A Defense of Virtue Reliabilism

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Virtue reliabilism is a theory of justification: it purports to give the conditions under which a person, S, is epistemically justified in believing a proposition, p. As one of the many contending theories of justification in contemporary epistemology, it has been subject to several objections. I will examine the ability of virtue reliabilism to defend against two particularly significant objections: the “Brain in Vat” objection and the “Norman the Clairvoyant” objection. First, I will describe the theory and consider its broad merits. Second, I will present the two objections and outline the responses of Ernest Sosa and John Greco. Third, I will consider whether these responses are successful. Finally, I will offer my own response. I will analyze the theories only insofar as they are theories of justification, although I do presume that knowledge is related to justification, either indirectly or definitionally, so as to stay relevant to the original accounts of virtue reliabilism. ¹

Before introducing virtue reliabilism, it would be helpful to outline process reliabilism and two common objections to that theory. Crudely put, this theory asserts that S is justified in believing that p if and only if her belief that p was formed by a cognitively reliable process. ² For example,

1Especially Ernest Sosa’s account of virtue reliabilism, which primarily concerns the concept of knowledge as opposed to justification specifically (Goldman). Traditionally, knowledge has been considered ‘justified true belief’—however this basic model has also met several objections in contemporary epistemology.

2Either a belief-independent unconditionally reliable process (e.g. perception, memory, introspection), or a belief-dependent process that is conditionally reliable (e.g. reasoning).

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under normal conditions perception, memory, and reasoning are reliable whereas wishful thinking, hunches, and pure guesswork are unreliable. This account is externalist, since reliability boils down to the percentage of times the process produces a true belief, and does not depend on whether S has mental access to reasons, arguments, inferences, etc. that support her belief. Process reliabilism has intuitive appeal. It is natural and simple, it can explain the importance of justification (as being justified tends to mean one’s belief is true), it avoids internalist issues such as the infinite regress problem, and it seems a fitting account for perceptual beliefs. However, issues begin to arise one when considers ‘higher-grade’ beliefs. Duncan Pritchard gives the example of the benevolent demon (Sosa and Kim, 466) that, unbeknownst to S, alters the world to make all of S’s beliefs true at the moment she forms them. All of S’s belief-forming processes are completely reliable, but intuitively she is still not justified in believing, for example, her periodic guesses that there are still exactly one million grains of sand in the Mojave Desert. S’s reliability is not her cognitive achievement, but a result of the demon’s interference. A second objection to process reliabilism, termed ‘the value problem,’ notes that process reliabilism cannot explain why having a justified true belief is more valuable than having a true belief. According to process reliabilism, justification is important only insofar as it is more likely to be associated with a true belief. If the valuable status is truth, how one gets there is not normatively significant. Since we intuit that justified true belief is somehow more valuable than mere true belief, it seems that process reliabilism fails to ascribe justification the positive normative status we desire it to have.

Virtue reliabilism can be framed as a response to these two worries about process reliabilism, a response to the problems of internalist accounts, and an inspired analogue to virtue ethics. A virtue ethicist would consider how actions reflect and result from one’s character, as opposed to those actions’ consequences or rule-abiding statuses. It assumes that a person’s character is the underlying contribution to her ethical behavior. Ernest Sosa gives the example of the doctor attending Hitler’s mother during Hitler’s birth (148). In this situation, infanticide would probably have had better net consequences for the world. Yet the doctor’s actions were

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3Justification of A needs to inferentially appeal to justified belief B, which is justified by C, which is justified by D, and so on ad infinitum.

4Beliefs inferred from many other beliefs, or isolated beliefs that are not directly drawn from perceptual experience

5Linda Zagzebski uses the analogy of a coffee machine. A delicious coffee produced from a well-functioning coffee machine is no more valuable than an equally delicious coffee produced, by luck, from a poorly-functioning machine.
still moral; they were a result of his moral virtues, such as compassion and benevolence. All other things being equal, infanticide would have been a product of his moral vices, such as cruelty and lack of empathy. Here, virtue ethics gives a much more intuitively appealing account than consequentialism. Virtue epistemologists define epistemic virtues along the lines of moral virtues. For virtue reliabilists, an epistemic virtue is a mechanism for producing beliefs that involves an ability to believe true propositions in a set of circumstances and refrain from believing false propositions within a set of propositions (Sosa and Kim 455). While ‘trait virtues,’ e.g. open-mindedness, do not clash with this definition, a virtue reliabilist is more likely to list the reliable cognitive abilities to remember, perceive, intuit, etc. as prototypical epistemic virtues (or ‘faculty virtues’) (Greco).

