A Virtue Epistemology

Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Volume I

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Lecture 2

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When an archer takes aim and shoots, that shot is assessable in three respects.

First, we can assess whether it succeeds in its aim, in hitting the target. Although we can also assess how accurate a shot it is, how close to the bull’s-eye, we here put degrees aside, in favor of the on/off question: whether it hits the target or not.

Second, we can assess whether it is adroit, whether it manifests skill on the part of the archer. Skill too comes in degrees, but here again we focus on the on/off question: whether it manifests relevant skill or not, whether it is or is not adroit.

A shot can be both accurate and adroit, however, without being a success creditable to its author. Take a shot that in normal conditions would have hit the bull’s-eye. The wind may be abnormally strong, and just strong enough to divert the arrow so that, in conditions thereafter normal, it would miss the target altogether. However, shifting winds may next guide it gently to the bull’s-eye after all. The shot is then accurate and adroit, but not accurate because adroit (not sufficiently). So it is not apt, and not creditable to the archer.¹

An archer’s shot is thus a performance that can have the AAA structure: accuracy, adroitness, aptness. So can

¹ Aptness is a matter of degree even beyond the degrees imported by its constitutive adroitness and accuracy, for a performance is apt only if its success is sufficiently attributable to the performer's competence.
performances generally, at least those that have an aim, even if the aim is not intentional. A shot succeeds if it is aimed intentionally to hit a target and does so. A heartbeat succeeds if it helps pump blood, even absent any intentional aim.

Maybe all performances have an aim, even those superficially aimless, such as ostensibly aimless ambling. Performances with an aim, in any case, admit assessment in respect of our three attainments: accuracy: reaching the aim; adroitness: manifesting skill or competence; and aptness: reaching the aim through the adroitness manifest. The following will be restricted to performances with an aim.

Some acts are performances, of course, but so are some sustained states. Think of those live motionless statues that one sees at tourist sites. Such performances can linger, and need not be constantly sustained through renewed conscious intentions. The performer’s mind could wander, with little effect on the continuation or quality of the performance.

Beliefs too might thus count as performances, long-sustained ones, with no more conscious or intentional an aim than that of a heartbeat. At a minimum, beliefs can be assessed for correctness independently of any competence that they may manifest. Beliefs can be true by luck, after all, independently of the believer’s competence in so believing, as in Gettier cases.

Beliefs fall under the AAA structure, as do performances generally. We can distinguish between a belief’s accuracy, i.e., its truth; its adroitness, i.e., its manifesting epistemic virtue or competence; and its aptness, i.e., its being true because competent.²

² Compare: “We have reached the view that knowledge is true belief out of intellectual virtue, belief that turns out right by reason of the virtue and not just by
Animal knowledge is essentially apt belief, as distinguished from the more demanding reflective knowledge. This is not to say that the word “knows” is ambiguous. Maybe it is, but distinguishing a kind of knowledge as “animal” knowledge requires no commitment to that linguistic thesis. Indeed, despite leaving the word “knows” undefined, one might proceed in three stages as follows:

(a) affirm that knowledge entails belief;
(b) understand “animal” knowledge as requiring apt belief without requiring defensibly apt belief, i.e., apt belief that the subject aptly believes to be apt, and whose aptness the subject can therefore defend against relevant skeptical doubts; and
(c) understand “reflective” knowledge as requiring not only apt belief but also defensibly apt belief.

There you have the core ideas of the virtue epistemology to be developed in the remaining lectures.

