.*

RESUMO *Este ensaio visa motivar uma concepção epistêmica não individualista sobre a reflexão. A proposta é não individualista porque (a) não considera apenas o desempenho metacognitivo individual; (b) refere-se a uma situação em que duas ou mais pessoas estão em desacordo dialógico sobre o mesmo assunto ou alvo da proposta; (c) essas pessoas realizam uma disputa com base no espaço de conversação e têm o direito legítimo de esperar umas das outras o compromisso com a busca da verdade, evitar os erros e o entendimento. Chamo esta proposta de Perspectiva Dialética sobre Reflexão. Segundo essa perspectiva, reflexão é uma operação intelectual consciente e intencional por meio da qual uma pessoa toma conhecimento do conteúdo de crenças disputadas em uma troca dialógica ou interpessoal, envolvendo tanto suas próprias crenças quanto as crenças de seus interlocutores. Para essa proposta, a reflexão produz o bem epistêmico de evitar vícios epistêmicos e promover a moderação epistêmica.*

1. In contemporary epistemological debates, reflection is understood as a metacognitive activity. In this sense, reflecting is an individual self-conscious and self-referential performance characterized as the act of accessing and critically examining one's own beliefs, thoughts, and other epistemic states. However, epistemologists disagree about the epistemic value of this performance and the kind of outcome it could generate. The heart of this disagreement lies in disputes between internalists and externalists about the notion of *epistemic justification* (Alston, 1989). For some epistemologists, justification is a necessary condition for knowledge and is associated with the reflective access the epistemic agent has to reasons that provide guarantees to answerable beliefs (Chisholm, 1988; 1989); for them, a belief can only become knowledge if it is justified, and it is justified only if it is based on reflection. In contrast, other epistemologists consider that epistemic justification involves the natural causal process, whose chain need not necessarily be reflectively accessible to the agent (Goldman, 1979)[1].

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1   I also exclude those who claim that justification (reflective or not) plays no role in the attribution of knowledge (*e.g.* Kornblith, 2008).

I will not address the debate about justification between internalism and externalism here[2]. My concern only relates to the fact that internalists *defend* and externalist *attack* what I call the *epistemic individualistic conception of reflection* (EICR). (EICR) is a position in which reflection is an operation of the mind, through which an individual epistemic agent consciously accesses, explores, evaluates, endorses, and calibrates the content and reliability of her own beliefs.

When epistemologists talk about the value of reflection, they are almost always referring to (EICR). This article aims to stimulate an alternative way of stating that reflection has epistemic value. I regard reflection as *thinking about thinking*, although not exclusively about my own thinking[3]. I propose an *epistemic non-individualistic conception of reflection*. My proposal is *non-individualistic* because (a) it addresses more than individual metacognitive performance and (b) it refers to a situation in which two or more people are in dialogical disagreement about the same subject matter or target proposition, (c) their dispute is based on conversational space and they are entitled to expect one another to be engaged in attempts to meet epistemic goals (truth, avoidance of error, and understanding etc.)[4]. I call this proposal a *Dialectical account of Reflection* (DaR):

> (DaR) Reflection is a conscious and intentional intellectual operation through which an individual becomes aware of the contents of disputed beliefs in a dialogical or interpersonal exchange, involving both *her own beliefs and the beliefs of her interlocutors.*

Accordingly, (DaR) addresses a specific field in Epistemology, which we may call the *epistemology of inquiry* (see Friedman, 2019), since it deals with the (normative) requirements for an agent to be a virtuous researcher and thinker. When a person becomes an inquirer, certain attitudes favor her attainment of epistemic goods. We *hope* she will look for the truth, consider the available evidence, accept the best explanation, cooperate with other epistemic agents, avoid everything that *gets in the way* of knowledge, and so on. Moreover, when someone enters a conflict of opinion with other people, we are entitled to expect them to critically and consciously assess their reason for believing. In the context of disagreement about reasons, reflection could be very valuable.

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2   There is important literature on this topic. See Fumerton (1988), Alston (1985; 1986; 1989), Kornblith (2001), Sosa & Bonjour (2003), Goldberg (2007), and Bergmann (2008).
3   In this regard, I am following the arguments put forward by P. Smith (2019).
4   This also applies to the case of *change in belief*, when an individual confronts her own future self.

2. The article is organized into three parts: in the first part, I discuss how E. Sosa (2017), D. Smithies (2015; 2016; 2019) and J. Greco (2019) present reflection as a performance to respond to epistemic challenges to justified beliefs, but not as a condition for knowing[5]; in the second part, I present the idea of a *Dialectical account of Reflection*; and in the last part, I claim that, at least in the dialectical scenario, (a) to reflect is an epistemically reasonable and desirable performance because (b) reflection produces the epistemic good of avoiding epistemic vices and promoting epistemic moderation.

I. Reflecting as responding to an epistemic challenge

3. Disagreement between epistemologists about the epistemic value of reflection arises as much from research into the conditions of knowledge as from discussions about its value.

    In relation to the *conditions of knowledge*, disputes between epistemologists focus on whether reflective justification is a condition for someone to know. They therefore discuss whether reflective justification can overcome at least three obstacles: Agrippa's Trilemma, voluntarism and overintellectualization. In the first case, *Agrippa's Trilemma* functions as follows: if an individual holds the belief *that p* and denies the belief *that ¬p*, she *must* have a justification for this. If the individual declares that she has such a justification, then we may ask her to present it, and to defend it against the three objections: infinite regress (where the reason refers to another reason which, in turn, refers to another reason*, ad infinitum*); *vicious circularity* (where, in the chain of reasons, one reason is justified by a previously presented reason); and arbitrary assumption (where the reason is not based on anything, but is simply assumed without any reason). Secondly, strong doxastic voluntarism usually argues that when we reflect, our beliefs are typically formed by a decision, and our knowledge of our own beliefs is explained by the fact that we decide what to believe because of something we discover about our minds. Finally, reflective justification tends to *overintellectualize* our cognitive activities because people have to be able to intellectually examine their own performances and cognitive achievements; thus, knowledge is rare and poorly distributed across the population.