For the virtue reliabilist, a faculty becomes a faculty virtue by reliably leading to true beliefs. Thus, for $S$ to have the faculty virtue of seeing medium sized objects in bright lighting, she must reliably produce true beliefs about the properties of medium sized objects when in bright lighting. Moreover, she must reliably get at the truth at least partly because she is manifesting the virtue. Given this framework, $S$ is justified in believing that $p$ if believing that $p$ is a result of an epistemic virtue (or virtues) she possesses. Here, the normativity of justification stems from a property of $S$, as opposed to a property of $S$’s beliefs. Sosa, a virtue reliabilist, motivates this shift of focus in his paper “The Raft and the Pyramid.” Problems with foundationalism and coherentism can be resolved, and the two theories can be sensibly synthesized, by appealing to the epistemic character of $S$ herself. Increasing coherence can be considered an epistemic virtue because it reliably conduces truth, so an $S$ who forms a belief as a result of this virtue

6 A virtue responsibilist probably differs from a virtue reliabilist here. For example, Montmarquet considers openness and courage epistemic virtues, even though he questions their truth-conduciveness. This is because these are traits people who desire truth want to have, even though they might not, in fact, reliably lead to getting the truth.

7 Virtue epistemologists would probably disagree on the meaning of ‘a result of,’ and whether this condition is sufficient for justification.

8 In coherentism, justification is achieved by having a set of logically coherent and systematically interconnected beliefs that mutually support one another. Thus justified beliefs form a ‘raft’ tied together by coherence. Yet, under this model, one can simply decide to believe the opposite of a perceptual belief, make small adjustments to preserve coherence, and still be justified. In foundationalism, justification is achieved by having justified beliefs that are inferred from other justified beliefs, and a set of basic beliefs with properties that do not appeal to further beliefs, but are justified anyway. Thus justified beliefs form a ‘pyramid’ where justification stems from the bottom layer. However, it is difficult to give a fundamental principle relating sensory experience to justified beliefs about sensory experiences, especially as we can imagine other creatures with different sensory experience mechanisms.
is justified. Moreover, it seems that following truth-conducive virtues will lead to a coherent system. Similarly, the ability to believe true propositions and avoid believing false propositions about visual experience, for example, is a faculty virtue, at least for humans. This also explains the justification of foundational empirical beliefs in foundationalism. Sosa uncovers a deeper ground that ties together the raft and the pyramid: both are constructed by manifesting reliable epistemic virtues.

At this point, the line between virtue reliabilism and process reliabilism may seem blurred, and it is useful to show how virtue reliabilism avoids the two objections to process reliabilism. In the case of the benevolent demon, the reliability of S’s belief-forming process about there still being only one million grains of sand in the Mojave Desert is not a result of her faculty or trait virtues, but a result of the demon’s interference. In fact, believing such a claim could be considered the result of a cognitive vice, such as lack of any careful consideration, inability to do spatial reasoning, etc. The value problem is also solved. Consider an archer shooting her arrow at a target. There is something more valuable about her hitting the target (i.e. getting at the truth) because she shot it skillfully, than because she closed her eyes and angled the bow randomly. This skill, which we might call ‘athletic virtue,’ is analogous to epistemic virtue. Justification is valuable because of the positive normative status of cognitive virtue in the virtue reliabilism framework.