coincidence.” (Sosa, Knowledge in Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 277). Also: “What in sum is required for knowledge and what are the roles of intellectual virtue and perspective? . . . [One] must grasp that one’s belief non-accidentally reflects the truth [of the proposition known] through the exercise of such a virtue” (Sosa, 1991, p. 292). Also: “We need a clearer and more comprehensive view of the respects in which one’s belief must be non-accidentally true if it is to constitute knowledge. Unaided, the tracking or causal requirements proposed . . . permit too narrow a focus on the particular target belief and its causal or counterfactual relation to the truth of its content. Just widening our focus will not do, however, if we widen it only far enough to include the process that yields the belief involved. We need an even broader view” (Sosa, “Reflective Knowledge in the Best Circles,” The Journal of Philosophy (1997): 410–30), from the sections entitled “Circular Externalism” and “Virtue Epistemology”; emphasis added). That broader view, as explained soon thereafter, puts the emphasis on the subject and on the subject’s virtues or competences. And it is made clear that the belief must be non-accidentally true, and not just non-accidentally present. The view developed in the present paper is essentially that same view, now better formulated, based on an improved conception of aptness, and explicitly amplified to cover performances generally.
One other idea has also been part of virtue epistemology, that of the *safety* of a belief. This too is a special case of an idea applicable to performances generally. A performance is safe if and only if not easily would it then have failed, not easily would it have fallen short of its aim. What is required for the safety of a belief is that not easily would it fail by being false, or untrue. A belief that p is *safe* provided it would have been held only if (most likely) p.

By contrast, someone’s belief that p is *sensitive* if and only if were it not so that p, he would not (likely) believe that p.

Surprisingly enough, such conditionals do not contrapose. Suppose that if it were so that p, then it would be so that q. It might seem to follow that if it were *not* so that q, then it would *not* be so that p. After all, if it were *not* so that q while it was still so that p, it *would* then be so that p *without* it being so that q. How then could it be that if it were so that p, it would be so that q? It is thus quite plausible to think that such conditionals contrapose, as do material conditionals; plausible, but still incorrect. If water now flowed from your kitchen faucet, for example, it would then be false that water so flowed while your main house valve was closed. But the contrapositive of this true conditional is false.

Accordingly, a belief can be safe without being sensitive. Radical skeptical scenarios provide examples. Take one’s belief that one is not a brain in a vat fooled by misleading sensory evidence into so believing. That belief is safe without being sensitive. We can thus defend Moorean common sense by highlighting the skeptic’s confusion of safety with sensitivity. Although our belief that we are not radically fooled is not sensitive, it is still safe, since not easily would that belief be false. Radical scenarios are ones that not easily would materialize.
That defense against radical skepticism is soon halted by beliefs that seem unsafe while still amounting to knowledge. I am hit hard and suffer excruciating pain, perhaps, believing on that basis that I am in pain. But I might very easily have suffered only a slight glancing blow instead, experiencing only discomfort, while still believing myself to suffer pain. This might have been due to priming, perhaps, or to hypochondria. Nevertheless, I do know I suffer pain when the pain is excruciating, surely, even if my belief is unsafe because I might too easily have so believed in the presence of discomfort that was not really pain.

What knowledge requires is hence not outright safety but at most basis-relative safety. What is required of one’s belief, if it is to constitute knowledge, is at most its having some basis that it would not easily have had unless true, some basis that it would (likely) have had only if true. When your belief that you are in pain is based on your excruciating pain, it satisfies this requirement: it would not easily have been so based unless true, it would (likely) have been so based only if true. And this is so despite its not being safe outright, since you might too easily have believed that you were in pain while suffering only discomfort and not pain.

A belief that \( p \) is basis-relative safe, then, if and only if it has a basis that it would (likely) have only if true. By contrast, a belief that \( p \) is basis-relative sensitive if and only if it is based on a basis such that if it were false that \( p \), then not easily would the believer believe that \( p \) on that same basis.

More plausibly, then, what is properly required for knowledge is basis-relative safety, rather than outright safety.

The radical skeptic claims, about some epistemologically crucial beliefs, that they have no basis they would lack if
false. If you were deceived based on radically misleading experience, for example, you would still believe that you were not so deceived, and there need be no basis that you now have for that belief which you would then lack.

In so reasoning, the skeptic restricts us to bases for belief that are purely internal and psychological, by contrast with those that are external. Otherwise, his main premise would collapse. If we allow external bases, then the brain in a vat will no doubt lack some basis that sustains our ordinary belief that we are normally embodied. The skeptic's internalist assumption has of course been challenged in recent years, but here I will grant it for the sake of argument. I wish to explore a different line of defense, a virtue epistemology that is compatible with but not committed to content or basis externalism. Part of the interest of this line of defense may indeed derive from the fact that it does not depend on such externalism.

