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# Epistemic Theodicy, Epistemic Evil, and Epistemic Responsibility

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**Abstract:** The paper explores the concept of epistemic theodicy and strengthens an argument that reconciles human fallibility with the existence of an all-powerful and benevolent God. This argument is grounded in epistemic responsibility, emphasizing our epistemic autonomy. The paper supports two aspects of this argument: the role of epistemic agency in shaping beliefs and belief formation based on experiential rationality. The paper begins by introducing the concept of epistemic theodicy and its relation to the problem of epistemic evil. Next, it presents a succinct version of the argument based on epistemic responsibility. The paper then focuses on epistemic agency, proposing a notion rooted in reasons-responsiveness and highlighting the agentive nature of belief formation. It provides an outline a of view of epistemic rationality grounded in experiential rationality, showing its compatibility with the responsibility-based response to the problem of epistemic evil. The conclusion reflects on the significance of these accounts of agency and rationality in the context of epistemic theodicy.

**Keywords:** theodicy; epistemic evil; epistemic agency; human fallibility; freedom; rationality; epistemic responsibility

## 1. Introduction

This paper examines the concept of epistemic theodicy and seeks to enhance one of the prospective arguments suggesting that human fallibility can coexist with the presence of an all-powerful and benevolent deity. This argument is rooted in the idea of epistemic responsibility, which emphasizes our autonomy and accountability in matters of knowledge and understanding, including error. Specifically, the article lends further support for two aspects of this argument. The first aspect pertains to the role of epistemic agency in shaping and upholding beliefs. The second aspect relates to the process of forming beliefs based on seemings and the associated experiential rationality.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section introduces the concept of epistemic theodicy and elaborates it in relation to the problem of epistemic evil. It also presents a sketched version of the argument for the compatibility of human error with the existence of the almighty and benevolent God that rests on epistemic responsibility and autonomy. Section 3 focuses on epistemic agency, which is presupposed in the mentioned argument. A notion of epistemic agency is put forward that rests on reasons-responsiveness and argues for the agentive character of belief formation on the basis of its phenomenology. Section 4 then outlines a view of epistemic rationality that rests on the so-called experiential rationality and demonstrates how this fits well with the epistemic responsibility-based response to the problem of epistemic evil. The concluding Section 5 offers some final reflections on how all this is important in the context of epistemic theodicy.

## 2. Epistemic Theodicy, Epistemic Evil, and Responsibility for Belief

Theodicy usually refers to endeavors that seek to understand and address the problem of evil and suffering in the context of the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and infinitely benevolent God. To put it another way, theodicy seeks to explain or justify why a good and powerful God would allow suffering and evil to exist in the world. One aspect of such a project pertains to a specific type of evil that concerns the domain of knowledge

and can be labeled as epistemic evil. This then leads to a more specific project of epistemic theodicy focused on explaining how the existence of epistemic evil is compatible with an infinitely benevolent God (Lin 2019). While general theodicies address the existence of moral and natural evils, epistemic theodicy addresses the presence of false beliefs, ignorance, confusion, and other forms of epistemic imperfection. It attempts to provide an explanation or justification for why an all-knowing and benevolent God would permit individuals to hold incorrect beliefs, misunderstand important truths, or lack access to essential knowledge. And just as there are several approaches to the more general concern, ranging from appeals to human free will and disobedience to God, preconditions for human moral and spiritual development and refinement of the human soul, and the natural aspect of an evolving universe to the evil being merely apparent and recognized as a problem only because of limited human understanding and comprehension of God's plans and reasons, there are several analogical responses to the problem of epistemic evil.

Furthermore, this highlights an interesting connection between the general and specific aspects of theodicy that emerges if one opts for the solution to the general problem that appeals to limited human understanding and knowledge. More specifically, skeptical theism is a view that proposes undercutting the evidential basis for the problem of the existence of evil. According to this view, examples of gratuitous suffering and instances of evil are merely appearances that do not provide sufficient reasons for believing or knowing since what we must take into account are cognitive limitations of human beings when relying on such appearances or seeming instances of suffering. Proponents of skeptical theism thus argue that since we cannot fully grasp the complexities of God's purposes, we should be cautious in drawing conclusions about the compatibility of seeming instances of evil with an all-good and all-powerful deity. There is a substantial cognitive gap between humans and God, and this undercuts justificatory or evidential support for our beliefs about suffering being gratuitous. But, in turn, such a response seriously endangers most of our knowledge if "it may be that God allows us to suffer from epistemic deficiency, if not out-right deceiving us that such-and-such is so, for moral reasons beyond our ken." (Licon 2013, p. 176). However, if we cannot rely on what seems to be good evidence for gratuitous suffering or evil, then why count anything else as sufficient evidence? Such a line of reasoning about the problem of epistemic evil inevitably leads to a very problematic form of skepticism (Licon 2013).