While the virtue reliabilist account may seem a compelling alternative to process reliabilism, it still faces two major objections. The first considers the scenario in which S is not a person living in our world, but is actually a brain in a vat, being fed perceptual experiences identical to ours by a computer. Almost all of her empirical beliefs about reality are false. Her trust of her basic perception is not, in fact, an epistemic virtue because this trust is not reliable at getting at the truth. Her visual acuity, open mindedness, intellectual sobriety, etc. do not even help her ‘hit the target,’ so to speak, and so are not epistemic virtues. Thus almost none of her beliefs are a result of epistemic virtues, and so almost none of her beliefs are justified. Yet, intuitively, someone who is in fact a brain in a vat is justified in trusting her senses and believing what she infers from that perceptual experience. She has no way of knowing her predicament; forming such beliefs is the only reasonable thing to do from her perspective, just as it is from ours. If she is not justified in believing there is a table in front of her, then we are potentially vulnerable to the same harsh verdict, especially given that the skeptical scenario is completely indistinguishable from the non-skeptical one! Thus virtue reliabilism does not give the intuitively appropriate diagnosis here.
The second objection considers Norman, who is extremely reliable at knowing the location of a particular man, John Smith. One day Norman comes to believe that Smith is in Texas and, another day, comes to believe that Smith is in California. Norman has not checked if any of these beliefs are true, and he is never exposed to any external sources of information about Smith’s location. It turns out that Smith’s unique body odor continually spreads in all directions, and Norman, who is especially sensitive to Smith smell, immediately judges the man’s location based on its potency. Norman is not actually aware he is doing this, or even that he smells anything odd. Yet he still believes that Smith is in the particular state. Intuitively, Norman is not justified in holding these beliefs. From his perspective, they have no evidential support and are patently absurd by any common standard. Yet, by the account of virtue reliabilism stated, Norman is justified. He believes Smith is in Texas a result of an epistemic virtue, in this case a faculty virtue, which is reliable at getting at the truth. Note that this situation is different from that of the benevolent demon; S’s reliability was a result of the demon’s post-belief alterations, not a special cognitive ability that S had herself. S did reliably get at the truth, but not because of some faculty or trait she possessed.9

I will give Ernest Sosa and John Greco’s responses to these objections, and explain why I think neither is satisfactory. In response to the Brain in Vat objection, Sosa adds that S is still justified because her beliefs originate in faculties that would be reliable in our environment. Perhaps this claim is suitable for an evil demon situation. However, as Greco points out, it is not suitable for the Brain in Vat situation: if placed into our environment, she would be a brain without a body and thus completely unable to function. To avoid this problem, we need to clarify that testing S’s reliability in our environment does not entail physically transporting her into our environment—it means seeing whether the cognitive faculties and traits that she has in the vat world, in and of themselves, would also be virtues in our world. Yet this seems to only delay the problem. What if we are also being deceived, or are all brains in vats? Then this criterion would not work. Moreover, we can imagine that S belongs to an alien species that has well-functioning faculties that require abilities and habits in order to operate that are completely foreign to humans. S would still be justified in believing her alien faculties as an alien-brain in a vat, but her cognitive faculties would not be reliable in ‘our’ human environment. Intuitively, it

9Unless one would consider the fact that there is a benevolent demon reading S’s mind and changing the world to conform to S’s belief a ‘faculty’ of S. I take it that this is more of an ‘external state of affairs.’
seems that S’s beliefs are justified independent of whether ‘our’ cognitive faculties are reliable, so Sosa’s fix is misplaced.

In response to the Norman objection, Sosa distinguishes between animal and reflective knowledge. Animal knowledge is true belief as a result of a reliable faculty, whereas reflective knowledge also requires a true understanding that one’s belief is based in a reliable faculty. So Norman has animal but not reflective knowledge; he is, so to speak, ‘animally justified’ but not ‘reflectively justified.’ This distinction does not seem satisfactory. Doesn’t a reliability-belief require a belief about the reliability of that reliability-belief, and so on, ad infinitum? Otherwise, these reliability-beliefs would, themselves, be examples of animal knowledge. It seems dubious that supporting animal knowledge with another layer of animal knowledge suddenly generates a new type of ‘reflective’ knowledge—it seems we are simply left with two layers of animal knowledge. Thus, why make two forms of knowledge and justification, when we can just say that having higher-order knowledge strengthens our justification? Even ignoring these concerns, we very rarely have meta-beliefs concerning the reliability of our faculties. As Greco points out, even if we had these beliefs dispositionally, we would probably fail to give an appropriate account of the particular segment of beliefs we are reliable about and the kind of circumstances we are reliable in (Sosa and Kim, 457). This means that neither Norman nor S who forms beliefs from visual perception has reflective knowledge, and are on equal justificatory footing. Again, this conclusion clashes with intuition.

Greco’s solution to both problems is to add an internalist element to justification which requires that S’s belief also be appropriate from her point of view; S’s belief that p has ‘positive epistemic status’ if believing that p is a result of a reliable cognitive virtue(s) she possesses, and if S’s virtue is based in “conforming to epistemic norms which S countenances” (460). ‘Positive epistemic status’ is whatever one needs to add to true belief to make it knowledge. A norm is a rule of belief formation and maintenance. To countenance a norm is to follow it when we reason conscientiously (459). To conform to a norm is to believe in accordance with it, and to do so because one countenances it (426, 460). To be clear, one does not need to have any beliefs about the norms themselves; one simply needs to reason with them and believe in accordance with them. For example, a skilled archer’s ability to hit the bull’s-eye is based in her conformance to the norms regarding good archery. If she did not conform to the norms of good archery, she would not hit the bull’s-eye except occasionally, by luck. Let S be the brain in the vat. S’s beliefs are in conformance with the norms she countenances, and so are justified according to Greco (459). Norman is not in conformance with the norms he countenances; presumably he countenances norms that
disallow believing that Smith is in Texas without any relevant evidence, or with contrary evidence.