What then is the alternative defense? It proceeds as follows:

(a) reject the skeptic's requirement of outright sensitivity, and even his requirement of basis-relative sensitivity;
(b) point out the intuitive advantage, over such sensitivity requirements, enjoyed by corresponding safety requirements;
(c) suggest that the plausibility of the sensitivity requirements derives from the corresponding safety requirements so easily confused with them through failure to appreciate that strong conditionals do not contrapose;
(d) conclude that the skeptic does not refute common sense, nor does he even locate a paradox within common sense, since we are commonsensically committed at most to basis-relative safety, and not to basis-relative sensitivity; for, our belief that we are not radically deceived—as in a
brain-in-a-vat or evil-demon scenario—is basis-relative safe, though not basis-relative sensitive.

Although quite plausible against radical scenarios, that defense falls short against the one traditional scenario that does not depend on remote possibilities, namely the dream scenario. That scenario is most useful to the skeptic on the orthodox conception according to which the episodes of consciousness that we undergo in our dreams are ones that we thereby really undergo, while we dream. I have challenged that orthodox conception in my first lecture, while proposing that dreaming is much more like imagining than like hallucinating. But let us here set aside that challenge, in order to explore an alternative solution to the problem of dreams, one with its own distinctive interest and more directly in line with our virtue epistemology.

I would like to confront dream skepticism directly, without presupposing the imagination model. Indeed, let us initially grant to the skeptic the orthodox conception required for the dream-based attack. How might a virtue epistemology help thwart that attack?

Return first to our archer's shot. There are at least two interesting ways in which that shot might fail to be safe: I mean, two ways in which that archer might then too easily have released that arrow from that bow aimed at that target while the shot failed. The following two things might each have been fragile enough to deprive that shot of safety: (a) the archer's level of competence, for one, and (b) the appropriateness of the conditions, for another.

Thus (a) the archer might have recently ingested a drug, so that at the moment when he aimed and shot, his blood
content of the drug might too easily have been slightly higher, so as to reduce his competence to where he would surely have missed. Or else (b) a freak set of meteorological conditions might have gathered in such a way that too easily a gust might have diverted the arrow on its way to the target.

In neither case, however, would the archer be denied credit for his fine shot simply because it is thus unsafe. The shot is apt and creditable even if its aptness is thus fragile. What is required for the shot to be apt is that it be accurate because adroit, successful because competent. That it might too easily have failed through reduced competence or degraded conditions renders it unsafe but not inapt.

So we have seen ways in which a performance can be apt though unsafe. Moreover, a performance might be safe though inapt. A protecting angel with a wind machine might ensure that the archer’s shot would hit the bull’s-eye, for example, and a particular shot might hit the bull’s-eye through a gust from the angel’s machine, which compensates for a natural gust that initially diverts the arrow. In this case the shot is safe without being apt: it is not accurate because adroit.

In conclusion, neither aptness nor safety entails the other. The connection that perhaps remains is only this. Aptness requires the manifestation of a competence, and a competence is a disposition, one with a basis resident in the competent agent, one that would in appropriately normal conditions ensure (or make highly likely) the success of any relevant performance issued by it. Compatibly with such restricted safety, the competence manifest might then be fragile, as might also the appropriate normalcy of the conditions in which it is manifest.
The bearing of those reflections on the problem of dreams is now straightforward. True, on the orthodox conception dreams do pose a danger for our perceptual beliefs, which are unsafe through the nearness of the dream possibility, wherein one is said to host such a belief on the same sensory basis while dreaming. However, what dreams render vulnerable is only this: either the perceptual competence of the believer or the appropriate normalcy of the conditions for its exercise.