4. In relation to epistemic value, most epistemologists think that the truth is the highest epistemological goal. But it is also common for philosophers to

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5   In the case of Sosa, this is a condition for (*animal*) *knowledge*.

assume something even more powerful, including the thesis that is referred to as *veritistic value monism*: "Believing truly is unique in being of fundamental epistemic value" (Ahlstrom-Vij, 2013, p. 19). If we think in these terms, the epistemic value of reflection must be explained instrumentally in relation to its reliability or conduciveness towards truth.

Otherwise, from an epistemically pluralistic point of view, we might conceive of another place and value for reflection that is not committed to the thesis that reflection is a (necessary) condition for the attribution of knowledge, understanding or another epistemic state; and is also not committed to the thesis that reflection provides more reliability for true beliefs. In recent works, some epistemologists have assumed a perspective on reflection as a performance that seeks *to respond to demands for reasons in an epistemic set*. They talk about reflection as a critical examination or critical scrutiny that arises from the challenge imposed on an epistemic agent, but not as condition for knowing. For them, reflecting either has a final value or has the instrumental value of maintaining belief as justifiably accountable in the "space of reasons".

5. In this section, I will discuss recent works by D. Smithies (2015; 2016; 2019), E. Sosa (2015; 2017), and J. Greco (2019) that address the epistemic value of reflection. Although they present important theses about reflection as a condition for maintaining a belief as justifiably accountable within the space of reasons, I note that they retain the notion that reflection is an individual metacognition and, consequently, remains associated with an *epistemic individualistic conception of reflection* (EICR)[6].

I.1 Sosa on judgment and affirming fully aptly

6. As we know, Sosa established a two-level epistemology, featuring the categories reflective knowledge (RK) and animal knowledge (AK) (Sosa, 2007). Reflective knowledge not only requires apt belief, but apt belief that can also be defended as apt (Sosa, 2007, p. 24; 2011, pp. 67-95). This requires the cognitive agent to have an "epistemic perspective" about her own beliefs, a perspective from which she endorses the source of her belief and from which she can establish that this source is reliable for producing the truth (Sosa, 2009, p. 135). Therefore, for (RK), it is not enough to believe correctly or aptly (to believe the truth of *p* for

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6   However, there is a crucial difference between them. In Sosa's two-level epistemology, reflection is a necessary condition for a type of knowledge, *reflective knowledge*. On the other hand, Smithies and Greco refute the idea that reflection is a condition for knowing.

the sake of one's own intellectual competence), but to believe aptly in an apt belief. It is important to note that *reflective knowledge* requires a *defensibly apt belief*, that is, "apt belief that the subject aptly believes to be apt, and whose aptness the subject can therefore defend against relevant skeptical doubts" (Sosa, 2007, p. 24). Reflection is a condition for a type of knowledge, typically human knowledge (knowing full well). That is to say, reflection is a means to confront, combat and overcome the skeptical (modern) challenge.

In Sosa's thinking, reflection is subjective self-review. For him, "reflection is the *operation of the mind by which it is consciously aware of its own conscious contents*" (Sosa, 2014, P. 175; 2017, P. 101).

Recently, Sosa (2015, 2017) has located the place and value of reflection in the distinction between "credence" and "judgment". *Credence* is "implicit confidence" in one's own belief, discarding contrary evidence. Along with the reliabilists, Sosa acknowledges that appropriately formed beliefs guide our lives and help us navigate the common world. In everyday life this kind of belief is almost never in serious doubt (Sosa, 2017, p. 8). *Judgment*, on the other hand, is affirmation with the deliberate and conscious intention to competently affirm something against skeptical challenges. Judgment has two characteristics: (a) it "involves a second-order stance regarding one's own affirming" (Sosa, 2017, p. 92) and; (b) it "is affirmation in the endeavor to affirm aptly" (Sosa, 2017, p. 89). Judgment is important for an agent's cognitive economy, because epistemic agents are not only aiming for the truth of the statement; "[t]hey also *judge*, aiming for *aptness* of affirmation" (Sosa, 2017, p. 82).

7. Among other things, the highest level of judgment involves *second-order awareness* and *affirming. Second-order awareness* and *affirming* are the products of reflective performance. *Higher-order awareness* can only be conceived in contexts in which the agent already has an apt belief, but needs to make a critical assessment of all the available evidence; this can occur in any context that requires some kind of cognitive assessment (*e.g.* a courtroom, a criminal investigation, a philosophy seminar, but also at the doctor's office or on the basketball court). In order to have higher-order *awareness*, all reasons must be carefully considered, including the agent's initial reasons (Sosa, 2017, p. 101).

Through this reasoning, Sosa (2017) introduces a performative aspect into epistemic attribution: the highest epistemic achievement is *to affirm fully aptly*, and reflective judgment is a necessary condition to *affirm fully aptly*:

> The agent *affirms* […] fully aptly only if guided to a correct *and apt* affirmation by second-order awareness of his competence to so affirm. […] The affirmation must be safe because the agent must know that he *would* succeed aptly if he tried, so that *if he*

> *affirmed he would do so correctly*, which is tantamount to safety of affirmation and, in turn, to safety of judgment. (Sosa, 2017, p. 90)

The performative act of *affirming fully aptly* or *affirming competently* (more than *affirming correctly*) requires a second-order awareness of one's ability to make an assertion against skeptical challenges, risks, and threats. This is because, through reflection, the agent must know that she is successful and her statement is upheld in safe judgment. If a judgment is, in fact, apt, the affirmation is fully apt and secure.