There are a few problems with this solution. First, clarifications need to be made about the line Greco draws between ‘positive epistemic status’ and justification. In introducing norm internalism, he states that “(n)orm internalism is the position that justified belief is the result of following correct epistemic norms...” and then states “S is epistemically justified in believing that p if and only if S’s believing that p is in conformance with the epistemic norms which S countenances” (Sosa and Kim, 458). However this raises the question of what a correct norm is, and whether correctness is a condition Greco wants to impose on norms in his final definition of justification. If a correct norm is one that, when conformed to, reliably leads S to the truth, then it seems there is no distinction between positive epistemic status and justification: if S countenances correct norms, then the belief-producing virtues he has will be reliable. In this case, his claim that the brain in a vat is justified would be inconsistent, since the brain’s norms are not correct as they do not reliably lead to true beliefs. Yet, not including some correctness requirements means that S can countenance ridiculously incorrect norms and still be justified. For example, S can follow the norm of counter-induction when he reasons conscientiously. He can believe in accordance in counter-induction and do so because he countenances it. Intuitively, this is not justified.

Putting aside that issue, let us assume that justification and positive epistemic status are equivalent. Given the damage of the counter-induction example, I think this is a more charitable interpretation. As pointed out, the Brain in Vat objection is not adequately addressed. S does not believe that her perceptions are correct as a result of her cognitive virtues, since the faculties and traits she has do not reliably get her to the truth and so are not virtues. At a minimum, we could say that S conforms to the norms she countenances, but these norms are incorrect to the same extent that a norm of counter-induction would be. I claim that the Norman objection is not adequately addressed either. Let us say that Norman did countenance the norm that, for him especially, believing the location of politicians on no evidence except intuition was appropriate; Norman follows this bizarre norm when he reasons conscientiously within the vicinity of the topic (for example, he overhears his rival making similarly bizarre claims about Smith’s location, and out of egotism reasons that, when it comes to Smith-tracking,

10The rule that one should believe the opposite of what induction suggests, e.g. all the emeralds I’ve seen were green so the next one I see will not be green.

11In fact, she might do better at getting at the truth using counter-induction given her situation.
only he has this ability). Intuitively, Norman is getting epistemically worse. He has still not checked the reliability of his beliefs, he is still unaware that any phenomenology is occurring, and he is conscientiously endorsing evidence-less, ego-inspired claims about his special ability. Yet, according to Greco’s theory, his justificatory status is increasing! His belief that Smith is in Texas is the result of a reliable faculty virtue which has its basis in Norman’s conforming to a correct epistemic norm which he countenances: if he is the only one who has this ability, he will always be correct when his egotism leads him to reason that he is the only one with it. Perhaps if the norm was categorized more broadly, e.g. ‘form beliefs about yourself based on egotism’ it would no longer be correct for Norman. But we can imagine a person who, in fact, has all the special cognitive abilities his rivals claim to have, and has not checked for evidence that this is actually the case. The rule ‘form beliefs about your cognitive abilities based on your perceptions of your self-worth’ seems broad enough to constitute a norm.

Is there another definition of correctness we can use? Greco could say that the rules and processes S uses to forms belief have to be justified (as opposed to reliable), and S must countenance them as justified. Perhaps the justificatory status of a rule could depend on some internalist requirements. Under this revision, S is justified in believing that p when his believing that p is in conformance with ‘internally justified’ norms he countenances; S has positive epistemic status when his belief is also a result of a reliable epistemic virtue. Yet, it is unclear what these internalist requirements are, and why they would not apply to individual beliefs in addition to rules. A theory which simply lists ‘following a justified rule’ as the major requirement for justification is not very enlightening, given that ‘justified’ is never really defined. Also, attempts to internally justify rules would lead to the infinite regress problem; it seems that reverting to foundationalism, coherentism, etc. then undermines the positive aspects of the unifying move Sosa made in “The Raft and the Pyramid.” At this point, Sosa’s idea, that we need a true understanding that our belief is based in a reliable faculty, looks more appealing.