The dreamer’s experience may be fragmentary and indistinct, so that his sensory basis may not be quite the same as that of a normal perceiver. Recall Austin’s “dreamlike” quality of dreams, and Descartes’ idea that dreams are insufficiently coherent. However, the dreamer’s reduced or lost competence may blind him to such features of his experience, features that would enable him to distinguish dreaming from perceiving. Sleep might render one’s conditions abnormal and inadequate for the exercise of perceptual faculties. The proximate possibility that one is now asleep and dreaming might thus render fragile both one’s competence and also, jointly or alternatively, the conditions appropriate for its exercise. That is how the possibility that one is asleep and dreaming might endanger our ordinary perceptual beliefs. But this is just one more case where safety is compromised while aptness remains intact.

Ordinary perceptual beliefs might thus retain their status as apt, animal knowledge, despite the possibility that one is asleep and dreaming. Ordinary perceptual beliefs can still attain success through the exercise of perceptual competence, despite the fragility of that competence and of its required

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4 In Meditation Six.
conditions. However unsafe a performer's competence may be, and however unsafe may be the conditions appropriate for its exercise, if a performance does succeed through the exercise of that competence in its proper conditions, then it is an apt performance, one creditable to the performer. Knowledge is just a special case of such creditable, apt performance. Perceptual knowledge is unaffected by any fragility either in the knower's competence or in the conditions appropriate for its exercise. The knower's belief can thus remain apt even if unsafe through the proximity of the dream possibility.

Despite how plausible that may seem intuitively, we soon encounter a problem. You see a surface that looks red in ostensibly normal conditions. But it is a kaleidoscope surface controlled by a joker who also controls the ambient light, and might as easily have presented you with a red-light + white-surface combination as with the actual white-light + red-surface combination. Do you then know the surface you see to be red when he presents you with that good combination, despite the fact that, even more easily, he might have presented you with the bad combination?

Arguably, your belief that the surface is red is an apt belief, in which case it amounts to knowledge, or so it does according to our account. For you then exercise your faculty of color vision in normal conditions of lighting, distance, size of surface, etc., in conditions generally appropriate for the exercise of color vision. Yet it is not easy to insist that you therefore know that surface to be red.

If forced to retreat along that line, our solution to the problem of dreams will be undone. For we will not be able to insist that, despite the proximity of the dream possibility, perceptual beliefs are nonetheless apt and therefore knowledge. Apt they
may still be, but no longer clearly knowledge. Of course, we could still fall back to the imagination model, but our solution directly through a virtue epistemology would have vanished.

Recall, however, our distinction between two sorts of knowledge, the animal and the reflective. Any full account would need to register how these are matters of degree. For present purposes, however, the key component of the distinction is the difference between apt belief simpliciter, and apt belief aptly noted. If $K$ represents animal knowledge and $K^+$ reflective knowledge, then the basic idea may be represented thus: $K^+p \leftrightarrow KKp$.

That is a distinction worth deploying on the kaleidoscope example. The perceiver would there be said to have apt belief, and animal knowledge, that the seen surface is red. What he lacks, we may now add, is reflective knowledge, since this requires apt belief that he aptly believes the surface to be red (or at least it requires that he aptly take this for granted, or assume it or presuppose it, a qualification implicit in what follows).

Why should it be any less plausible to think that he aptly believes that he aptly believes than to think that he aptly believes simpliciter? Well, what competence might he exercise in believing that he aptly so believes, and how plausible might it be to attribute to that competence his being right in believing that he aptly believes?

What, for example, is the competence we exercise in taking the light to be normal when we trust our color vision in an ordinary case? It seems a kind of default competence, whereby one automatically takes the light to be normal absent some special indication to the contrary. And that is presumably what the kaleidoscope perceiver does, absent any indication of a joker in control. So, we may suppose him to retain that competence unimpaired and to exercise
it in taking for granted the adequacy of the ambient light, so that he can aptly take the surface to be red. Since the belief that he believes aptly is a true belief, and since it is owed to the exercise of a competence, how then can we suppose it not to be itself an apt belief? Well, recall: the requirement for aptly believing is not just that one’s belief be true, and derive from a competence. The requirement is rather that one believe correctly (with truth) through the exercise of a competence in its proper conditions. What must be attributable to the competence is not just the belief’s existence but its correctness.