8. My question is: why should rational agents have to *affirm fully aptly*? More precisely, why does a person have to *affirm competently* rather than *just affirm correctly*? The question is not why *affirming competently* is more valuable than *just affirming correctly* – in fact, *affirming competently* is more valuable, because it reveals a higher degree of examination and safety. The problem concerns the type of commitment that an agent assumes, which requires her to judge her beliefs and to *affirm competently*. Where does the commitment to *affirm competently* come from? Why be *so* rational?

Sosa identifies an individualistic scenario – "epistemic risk" as an element that imposes a judgmental action on the agent and her need to "affirm with propriety". Sosa is thinking of a self-critical agent, who anticipates the possibility that her beliefs are not sufficiently safe or who is critical of her ability to achieve her epistemic goals. For this agent, the assessment of risk is inherently a second-order performance.

Meanwhile, from a broader perspective, is there a significant difference in daily life between "affirming correctly" and "affirming aptly"? If a person "affirms correctly" that there is a barn in front of her and another person affirms the same thing "aptly", is the distinction between these "statements" relevant, or of no interest to us? "Affirming" in its strong sense (affirming aptly) is not a behavior we perform in soliloquy. "Affirming" is almost always something we enact in front of other people, when someone challenges us to give our reasons. Outside the context of epistemic challenge, "affirming" in its strong sense does not make sense.

I.2 Smithies on critical reflection

9. D. Smithies (2015; 2016; 2019) develops an auspicious proposal that seeks to offer a theory of justification and establish both a place and an epistemic value for reflection. In addition, Smithies advances arguments in response to

skeptical challenges to the value of reflection, especially as we find them in the works of H. Kornblith (2008; 2012).

Smithies' proposal resides in the gap in epistemology between internalism and externalism and is clearly based on a critical interpretation of W. Alston's epistemology, and inspired by T. Burge. His conception of reflection has strictly epistemological implications (it is the basis of his theory of justification) and metaphysical ones, since, for him, reflection is a necessary condition for an individual to be a person. Smithies argues for a version of the *JJ-Principle,* according to which an agent has a justification for believing in *p* only if she has a higher order justification for believing that she has a justification for believing[7].

10. Two ideas are central to Smithies' reasoning: *critical reflection* and *responsiveness to reasons*.

Based on a critical interpretation of W. Alston's epistemology, Smithies' starting point (2019, p. 4) is the hypothesis that the theme of epistemic justification is relevant "because of its connection with the practice of reflection on the sustention of our epistemic states". The main challenge of a theory of justification is to explain why a belief must be sustained after it is challenged. For Alston (1989, p. 273), the concept of justification exists "because of the practice of critical reflection on our beliefs, of challenging their credentials and responding to such challenges". For a belief that *p* to be a justified belief, it must be situated in a position that can successfully respond to such a challenge and survive critical reflection (Alston, 1989, pp. 225-6; *apud* Smithies, 2015, p. 226).

In this sense, for Smithies (2015, p. 226), *critical reflection* is a higher-order scrutiny of the justificatory credentials of our beliefs. We therefore find ourselves in a position to examine which beliefs we have justifications for maintaining in the light of this higher-order scrutiny. The result of this is that we can "bring our beliefs into line with our higher-order reflections about which beliefs we have justification to hold". In this sense, justified belief necessitates being reflectively responsive to reasons (Smithies, 2016, p. 58).

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7   Here is how Smithies (2019, pp. 12-14) demonstrates *the JJ-Principle*: Necessarily, you have justification to believe that *p*, if and only if you have higher-order justification to believe that you have justification to believe that *p*. The complete argument is: (1) You have justification to believe that *p*, if and only if you have some basis on which you would believe that *p* after a fully justified process of reflection; (2) You have some basis on which you would believe that *p* after a fully justified process of reflection, if and only if you have higher-order justification to believe that you have justification to believe that *p*; (3) Therefore, you have justification to believe that *p*, if and only if you have higher-order justification to believe that you have justification to believe that *p*.

Smithies argues that epistemic reflection is a necessary requirement for an individual to be a person. Although Smithies is in good company, this thesis is not uncontroversial:

> Reflection is valuable not because of its reliability, but because it is the *sine qua none* for being a person who can be held responsible for their beliefs and choices. Assuming that personhood is intrinsically valuable, so is reflection. To explain the value of reflection in terms of reliability alone is to overlook the evaluative significance of the distinction between persons and other animals. (Smithies, 2016, p. 66)

For Smithies (forthcoming), an individual is a person if she can be epistemically responsible for her beliefs, choices, and actions and is able to calibrate her beliefs to normative requirements and standards. Like Sosa, Smithies argues that people are different from other animals, among other things, because of their ability to reflect.

12. However, I have two questions about Smithies' proposal. First, he states that the human capacity for reflection emerges from the social and interpersonal context of participation in human relationships (Smithies, 2016, p. 64), while remaining bound to a "robust and normative idealization" of epistemic rationality. This may mean that reflective rationality is not a requirement for everyday human practice (even if it does not mean that it is an irrelevant and unattainable ideal): "[t]he ideal of epistemic rationality may not be humanly achievable, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to get as close as we can." (2019, p. 26) Given that reflective ability arises from the context of human interaction, doesn't this context become the entire space for reflective achievement (without having to resort to "robust idealization")? Reflection as a normative idealization (and, as a rarely attainable ideal) is detached from the ordinary practice of human agents involved in the different spheres of cognitive practice. This makes the critical assessment of beliefs rare and, perhaps, practically irrelevant.