A possible defense against the Norman theory, which does not add internalist elements, consists in a re-evaluation of the requirements for a virtue. According to virtue responsibilist Linda Zagzebski, someone with epistemic virtues manifests qualities that are generally considered truth-conducive by one’s epistemic community (Sosa and Kim, 447-8).12 Here Zagzebski is referring to trait virtues, but this requirement can be extended to faculty virtues. Norman’s faculty to detect Smith’s location is reliable, but

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12I am considering Neo-Aristotelian virtue epistemology a subset of virtue responsibilism.
it is not considered truth-conducive by his epistemic community. If it was a well-documented, commonly known fact that humans have the power to detect the location of Smith, we would intuit that Norman is justified in forming his beliefs. We would intuit this even if, by chance, Norman had not heard, seen, read, discussed, etc. anything about this human ability. While this tweak might work well for the Norman case, it seems to have dangerous consequences. What if one has no epistemic community, such as the lonely brain in the vat? What if one’s epistemic community has very bad ideas about what is truth conducive? There were communities in which owning and using slaves was considered a kind of moral virtue. Similarly, there were communities which considered wishful thinking, superstition, blind acceptance of dogma, etc. to be truth conducive. I argue that a rebellious member of an ancient society who thinks that human sacrifice is morally wrong and skeptical and that empirical investigation is more truth conducive than blind acceptance does possess moral and epistemic virtues, even if his community strongly disagrees with him. While extending the same analysis to a faculty-virtue, such as Smith detection, may seem much less intuitive, I think it is an acceptable bullet to bite to avoid a damaging form of faculty/trait relativism. Thus I claim that Norman is justified in believing Smith is in Texas, even though he is not checking the reliability of his beliefs. To push our intuitions in this direction, we can imagine situations in which every human has this ability, but no one mentions or investigates it, and the information of Smith’s location is not publicly accessible. It is not completely against intuition to say that humans were justified in believing the outputs of their shared faculty, even before they talked about and investigated it.

Attention can now be turned to the Brain in Vat objection, which has not yet been given an adequate response. A substantive tweak needs to be made to the virtue reliabilist account. My proposal is in the spirit of Soša’s, and offers the following necessary and sufficient conditions for S being justified in believing that p: (i) S believes that p as a result of an epistemic

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13To make this more obvious, consider the human ability to gauge about how much time has passed in a given interval (even assuming lighting stays constant and there are no other indicators). Someone with no access to a watch or clock is asked to approximate how much time has passed after about five minutes. Because he is a human with this ability, he would be justified in believing approximately five minutes have passed, even if he has not checked the reliability of his time-estimating skills before.

14One might question the juxtaposition of human sacrifice, an idea that has emotional weight, and blind acceptance, which does not. However, I think this juxtaposition is suitable, given that we are trying to highlight the normativity of justification and given that we are modeling justification on an ethics analogue.
virtue that is either reliable and quasi-reliable, or just quasi-reliable, (ii) epistemic virtues include both faculty and trait virtues, (iii) faculty virtues need only be abilities, while trait virtues require the properties outlined below, (iv) for an epistemic virtue to be quasi-reliable it must reliably identify true properties or features of the world that S empirically experiences.

The three main motivations for (ii) and (iii) are that many beliefs do not result from cognitive faculties but from character traits, responsibilist accounts of trait virtues are compelling, and that to include both of these is not incoherent. Zagzebski gives a general account of trait virtues (which she refers to simply as virtues): a virtue is an “acquired excellence” that is entrenched in the person’s character, and one that the person was at least partially responsible for cultivating (Sosa and Kim, 442). A trait virtue has two key features: a motivational aspect and a success aspect. Zagzebski distills the motivational component in epistemic virtues to the motivation for knowledge, which she generalizes as “the motivation to have cognitive contact with reality” (444). Someone who desires truth, understanding, etc. is motivated to act the way an epistemically virtuous person would, e.g. with intellectual courageousness and “intellectual sobriety” (447-8). In addition to having motivation, one must be able to act in accordance with the virtue’s description. For example, to have the epistemic virtue of open-mindedness one must actually consider others’ arguments and not merely want to do so. One must be reliably (or, in my case, quasi-reliably) able to achieve these goals. I consider these standards appropriate, as long as the motivational component allows for pragmatic motivations that indirectly produce epistemic motivations.