Here now is a premise from which I propose to argue:

C. For any correct belief that p, the correctness of that belief is attributable to a competence only if it derives from the exercise of that competence in appropriate conditions for its exercise, and that exercise in those conditions would not then too easily have issued a false belief.

Consider now the kaleidoscope perceiver’s belief that he aptly believes the seen surface to be red. We are assuming that the competence exercised in that meta-belief is a default competence, one which, absent any specific indication to the contrary, takes it for granted that, for example, the lights are normal. Because of the jokester in control, however, the exercise of that competence might then too easily have issued a false belief that the lights are normal. Given principle C, therefore, we must deny that the truth of our perceiver’s belief that he aptly believes the surface to be red is attributable to his relevant competence. There being no other relevant competence in view, we must deny that the perceiver aptly believes that he aptly believes the surface to be red. Nor can the perceiver then have animal knowledge that he has animal knowledge
that the surface is red. And that is why the perceiver then lacks reflective knowledge of the color of that surface.

What shall we now say of the problem of dreams? If it is analogous to the kaleidoscope problem, then, although we can defend our perceptual beliefs as apt, we must surrender to the dream skeptic their status as reflectively defensible. We can defend our perceptual beliefs as cases of animal knowledge, but must relinquish any claim to the higher status of reflective knowledge. Surrender seems hasty, though; let's retreat and reconsider.

The problem of dreams arises for any ordinary case of perceptual knowledge through the fact that the subject might too easily have believed just as he does in that instance, although his belief and its sensory basis would have been housed in a dream. Too easily, then, might any ordinary perceptual belief have had its same basis while false.

Although ordinary perceptual beliefs are thus rendered unsafe, we responded, they can remain apt even so, and hence knowledge of a sort, of the animal sort. What is endangered by the dream possibility is only our perceptual competence or the presence of appropriate conditions for its exercise. But this poses no danger to the aptness of beliefs yielded by perceptual competence in appropriately normal conditions, and only aptness is required for animal knowledge, not safety.

However, the kaleidoscope case puts that response in doubt. What seems there endangered is one's perceptual competence or the conditions for its exercise, yet we are strongly drawn to claim that although one's belief is apt it is not knowledge.

It helps to distinguish between animal and reflective knowledge, between apt belief simpliciter, and apt belief aptly
noted. That distinction helps us defend the kaleidoscope perceivert's knowledge as a case of *animal* knowledge. We thus implicitly suggest that he has knowledge of a sort, animal knowledge, while lacking knowledge of another sort, reflective knowledge. So, if we apply our reasoning about that case to the problem of dreams, the consequence will be that perceptual knowledge generally falls short of the reflective level. The skeptic wins.

If common sense is to prevail, based on our virtue epistemology, we must see how, in ordinary perceptual belief, one can aptly presuppose, or take it for granted, that the relevant competence and conditions are in place. But the aptness of any such presupposition would require that it be correct because of a competence exercised in the conditions in which it is exercised. And the relevant competence seems nothing more than a default competence of assuming ourselves awake whenever conscious, absent any specific indication to the contrary. But the ease with which we might have gone wrong by so presupposing on such a basis is proportional to the proximity of the dream possibility, and that is really too close for comfort. So we would have to conclude that our getting it right when we ordinarily believe ourselves awake is not attributable (sufficiently) to the exercise of our default competence. That is the conclusion to which we are led by reasoning from principle C above. We do not get it right through competence in presupposing ourselves awake, since the supposed competence that we exercise, in its proper conditions, might too easily lead us astray.

That is where we are led if we take our cue, for ordinary perception in general, from the kaleidoscope example. In that example, we retain animal knowledge because we seem clearly enough to exercise our color vision in its normal
conditions (of distance, lighting, size of surface, etc.). There
we fall short of reflective knowledge, however, because the
jokester precludes the aptness of our implicit confidence that
our perceptual belief is apt. His being in control makes it too
easy for us to be confident in that default way, in normal
conditions for the exercise of our perceptual competence,
while still mistaken. So when, as it happens, we are right,
not mistaken, this cannot be attributed to the exercise of our
default competence as a success derived from it.