Second, how can we be responsive to reasons in a serious and virtuous manner if our reflective capacity is only metacognitive and only examines our own reasons for believing that *p*? The best way to be responsive to reasons is to consider the beliefs and reasons of our interlocutors, critics, and challengers. And in order to do this, we must preserve a certain degree of epistemic modesty or moderation in the confrontation between our beliefs (and reasons) and the beliefs (and reasons) of other people. Therefore, critical reflection cannot be exclusively about my own beliefs and must extend to the beliefs of others. If we consider, from a *charitable* perspective, that the beliefs of others are relevant, we should take them into consideration.

13. Meanwhile, Smithies is not fully committed to (EICR). However, he is only partially committed to a non-individualist perspective. The fact that critical reflection is applied to my own beliefs does not exclude me from reflecting on the beliefs of others. Moreover, it is an important part of social practice for each person to have the ability to critically examine their own beliefs.

I.3 Greco on the social value of reflection

14. John Greco's virtue reliabilism is an original and important contribution to our understanding of the normative dimension of knowledge, especially in his account of the knowledge ascription problem. For Greco (2010), knowledge is a kind of success, which arises from an agent's ability: "knowledge is an instance of a more general normative phenomenon – that of success through ability (or success through excellence or success through virtue)" (Greco, 2009, p. 17; 2010, p. 3).

Greco seeks to explain the normative dimension of knowledge in terms of person-level excellence or intellectual ability. Cases in which we could ascribe knowledge to a person are cases in which that person believes the truth of proposition *p* because her belief was produced by her own intellectual ability. To be more precise, in cases of knowledge, S's success is *attributable* to S's ability, which is the same as saying that it is attributable to S (Greco, 2012, p. 1) and, in this case, true belief is not mere luck.

15. For Greco (2012, p. 17), an ability is a "disposition to achieve some relevant success, in relevant circumstances, relative to some environment, with a sufficient degree of reliability"[8]. Meanwhile, there is some dispute between virtue epistemologists about what sort of ability is required for knowledge.

This question of what abilities are relevant to knowledge is of great importance. Some virtue epistemology theorists consider that, in the face of skeptical challenges, one of the necessary abilities is the agent's ability to reflect on the reliability of her belief (*e.g.* Sosa). The most frequently recurring case is the Pyrrhonian challenge (or Pyrrhonian Problematic), according to which all knowledge *must*, on the one hand, be grounded in *good reasons* while, on the other, one *must* have reasons for believing that one's reasons are true. This is a central problem for Sosa (1997; 2015, pp. 215-254) and compels him to

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8   His argument is: "S has a knowledge-relevant ability A(R C D) relative to environment E = S has a disposition to believe truths in range R when in circumstances C and environment E, with degree of reliability D." (Greco, 2012, p. 18).

theorize about an epistemic higher level and a situation in which the agent has to deal with beliefs challenged by a skeptic.

For Sosa (1997, p. 231), reliabilism does not respond satisfactorily to the demands imposed by Pyrrhonian skepticism. There is a fragment in Sextus Empiricus (AM VII, 52) that Sosa uses to illustrate these requirements: if someone is looking for treasure and she is in a completely dark room, so she can't see anything, can we say that this person has found the treasure, even when she says so? Pyrrhonists tell us that, even if we have *grasped the truth,* we *do not know* that we have done so. Our beliefs are arbitrary (do not constitute knowledge) if we do not know if these beliefs are true and reliably formed. Even if the process is reliable and the belief is indeed true, we cannot attribute knowledge if the agent is not aware that the process is reliable and the belief is true[9]. In addition, it is necessary for this person to be able to reflect on why she believes what she believes.

Greco is not satisfied with Sosa's solution about Pyrrhonian demands and the division between two kinds of knowledge (Greco, 2010, pp. 142-6), but I will not discuss this point here. What I want to highlight is that, for Greco, reflection is epistemically important, but the role of reflection is not to guarantee the reliability of a belief, nor to be a condition for any kind of knowledge.

16. Like his colleagues, Greco (2019, p. 45) conceptualizes reflection as a valuable metacognitive activity. But for him, in particular, its *primary value is social*: "… thinking about our own thinking underwrites our ability to *cooperate* intellectually and practically; to plan, coordinate, execute and evaluate cooperative activity." This social perspective of the value of reflection explains how metacognitive activity can be both essential and moderate: it is essential, because human agency takes place in "the space of reasons"; it is moderate because it is not a condition for knowledge and agency in general, but for social agency.

The activity of thinking and evaluating one's first-order mental states forms part of the network of the cognitive activities of an agent who lives and cooperates with other agents. When reflecting in this sense, the agent finds herself in a position to report her states, defend her beliefs and actions, and coordinate her epistemic and practical performances on the social scene. One requirement of an individual's rationality and coherence is that she has to have the ability to understand her own beliefs, thoughts, desires, intentions, etc. If someone has a belief or intends to do something, she *must* have the power to understand why she

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9   Greco (2019, p. 141) discusses this argument.

believes what she does and what it is she wants to do. Since our cognitive and practical lives take place in a social environment, it is obvious that this person can report her cognitive states. This establishes an indispensable possibility for the human condition: the ability to cooperate intellectually and practically, to plan, coordinate, execute and evaluate cooperative activity (Greco, 2019, p. 53).