Epistemic (also intellectual or cognitive) evil is a concept that relates to the realm of knowledge, beliefs, understanding, and other possible epistemic endeavors or goals. More specifically, it refers to the incidence of ignorance, misinformation, or false beliefs that can lead to negative consequences. In order to substantiate the label of evil, such negative consequences must meet some standard of seriousness or gravity. Looking out the window and mistakenly thinking that the white patch that I see on the upland grazing field is a sheep that I am used to seeing there all the time, while in reality, it is a white rock being put there recently, is an example of an erroneous belief, but this does not mean that is necessary qualifies as an instance of epistemic evil. Epistemic evil is thus concerned with the ways in which our cognitive processes can lead us astray or result in harmful consequences. There are at least two possible ways in which such consequences could be harmful. The first is if the epistemic agent in question acts on the basis of false beliefs, insufficient understanding, etc., and such actions result in some serious moral harm. The second way concerns specific instances of epistemic harms, e.g., in the case of epistemic injustice, where such harm is connected to the person being wronged in her capacity as a knower. "To be wronged in one's capacity as a knower is to be wronged in a capacity essential to human value. When one is undermined or otherwise wronged in a capacity essential to human value, one suffers an intrinsic injustice. The form that this intrinsic injustice takes, specifically in cases of testimonial injustice, is that the subject is wronged in her capacity as a giver of knowledge. The capacity to give knowledge to others is one side of that many-sided capacity so significant in human beings: namely, the capacity for reason. We are long familiar with the idea, played out by the history of philosophy in many variations, that

our rationality is what lends humanity its distinctive value. No wonder, then, that being insulted, undermined, or otherwise wronged in one's capacity as a giver of knowledge is something that can cut deep." (Fricker 2007, p. 44; cf. Centa and Strahovnik 2020).

Epistemic evil can emerge in the form of erroneous beliefs linked to phenomena of misinformation, culpable ignorance, dogmatism, confirmation bias, and other epistemic deficiencies. In this vein, the problem of epistemic evil highlights the ways in which our cognitive processes can be vulnerable to error, misunderstanding, and manipulation. In response, epistemic theodicy thus examines the presence of incorrect beliefs, ignorance, misunderstanding, and other types of epistemic imperfection in juxtaposition with classical theodicies, which address evil in general.

One way in which epistemic theodicy endeavors to achieve this is by invoking the consideration of human freedom, including aspects of freedom that extend to matters epistemic. Human error is thus explained or accommodated as the consequence of human free will. "Human error is compatible with the existence of a perfect God because we are free to use our cognitive capacities well or poorly." (Lin 2019, p. 26). Additionally, true intellectual growth and genuine understanding require the freedom to choose what to believe, and if individuals were forced into holding true beliefs, it might undermine the value of knowledge and intellectual exploration. Such a response, therefore, interrelates human epistemic endeavor with dimensions of autonomy and responsibility. One prominent example of this line of response is Rene Descartes' (2008) proposal to understand judgment as resting both on intellect and volition. Judgment requires affirmation of an idea and is primarily in the domain of volition and thus "involves the exercise of a free will. By affirming that p, I come to believe that p. Thus, if affirmation is a free volition, then what I believe is up to me." (Lin 2019, p. 30). Error is thus the responsibility of the epistemic agent. However, such a response is only persuasive if one accepts a highly contentious presupposition that belief or judgment is voluntary. And as we will see shortly, there are several good reasons for rejecting it.

In the next section, after briefly sketching the context of the debate on epistemic agency, I put forward an account of epistemic agency that both rejects the idea that the formation and maintenance of beliefs is voluntary and leaves ample room for epistemic responsibility. In Section 4, I amend this proposal with an account of experiential rationality and epistemic virtuousness that complements the whole package in a way that highlights several dimensions of epistemic responsibility.

## 3. Epistemic Agency in the Space of Reasons

Before sketching the context of the debate on epistemic agency, a couple of important preliminary clarifications are in order before proceeding. When talking about epistemic agency, what I have in mind is epistemic agency proper, i.e., epistemic agency as related to belief fixation, that is, to the formation and maintenance of beliefs. I am thus not primarily concerned with certain associated and apparently fully voluntary actions that sometimes accompany or are part of the formation of a belief. These include, e.g., voluntarily seeking out certain sources of information, voluntarily rehearsing to oneself certain pertinent considerations, voluntarily training or developing epistemic skills, intentionally changing one's existing epistemic practices, etc. It needs to be emphasized that using the phrase "forming and maintaining beliefs" does not already presuppose epistemic voluntarism. It can be thought that this kind of language somewhat alludes to belief fixation being agentive, but I am using it in a way that is neutral in this regard. Additionally, a distinction that proves useful to employ in relation to the agentive character of our epistemic endeavors is a distinction between *indirect* doxastic voluntarism and *direct* doxastic voluntarism. The former pertains to the above-mentioned voluntary acts that accompany the fixation of belief, while the latter pertains to belief fixation *per se*. When discussing epistemic agency, I have in mind primarily the latter, but in a way that includes aspects of the former, as both are proper parts of epistemic responsibility and virtuousness. Second, and related to the first point, it seems preferable—if one is to fully answer the challenge of epistemic evil—not to

limit the talk about epistemic agency merely to a specific domain of beliefs. An example of the latter would be a view that would limit the talk about epistemic agency to higher-level processes or mechanisms related to belief acquisition (e.g., reflection, deliberation; cf. Olson 2015) or a subset of beliefs (Sosa 2015). On the contrary, I aim to develop an integrative view that is applicable to belief fixation as a whole.