It might well be thought that the presence of the jokester
makes our conditions abnormal for presupposing that the light
is good. But in so presupposing we must then fall short of
aptness, in either of two ways. Perhaps we fall short because,
although we presuppose that the light is good, in appropriate
conditions for doing so, nevertheless, our correctness still
cannot be credited to our default competence, in its proper
conditions. Given the jokester’s presence, we might too
easily so presuppose, in such conditions, and still get it
wrong. Alternatively, we fail because the conditions for the
exercise of our default competence are already spoiled by
the very presence of the jokester. Either way, we then fail
aptly to presuppose that the light is good, since we fail to
presuppose correctly through the exercise of a competence in
its appropriate conditions.

Is the case of ordinary perception alike in those crucial
respects? That is not so clear. Among the things we must take
for granted in attaining ordinary perceptual knowledge is that
we are awake. What is our basis if any for so presupposing?
Is it simply our being conscious? Plausibly it is, at least on
the orthodox conception of dreams. In our dreams we are
awake, and on the orthodox conception we thereby believe
accordingly, while we dream. Plausibly, then, our basis when
we take ourselves to be awake is simply being conscious. And what are the conditions appropriate for the exercise of this competence? Here it is less clear what to say.

Do we retain when dreaming our normal competence to tell when we are awake? No, sleep would seem to deprive us of normal competence to discern features of our experience that would show to someone awake that it was just a dream (if it is possible to inspect the contents of a dream while awake, which seems implied by the phenomenon of lucid dreaming). Again, Austin spoke of a “dreamlike” quality, and Descartes of a certain lack of coherence. Suppose the orthodox conception is right, so that in dreaming we have real experiences, and respond to them with real beliefs, including the belief that one is awake. Perhaps we take for granted that we are awake whenever we are conscious. If our basis for so assuming is just being conscious, then the pertinent competence might too easily lead us astray in any ordinary situation, since in any ordinary situation, despite the proximity of the dream possibility, we would still assume ourselves to be awake on the same basis: namely, that of being conscious.

If we reason thus, however, we must then take back our claim that we can know ourselves to be in pain when we suffer excruciating pain, even if, through priming or hypochondria, we might easily have believed ourselves to suffer pain while it was only discomfort. We must take back that claim to know, for we can no longer claim the excruciating pain to be the relevant basis for our belief. After all, we would have believed ourselves to be in pain whether the pain had been

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5 Some competences are fundamental and minimally dependent on the episodic states of the subject. Others are more superficial, and dependent on the shape that the subject is in at the time. Intemperate drinking, for example, can reduce or remove one’s competence to drive a car.
excruciating or not. So the real basis for the belief is some more determinable experience of which excruciating pain is only one determinate.

Suppose we resist such reasoning. Despite the fact that we would have believed ourselves in pain even when suffering only discomfort, we might argue, still there is some sense in which the excruciating pain is in all its intensity a cause and a basis of our belief that we are in pain. If so, then we open the way for a similar response to the problem of dreams. “Even if we would have believed ourselves awake had we simply been conscious,” we could now say, “this does not take away the richer basis that we enjoy in waking life for the belief that one is awake.” Now we could appeal, with Austin, to the vividness and richness of wakeful experience, and with Descartes to its coherence, as part of the basis for our belief that we are awake.

Of course, it may be that dreams pose a problem for the safety of ordinary perceptual knowledge in two ways. First, the phenomenological content of dreams may simply be different from that of waking life, in the ways suggested by Austin and Descartes.⁶ So, the dreams you commonly