17. One aspect of Greco's reasoning does not strike me as sufficiently satisfactory: using the first person, he says that "my reasons, intentions, etc. must be consciously available to me if I am to *report these mental states to others,*" and this involves coordination and cooperation with others (Greco, 2019, p. 47). But in what sense are we cooperating with others? Only in the sense of planning together, or when I inform others of my personal states? Or in the sense of sharing our beliefs and desires?

   Of course, an examination of one's own beliefs – "my thinking about my thinking" – can be a dilettante act, free or spontaneous, as with a person who decides to evaluate her own life or an artist who wants to give a new direction to her artistic career. But in an epistemically relevant sense, "my thinking about my thinking" is not something that occurs spontaneously, rather it is a mental activity that is motivated by demands and expectations that arise in the "space of reasons". This could mean at least two things: (a) my belief exists in the midst of other beliefs, and (b) my belief is in disagreement with other beliefs in the "space of reasons".

   It seems to me that there are usually two reasonable motives for us to examine and try to understand our own beliefs: either when we are faced with new evidence (contrary to the evidence that made us believe in the first place) or when someone disagrees with us, challenges us, and asks us to present our reasons. In the latter case, second person beliefs play a decisive role in our assessment of our belief. The way we play cooperative games is also decisive in this assessment. This tension can generate conflict, but reflective capacity is a way for conflict to become a form of social cooperation. What Greco doesn't address is the fact that the capacity to reflect can be thought of as a capacity for scenarios of rational disagreement, involving both our, and our interlocutor's, beliefs. And in this sense, it is not just an individual metacognitive activity. Although Greco is thinking about the network of exchanges between subjects, for him reflection seems to be an individual activity.

1.4 What is missing?

18. In this section, I have tried to present the valuable contributions made by Sosa, Smithies, and Greco to improve our understanding of the epistemic value of reflection. They all seem to agree that reflection is an individual metacognitive activity through which a rational agent evaluates her own beliefs.

For Sosa, reflection is subjective self-review made by a self-critical agent who anticipates the possibility of her beliefs not being sufficiently secure, or someone who is critical of her own ability to attain her epistemic goals. In contrast, for Smithies (2015, p. 226) *critical reflection* is a higher-order scrutiny of the justificatory credentials of our beliefs, and justified belief requires one to be reflectively responsive to reasons. For Greco, the activity of thinking and evaluating one's first-order mental states forms part of the network of the cognitive activities of an agent who lives and cooperates with other agents. But in my opinion, they neglect one aspect: "affirming fully aptly" as "justifying" or "reporting reason" etc. are performative acts we do *for other people*, *with other people* and in tension with them. In this sense, these acts could be described in the same way that we describe acts of asserting, asking, doubting, telling, believing, knowing something about the world: acts that a person shares with other speakers. I am assuming, without further explanation, that the epistemic agent is a speaking agent.

For a speaker to be able to say "I promise", "I claim", "I know", "I believe", etc., her reflective understanding of this act of speech must incorporate her interlocutor's point of view and assume that she is indeed playing her part to complete the speech act, just as her interlocutor's uptake must incorporate the interlocutor's own understanding of what the speaker's utterance means. But this is more than the acquisition of (first-order) beliefs about the interlocutor's beliefs and reasons.

19. Thus Sosa's, Smithies', and Greco's considerations of reflection remain affiliated to the *epistemic individualistic conception of reflection* (EICR). As I described earlier, (EICR) is the position in which reflection is an operation of the mind through which an individual epistemic agent consciously accesses, explores, evaluates, endorses, and calibrates the content and reliability of her own current beliefs.

II. Reflecting as answering a *dialectical* epistemic challenge

20. I concluded the previous section by noting that there is something that Sosa, Smithies and Greco do *not* consider to be a central point in the demand for reflection: a critique of the beliefs at stake (my own belief and my interlocutor's belief) – an evaluation of the evidence, an examination of the propositions etc., in short, the *search for reasons* is something that we are committed to doing in our ordinary relationships with other people. It is in the context of confrontation with others in the *epistemic arena* and in conversational dynamics that reflection seems to be relevant.

In this section I will introduce the *epistemic non-individualistic conception of reflection*. This proposal is *non-individualistic* because (a) it addresses more than individual metacognitive performance and (b) it refers to a situation in which two or more people are in dialogical disagreement about the same subject matter or target proposition, (c) their dispute is based on conversational space and they are entitled to expect one another to be engaged in attempts at epistemic goals (truth, avoidance of error, and understanding etc.). In the absence of a more precise expression, I call this a *Dialectical account of Reflection* (DaR).

> (DaR) Reflection is a conscious and intentional intellectual operation through which an individual becomes aware of the contents of disputed beliefs in a dialogical or interpersonal exchange, involving both *her own beliefs and the beliefs of her interlocutors.*

(DaR) is deliberately restrictive and refers to a very limited phenomenology. In fact, from a broader viewpoint, reflection may involve two (or more) people with conflicting beliefs, but it may also involve only one person's belief in conversation with another. Moreover, since there is a dialectical reflection, we can apply this to ourselves, as in a "dialogue of the soul with itself," as Plato calls it, or as Descartes does in his *Meditations*. The (DaR) emphasis is on pointing out the error of thinking that this monologue, or "dialogue with oneself," is the only form of reflection, or the privileged form from which the others flow[10].

I will now seek to clarify this notion.