The Brain in Vat objection is supposed to be deflected by (iv). Let us turn back to the archery analogy. The archer is standing and raising her bow. As she looks up at the target, an evil demon begins interfering: he causes her to hallucinate that the target is five feet to the right of where it actually is. Consider four situations. (I) The archer skillfully shoots several arrows at this ‘demon-made’ target, and hits the ‘demon-made’ bull’s-eye every time. Here, the archer’s athletic virtues are quasi-reliable. (II) The archer misses the ‘demon-made’ target: her athletic virtues are not quasi-reliable. (III) She misses the ‘demon-made’ target but, by chance, hits the real target; her athletic virtues are reliable but not quasi-reliable. (IV) The real target and the ‘demon-made’ target are identical (i.e. S’s world has the exact same properties as the real world). Hitting both means her athletic virtues are both quasi-reliable and reliable.

15This is the relevant epistemic motivation. Zagzebski concedes that there may be other motivations that give rise to epistemic virtues, such as practical ones (449).

16‘Intellectual courage is ’sticking to one’s guns.’ Intellectual sobriety involves not just assuming all one’s wildest inferences are highly reliable.
Consider the brain in a vat, S. S is very good at identifying features of the simulation she is in, although she does not know she is in a simulation. Her perceptual beliefs make false claims about reality. Yet they can also be charitably interpreted as feature-identifiers of the world she is experiencing, e.g. ‘general relativity is approximately true’ is also a belief about a property of her empirical world, so this is case type (I) or (IV).\(^\text{17}\) According to both my account and intuition, if it was not a property of her simulated vat world, she would not be justified in believing it, as this would be an example of either case type (II) or case type (III). Moreover, assuming that her ‘vat-made’ target is still well-defined, i.e. the features of her world are consistent and ordered in some way, she has a fair shot at being quasi-reliable. If her target is very small, e.g. her empirical world contains a multitude of conflicting information and so there are few properties to identify, she would be expected to refrain from forming beliefs about properties that her empirical world does not have.\(^\text{18}\) Again, this expectation is fair, as by definition the properties of her empirical world must be accessible in some form by way of experience and observation.\(^\text{19}\)

Issues arise when one considers the parameters of a ‘world.’ For example, if S takes a drug that happens to cause her to perceive giant tomatoes, is she justified in believing they are there? My answer is yes.\(^\text{20}\) What if she is aware the drug has strong hallucinatory side effects? Then, my answer, along with intuition, is no. The ‘charitable interpretation’ is no longer appropriate here. In scenarios where S is aware that she ‘changed the target,’ she is only justified in holding only beliefs that truly identify properties (e.g. I see a giant tomato) but not that make false reality claims (e.g. giant tomatoes actually exist). What if S is not aware that the drug has strong hallucinatory side effects, but there was a warning clearly written on the bottle? I think she is still justified in thinking there are giant tomatoes. These scenarios lead us in the direction of ‘no objective defeater’ theories.

\(^\text{17}\)It is case type (IV) if, in the real world, general relativity is approximately true.

\(^\text{18}\)She can observe that nature is grossly disordered, conflicting, etc. and so would probably not want to use certain forms of induction that rely heavily on aspects of nature’s uniformity.

\(^\text{19}\)She must ‘see a target’ somewhere, whether it is real, vat or demon-made. Otherwise, she would not be having any identifiable experience and so would be unjustified in shooting any empirical belief arrows.

\(^\text{20}\)If she is not aware that the drug will cause her to hallucinate, she cannot be expected to withhold her basic perceptual beliefs on account of a slim possibility. The banana that I ate yesterday might be causing me to hallucinate that I am typing on a computer. Yet, intuitively, that would not affect the justificatory status of my belief that I am typing on a computer.
of justification, which have many problems, and I hesitate to over-accommodate our intuitions.21

I think this account has some compelling advantages over Sosa’s. Instead of making justification relative to our environment, which might also be an illusion, it keeps justification connected to S’s own experience of her environment. My account does not resort to internalism: it is objectively the case that S is having perceptual experience of a world, that S is not aware that the world is illusory, and that this world has certain properties. Moreover, the account retains the benefits of virtue reliabilism that do not cross-apply to process reliabilism. It explains why hitting a target with skill is valuable, even if that target is not real. Without this deeper normative account, the addition of the quasi-reliable status would seem entirely ad hoc.

21Namely that there will always be objective defeater, and a defeater defeater. Defeaters will simply boil down to only being justified in accepting the claims that are true.
Works Cited