⁶ Compare J. L. Austin’s Sense and Sensibility (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 48–9: “I may have the experience [dubbed ‘delusive’ presumably] of dreaming that I am being presented to the Pope. Could it be seriously suggested that having this dream is ‘qualitatively indistinguishable’ from actually being presented to the Pope? Quite obviously not. After all, we have the phrase ‘a dream-like quality’; some waking experiences are said to have this dream-like quality, and some artists and writers occasionally try to impart it, usually with scant success, to their works. But of course, if the fact here alleged were a fact, the phrase would be perfectly meaningless, because applicable to everything. If dreams were not ‘qualitatively’ different from waking experiences, then every waking experience would be like a dream; the dream-like quality would be, not difficult to capture, but impossible to avoid. It is true… that dreams are narrated in the same terms as waking experiences: these terms, after all, are the best terms we have; but it would be wildly wrong to conclude from this that what is narrated in the two cases is exactly alike. When we are hit on the head we sometimes say
undergo may very rarely if ever really be intrinsically much like wakeful experience in content. Second, being asleep may impair your competence to discern features relevant to whether it is a dream or waking life. So, the way in which you tell things in a dream—as when in dreaming you implicitly assume that you are awake and perceiving things—is not the competent way in which you do so in waking life. This may be because you do not have the same experiential basis, since the dream basis would fail short in respect of vividness, richness, or coherence. Alternatively, that we ‘see stars’; but for all that, seeing stars when you are hit on the head is not ‘qualitatively’ indistinguishable from seeing stars when you look at the sky.”

Compare also the last paragraph of Descartes’ Meditations: “I know that in matters regarding the well-being of the body, all my senses report the truth much more frequently than not. Also, I can almost always make use of more than one sense to investigate the same thing; and in addition, I can use both my memory, which connects present experiences with preceding ones, and my intellect, which has by now examined all the causes of error. Accordingly, I should not have any further fears about the falsity of what my senses tell me every day; on the contrary, the exaggerated doubts of the last few days should be dismissed as laughable. This applies especially to the principal reason for doubt, namely my inability to distinguish between being asleep and being awake. For I now notice that there is a vast difference between the two, in that dreams are never linked by memory with all the other actions of life as waking experiences are. If, while I am awake, anyone were suddenly to appear to me and then disappear immediately, as happens in sleep, so that I could not see where he had come from or where he had gone to, it would not be unreasonable for me to judge that he was a ghost, or a vision created in my brain [. . . like those that are formed in the brain when I sleep; (added in the French version)], rather than a real man. But when I distinctly see where things come from and where and when they come to me, and when I can connect my perceptions of them with the whole of the rest of my life without a break, then I am quite certain that when I encounter these things I am not asleep but awake. And I ought not to have even the slightest doubt of their reality if, after calling upon all the senses as well as my memory and my intellect in order to check them, I receive no conflicting reports from any of these sources. For from the fact that God is not a deceiver it follows that in cases like these I am completely free from error. But since the pressure of things to be done does not always allow us to stop and make such a meticulous check, it must be admitted that in this human life we are often liable to make mistakes about particular things, and we must acknowledge the weakness of our nature.”
and compatibly, it may be because even if your experience in a dream could match ordinary waking experience in those respects, nevertheless your competence to take such respects into account would be so impaired when asleep that it would not matter. You would take yourself to be awake so long as you were conscious, regardless of how vivid, rich, or coherent your experience might or might not be.

Neither dream-involving threat to the safety of our perceptual beliefs is a threat to their aptness, however, since both would endanger only our normal competence to form perceptual beliefs. And we have seen how this can leave aptness unaffected.

The first lecture proposed an imagination model of dreams, as a way to block the skeptic’s conclusion that dreams endanger ordinary perceptual beliefs. A further argument was still required for the further claim that our perceptual beliefs do normally rise above the animal level to a higher reflective level. And this led to a surprising pairing of our knowledge that we are awake with our knowledge of the cogito.

This second lecture proposes a virtue epistemology that distinguishes between aptness and safety of performance generally, and of belief in particular, which enables a further solution to the problem of dreams, beyond the imagination model. On this supplementary solution, dreams preclude the safety of our perceptual beliefs, but not their aptness, which is all they need in order to constitute animal knowledge.