II.1 From ordinary to dialectical reflection

21. John Greco (2019, p. 46) presents three senses of reflection: (a) the *ordinary sense*: in this sense, reflection is tantamount to thinking or considering something

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10 Thanks to Plínio Smith for pointing out this restrictive aspect of (DaR).

intentionally, consciously, and carefully, for example, when someone reflects on the situation of immigrants, on the criticism she has received from colleagues, and so on; (b) the *philosophical sense*: here, reflection concerns *self-conscious* thinking, being both (i) conscious and (ii) self-directed. As Greco points out, (i) and (ii) can walk separately (since one can consciously think about something different from oneself and one can think of oneself unconsciously), but the philosophical sense integrates these two dimensions and; (c) the *psychological sense*: in this sense, reflection is equivalent to a *metacognitive activity*. The objects of this metacognitive activity are beliefs, reasoning, desires, intentions, cognitive skills, motivational dispositions, strategies for practical reasoning, etc. For Greco, this sense of reflection is both narrower and broader than the *philosophical sense*. It is broader, because it includes both subconscious and conscious thinking. It is narrower, "because it is thinking that is specifically about one's *thinking*, as opposed to thinking about oneself more generally".

22. (DaR) incorporates aspects of the *psychological sense*, but does not reduce it to an *individual metacognitive activity*. (DaR) means not only thinking about one's own act of thinking, but also *thinking about other's thinking*. In (DaR) reflection is not only a second-order performance[11], since the person considers her own beliefs and the beliefs of her peers within the dialogical dynamic equally. This is a dialectic and non-individualist perspective.

I use "dialectical" ("conversational" or "dialogical") because the great motivation for reflecting, in its epistemically relevant sense, is "conversational" or "dialogical" disagreement. This kind of performance is something that, as rational beings, we expect others to do, just as they expect us to[12]. In (DaR) "dialectic" is treated as a broad and imprecise term that means a rational interpersonal exchange about a subject matter in disagreement (this is not a rigorous approach because my goal is simply to suggest a non-individualistic epistemic scenario)[13]. We could call *dialectical conversation* a singular case of conversation motivated by a conflict of opinions about relevant issues, one which may not be resolved by resorting to either empirical or logical evidence. But in this kind of dialectical disagreement, participants are *asking and demanding*

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11 This insight emerged out of one of Sven Bernecker's observations during a conversation in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

12 See S. Goldberg (2018a; 2018b).

13 This idea of dialectic has both a classical and contemporary inspiration. In Gadamer's *Plato's Dialectical Ethics,* dialectical conversation is the actual way we come to share understanding; for him, the primary sense of *logos* [reason] is *being answerable*, giving an account in conversational disagreement (Gadamer, 1983, p. 27).

reasons, since they disagree with each other about their reasons for believing that *p* (or not-*p*).

Cases in which a conversation takes place between two people who have conflicting opinions are especially important for our epistemic practices, particularly given the essentially social aspect of our cognitive life. These cases are extremely common and often represent the best we can do in our cognitive practices within science, philosophy, politics, or law.

II.2 Critical reflection in the public epistemic arena

23. The first part of (DaR) is close to the idea of "critical reflection" presented by W. Alston (1989) and developed by D. Smithies (2015, 2016, 2019). For Smithies (2015), critical reflection is the activity of revising our beliefs in the light of our higher order reflections about their justificatory credentials. The difference here is that I think the dialectical challenge creates demands and expectations that compel the epistemic agent to *evaluate* both her own justificatory credentials for believing and the justificatory credentials of her interlocutor. The evaluative examination is not undertaken as an individual self-examination in soliloquy about one's own beliefs. The evaluative examination addresses the reasons that the person presents in the *public epistemic arena,* and that are in conflict with opposing reasons (presented by her interlocutors, opponents or by the person herself).

I understand the *epistemic arena* to be the horizon of public experience in which people take on common epistemic commitments, goals and objectives[14]. These commitments and goals include taking into consideration the available evidence and attaining the truth through intersubjectivity (such intersubjectivity is understood to be "shared" by a group of people). Another commitment may be this: to present reasons in favor of one's own beliefs and to consider contrary ones when disputes and disagreements occur. As long as these commitments are present, one may discuss the *epistemic arena* in various spheres of human experience, such as with an aquatic mammal specialist, a cardiologist, a lawyer, but also in the most common activities of ordinary life.

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14 I would like to thank Tiago Ferreira for alerting me to this passage in C. Elgin (2013, p. 144): "The reasons for them must be specifiable and justifiable to the other members of the epistemic community. Since the realm of epistemic ends is supposed to be the arena within which epistemic agents live their cognitive lives, those commitments must mesh. Not only must each be individually acceptable; all must be collectively acceptable. This means that there are consistency and coherence constraints on what the legislators can endorse."

II.3 A dialectical conversation

24. In a *dialectic disagreement* (which requires contrasting reasons) within the scenario of a conversation (which is mediated by language and not only by the belief itself), we have a dialogue motivated by a conflict of opinion. The basic assumption is that each of the interlocutors involved in a disagreement assume that their initial beliefs are true and justified. The question is, what should we do in this situation? It is a conversational rule that, whenever you are asked the question 'why do you believe that?', you must provide an answer. From a normative standpoint, we can expect each agent to undertake to recognize that their interlocutor also has reasons to support their opposing beliefs[15].

The contemporary epistemology of disagreement almost always expects peers in disagreement to consider the same evidence and reasons – and for this reason a major part of the debate is concerned with the possibility of a reasonable disagreement. In contrast, the significance of disagreement between ancient skeptics assumes that peers may provide different evidence and reasons.[16] Sextus Empiricus (Sextus HP I, 164-169) presents disagreement in a specific situation: one person affirms *that* p and another affirms *that* ¬p or q, where q implies ¬p. Before the dialectical confrontation, the person only has a belief - no justification has thus far been provided. In the face of disagreement, however, she must justify her opinion, for, if she does not have a reason, her bare assertion is worthless.

25. In dialectical conversation based on disagreement, people investigate whether or not their own beliefs, or those of their interlocutor, are justified, and whether or not their reasons are good, or even conclusive, reasons. The general schemata is:

(DD) *Dialectical Disagreement*: about an object, happening, idea, concepts, any *f* phenomenon
(A) J believes that *a*
(B) K believes that ¬*a* (or *b* where *b* implies ¬*a*)
(C) K challenges J to explain why J believes *a* and not ¬*a*
(D) J challenges K to explain why K believes ¬*a* and not *a*

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15 Some of these points were developed in Silva Filho & Rocha (2018).
16 The ancient skeptics do not specifically address the issue of epistemic peers. Disagreement appears as one of Agrippa's *Five Modes,* leading to the suspension of belief. I would like to thank Diego Machuca for making me aware of this.

When only (A) and (B) occur, we can imagine that both J and K will refuse to continue the dialogue. If we leave aside an idealized individual, whose rationalism requires them to remain in a permanent arena of consistent arguments, willingness to continue the dialogue is not only an epistemic requirement, but also a moral one. We can then imagine that, for some reason, deciding between a and $\neg a$ is relevant to both J and K; that for both J and K it is not a matter of indifference whether they believe a or $\neg a$, since these beliefs affect the epistemic position of these individuals in relation to the world, to themselves and to other individuals.

In order to follow this reasoning, we are dealing with disagreement from the perspective of a dialogue, which involves a second person[17]. Although the steps from (A) to (D) constitute an idealized scheme, dialogue is a normative linguistic-communicative performance: to conduct a dialogue, one *ought* to do , and to do is to present reasons, examine other people's reasons, and assess one's beliefs in order to arrive at the truth, knowledge, understanding, and so on[18].

At the outset, the interlocutors do *not* assume what the contemporary epistemology of disagreement calls a *Position of Equality*. If J believes a and rejects $\neg a$ (while K believes the opposite), and also thinks she has good reasons to believe a, she obviously thinks she is in a superior position[19]. It is necessary to skeptically show her that she is not in the superior position that she thinks she is. Following the dialogue is a skeptical requirement and the norms of dialogue are imposed by the condition that J and K are rational, if fallible, agents – because they are cooperative, charitable, conversationally competent. For this reason, the fact that J and K start out with beliefs that they accept as the truth does not prevent them, at the outset, from attributing the condition of epistemic peer to their interlocutor and assuming the *Principle of Charity*. As Davidson reminds us, this principle is the precondition for two people to be able to talk and disagree about something: in order for one individual to be able to understand the meaning of the utterances of the other, she must suppose that this individual is a rational being, who formulates utterances with meaning, which are (in most cases) true (Davidson, 1973).

In the epistemology of disagreement, discussions frequently address idealized scenarios and involve hyper-rational beings who strictly obey the laws

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17 One great example is Williamson's *Tetralogue: I'm Right, You're Wrong* (2015).

18 I believe that some of these results may be generalized to a situation in which a subject disagrees with her past or future self, but, for now, I am going to remain neutral about this. Similarly, I have avoided the third person perspective or that of the *omniscient narrator*.

19 I would like to thank J. Matheson for reminding me that the supposition that the individual must have "good reasons" is fundamental to the reasoning expressed in this phrase.

of classical logic[20]. From a (DaR) perspective, agents are fallible beings, who have an incomplete understanding of the cognitive content of their own and their interlocutor's states, who only have access to a partial set of information and may be influenced by feelings and emotions. In this sense, there are no perfect symmetries between J's and K's positions and their doxastic differences; it is difficult for these two (or more) subjects to have the *same* evidence. This does not compromise the argument, since, even when they are not hyper-rational beings, it is not hard to imagine that two people might be sincerely interested in finding out the truth and might be sincerely self-critical.

26. It is assumed that the participants in the dialogue have *reflective critical capacity*: in turns, J and K exercise their capacity to access and evaluate their own epistemic states and list reasons in favor of their beliefs. But they must each be able to understand and assess the reasons against their beliefs, even if they do not accept them. This "reflective capacity" leads us to expect that J and K will realize that their own reasons may not be sufficient to support *a* or ¬*a* (or *b*). This is why they have to investigate. In this argument, it does not matter whether or not proposition *a* is true or false; what matters is that each person's epistemic state will be attained virtuously, because they reflected.

We can then imagine a situation in which both individuals assess their own reasons as being sufficiently ready to present to their interlocutors, to convince them of the truth of what they are saying. From the point of view of *dialectical disagreement,* justification is a matter of *defensibility*, not of the subject to herself, but in the face of other people's reasons. Even if we accept that knowledge attribution does not require reflection, but only reliably formed true belief, in the context of dialectical challenges, when subjects disagree about a belief about which, in principle, they should not disagree, something else is required. Disagreement seems to imply, at the outset, that an individual may not have the justification and reliability she thinks she has, and that she may not yet know everything there is to be said about the belief held by her interlocutor. When I say that the other person is justified in her beliefs, I am saying that she has *good* reasons to believe, and to try and convince me. In the same way, in the same context, when I say that I am justified, I am saying that I have reasons to believe and to try and convince her.

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20 Frances (2014) and Matheson (2015) see this as a problem for theories related to the epistemology of disagreement.

II.3 Why does reflection matter epistemically?