In summary, some skeptics find a paradox at the heart of common sense. They argue that to know something requires that you believe it sensitively, in that had it been false you would not have believed it; or at least that you believe it on a basis such that had it been false you would not have
so believed it. A first step in response is to replace any such sensitivity requirement with one of safety, which a belief satisfies by having a basis that a belief would likely have only if it were right. A belief can thus be safe without being sensitive, which comports with the fact that subjunctive conditionals do not contrapose. Though more adequate than the sensitivity requirement, this requirement of safety is still inadequate. For we still face the skeptic’s paradox, given that dreams are a common enough fact of life, unlike the usual run of outlandish skeptical scenarios. The special threat from dreams is that they seem to render our ordinary perceptual beliefs unsafe. Too easily might we have so believed on a similar enough basis in a dream, while our belief was false.

I have offered two ways to meet this threat. First, I contend in the first lecture that dreams do not contain real beliefs, and hence do not threaten the safety of our ordinary perceptual beliefs. Second, I propose in this second lecture a move beyond requiring that a belief must be safe in order to amount to knowledge, to a requirement of aptness rather than safety.

Consider indeed performances generally, not just intellectual performances such as judgments or beliefs. Your pertinent skill or competence, and your relevant situation for its exercise, can both be sufficiently fragile to render your performance unsafe, while it remains an apt performance nonetheless, one creditable to you as an attainment. Knowledge is simply such apt performance in the way of belief. Knowledge hence does not require the safety of the contained belief, since the belief can be unsafe owing to the fragility of the believer’s competence or situation.7

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7 Consider the kind of simulation that a fighter pilot may have to go through. The pilot may well find himself in a situation that to him, strapped in as he is,
When we sleep and dream, then, our situation is inappropriate for the manifestation of perceptual competence. Hence, even assuming that we do have perceptual beliefs in our dreams, these are not then apt beliefs, since even if and when they accidentally hit the mark of truth, they fail to do so in a way creditable to the believer’s competence. But this does not affect the aptness of our perceptual beliefs in waking life.

In conclusion, animal knowledge is best viewed as apt belief, which enables a resolution of our skeptical paradox. As a bonus, it enables also a solution, at least in part, for the Gettier problem, the problem that beliefs can be true and justified without being knowledge. Our solution is that beliefs can be true and justified without being apt, whereas in order to constitute knowledge a belief must be apt, not just true and justified.

It turns out to be indistinguishable from real life flying and shooting, even though it is only simulation. Given the nearness of such possibilities for a pilot as he nears the end of his period of training, how do we assess his real life flying and his good shots in those stages of his training, where simulation alternates with real flight. How good the pilot is will be assessed in part by reference to how easily he could now miss. And what is to be taken into account in determining this? Should we take into account that when the pilot now takes a real shot as he flies a real plane, he might too easily be in an indistinguishable simulation wherein he would go through what would seem to him to be real shots, though obviously no real target would be hit? How plausible can that be? Surely what matters is how remote the possibilities are wherein he takes a real shot in relevantly similar circumstances and still misses. There is a nearby possibility wherein he acts in a way that to him is indistinguishable from that of taking a real shot although he “misses” in the sense that no real target is hit. But this possibility seems irrelevant to evaluating how good a shot that pilot is now, and how good his real shots are. And an analogous point must now be considered concerning the thinker who shoots his answers at a certain range of questions. What affects how good an intellectual, epistemic shot that thinker is, and the epistemic quality of his actual beliefs? It is now in doubt that any possible situation wherein the thinker takes his shot and misses is automatically relevant to his pertinent evaluation and to the risk of error in his actual shot, if it is a situation that he cannot distinguish from the actual situation wherein he takes that shot.
That solution is partial since so far it deals with animal knowledge only, but it can be extended to cover also the sort of knowledge that requires reflective and apt endorsement of one’s animal knowledge. It may indeed be thought that dreams still pose a problem for our claims to *reflective* perceptual knowledge. But we have seen the resources available to us for meeting also this deeper skepticism.

The fifth lecture will aim to deepen our solution to the problem of dreams based on distinguishing apt belief, or animal knowledge, from apt belief aptly noted, or reflective knowledge. The ways in which our virtue-based solution goes beyond the imagination model will then emerge more fully. Meanwhile, the two intervening lectures will use our aptness-centered epistemology to illuminate, first, the nature and epistemic role of intuitions, and, second, epistemic normativity and the problem of how knowledge can be better than mere true belief.