27. This non-individualistic perspective is not intended to address all epistemological problems or to directly address the concept of knowledge. It is a small domain of Social Epistemology: in everyday life (science, politics, economics etc.), during exchanges with other people, one is sometimes obliged to evaluate one's own beliefs and to therefore consider one's own beliefs with one's interlocutors, examining the beliefs of the subjects involved[21]. I reflectively evaluate both my belief and my interlocutor's belief because I am investigating an issue for which we have conflicting reasons. This obligation is both epistemic and moral, for what is at stake is what is right and wrong to believe and do (what one is rationally justified in believing and doing) in the face of a demand from another person or from society. Recently, S. Goldberg (2018a; 2018b) perfectly captured this epistemic sense of "what we owe each other," an argument originally found in the moral philosophy of T. M. Scanlon (1998). He wrote: "We have very basic normative (epistemic) expectations regarding others as they go about their business forming, sustaining, and revising their system of beliefs" (Goldberg, 2018a, p. 151).

Thus, there are three ways in which reflection matters epistemically: (I) acknowledging a conflict of opinions is one of the great reasons to begin an investigation; (II) in terms of performance during an investigation: it is more virtuous to reflect and less virtuous not to do so; (III) regarding the outcome of the investigation: someone who reflects accomplishes something that those who do not reflect cannot (or only achieve by luck): *they are fully responsible for affirming, denying, suspending judgment, restarting an investigation, maintaining dialogue and so on*. The result is a negative: the avoidance of epistemic vices.

III. Reflecting as a way of avoiding epistemic vices

28. In the previous sections, I raised certain objections to what I call the *epistemic individualistic conception of reflection* and sought to stimulate the idea of an *epistemic non-individualistic conception of reflection.* In cases where someone holds beliefs because she considers them to be apt (true, because of her skills), but is challenged by contrary beliefs in the sphere of an interpersonal epistemic

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21 This form of disagreement may be found in both daily life and philosophy. In daily life, in which practical decisions must be made, to judge following the exercise of reflection in the way I describe is an achievement, even though the belief may be fallible, defensible, etc. In the case of philosophy, whose object is categorically not based on evidence, the suspension of judgment may be an achievement – even if people, including dogmatists, think that justifying a belief is an achievement in itself and that suspending judgment is a loss.

arena, *reflecting is the best thing to do* (or perhaps the only rational thing to do is to reflect).

I claim that in certain contexts, which involve dialectic disagreements and something like a *public epistemic arena*; (a) it is virtuous to reflect and it is non-virtuous not to reflect because (b) the person who reflects in such situations achieves something that the person who does not reflect cannot achieve, that is, responsible epistemic standing. As an objective result of a rational disagreement, a person may believe, disbelieve, or suspend judgment; this is not a voluntary choice. These options are established by the conditions required to be a rational being.

29. If someone is capable of critically reflecting on her own beliefs and the beliefs of interlocutors who have opposing beliefs, regardless of the result, this appears to me to be something positive and valuable. The critical spirit with which a person discusses opinions, subjecting themselves to the scrutiny of arguments for or against these opinions, is something virtuous. There may be a direct gain: when the person discards unsatisfactory reasons and finds guarantees to believe or disbelieve; but the gain may also be indirect: leading to a more demanding attitude, mistrustful of certain claims, while, at the same time, becoming more capable of understanding positions different from their own.

At this point we are dealing with the value of one's performance, what is best and worst to do. Reflection is a performance that may provide various results. And reflection is important in the social and interpersonal context of relations between people in epistemic disagreements in order to avoid epistemic vices and promote *epistemic moderation.*

In relation to epistemic vice, a critical reflective performance clearly does not make one immune to error or false beliefs: to evaluate reasons and present justifications is no guarantee of truth and knowledge. However, reflective work places people in a position that deserves praise and credit: it avoids undue haste, arrogance, dogmatism and certain kinds of epistemic vice (see Cassam, 2016; 2019; Tanesini, 2018).

Intellectual moderation, on the other hand, involves further reflection about one's epistemic position in regard to the target proposition in dispute (but such reflection should not be understood as incompatible with continued conviction about the target proposition) (Pritchard, 2019). The central idea is that, whereas intellectual pride is characterized by ideals and illusions of self-sufficiency (Greco, forthcoming), intellectual moderation is characterized by a realistic estimation of one's own abilities and an appreciation of one's epistemic dependence on others. Moderation, characterized by a fair assessment of the

reasons in dispute, avoids the vices that lie at the extremes of our inclinations, neither the extreme of humility (such as self-deprecation), nor the extreme of arrogance and epistemic injustice.

IV. Conclusion

30. In this essay I have presented two positions for the place and value of reflection: (a) *an epistemic individualistic conception of reflection* and (b) an *epistemic non-individualistic conception of reflection*. The favored argument for (b) is a Dialectical account of Reflection (DaR). According to (DaR), reflection is a conscious and intentional intellectual operation through which a person becomes aware of the contents of disputed beliefs in a dialogical or interpersonal exchange, involving both her own beliefs and the beliefs of her interlocutors. In (DaR), reflection produces the epistemic good of avoiding epistemic vices and promoting epistemic moderation.

To stimulate (DaR), I have discussed some recent works by D. Smithies (2015; 2016; 2019), E. Sosa (2015; 2017), and J. Greco (2019) on the epistemic value of reflection. I have argued that, although they present important theses about reflection as a condition for maintaining a belief as justifiably accountable in the space of reasons, they retain the notion that reflection is an individual metacognition and, consequently, remains associated with an *epistemic individualistic conception of reflection* (EICR).

The two central points of my argument are: *first,* the non-individualistic perspective is not intended to address all epistemological problems or to directly address the concept of knowledge. It is a small domain of Social Epistemology that addresses the situations in which people need to dispute epistemic reasons within the conversational space. *Second,* while there is no agreement as to whether reflection is a condition of knowledge, in dialectical conversation reflection could produce an epistemic good, since the agent's performance will be cautious, charitable, and moderate.

Acknowledgments

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