Let me begin by briefly delineating two views on epistemic agency that lie at the opposite extremes of the continuum, namely doxastic voluntarism and a flat-out denial of epistemic agency. The core idea of *doxastic voluntarism* is a thesis that we can form our beliefs at will or through voluntary control, i.e., that we have the same (or at least sufficiently similar) sort of control over our beliefs that we have over our voluntary actions. Steup (2000, 2012) defends such a view by first putting forward a compatibilist construal of the concepts of free action and voluntary control and then claiming that we have such control over our doxastic attitudes (belief, disbelief, suspension of judgment) and that this is then a basis for deontological evaluation in relation to epistemic justification. Steup puts forward four considerations that support such a view. First, similar to our actions, our doxastic attitudes are a fit object for our reactive attitudes. Second, in most cases, there is no conflict between our belief-forming processes and our higher-level assessment of them, which means that such a view can account for the absence of internal constraints that would otherwise render our belief-forming processes as unfree (e.g., believing something as a consequence of robust indoctrination). Third, our doxastic attitudes are typically weakly intentional, which means that they are non-accidental and involve some kind of pro-attitude (in cases where there is no direct intention present). And finally, our doxastic attitudes are typically based on reason-responsive processes. For Steup, these considerations taken together outweigh any considerations that would go against such compatibilist doxastic freedom (Steup 2012, pp. 388–90).

There are several (plausible) conceptual and psychological arguments against doxastic voluntarism (Turri et al. 2018). One of the central arguments was eloquently put forward by Bernard Williams in the following way. "Belief cannot be like that; it is not a contingent fact that I cannot bring it about, just like that, that I believe something, as it is a contingent fact that I cannot bring it about, just like that, that I'm blushing. Why is this? One reason is connected with the characteristic of beliefs that they aim at truth. If I could acquire a belief at will, I could acquire it whether it was true or not. If in full consciousness I could will to acquire a 'belief' irrespective of its truth, it is unclear that before the event I could seriously think of it as a belief, i.e., as something purporting to represent reality." (Williams 1973, p. 148). Additionally, if we look at the experiential or phenomenological aspects of doxastic attitudes, they seem to lack choice or voluntary control as a component, and this is in sharp contrast to the experience of ordinary actions.

That is why many opt for a denial of epistemic agency. This view claims that belief fixation is not agentive and that it makes little sense to talk about epistemic agency. All beliefs, whether formed on the basis of high-level processes or unreflectively, are no different at the lower, mechanistic level of belief acquisition. We have *no* voluntary control over such a process. Kornblith elaborates on such a view in the following way. "[T]he appeal to epistemic agency seems to be nothing more than a bit of mythology. A demystified view of belief acquisition leaves no room for its operation. Epistemic agency does not seem to be a feature of belief acquisition generally. But any attempt to tie agency to reflection seems doomed, since our agency is involved only in actions which provide input to our belief-forming processes, not in the formation of belief itself. And this, therefore, provides us with no more reason to speak of agency in the case of belief acquisition than the fact that eating is undertaken voluntarily gives us reason to speak of digestion as a manifestation of our agency." (Kornblith 2016, p. 177). Genuine agency can only be attributed to actions that precede or accompany belief fixation, such as focusing our attention on various bits of evidence or turning our head in order to see whether somebody is approaching around the corner of the building. These are all actions that have aims, and we have the relevant control over them. But beliefs have no such aims, and we have no control over their formation.

Kornblith illustrates this with the case of perceptual beliefs. "I open my eyes and see a table in front of me and thereby come to acquire the belief that I am standing in front of a table. The perceptual mechanisms which come into play here work automatically; they do not require any mediating aim, or goal, or intention on the part of the believer. I may sincerely care about having true beliefs about what is in front of me, or I may be indifferent to the matter entirely. My perceptual mechanisms, and the cognitive mechanisms to which they are linked, will simply go to work whatever my concerns." (Kornblith 2016, p. 180).

Situated somewhere along both extremes are versions of the restricted conception of epistemic agency. This is a view that restricts epistemic agency only to some doxastic states, acts, processes, or practices. It comes in two main types. The first type restricts epistemic agency to specific epistemic practices. An example is a view on epistemic agency as defended by Olson (2015). Olson regards epistemic agency as "the agency one has over one's belief-forming practices, which will directly affect the way in which one forms belief and indirectly affects the beliefs one forms" (p. 449). The core of this type of restricted epistemic agency is that one has the ability to (voluntarily) modify one's doxastic disposition or belief-forming abilities. "Epistemic agents have the ability to hone and refine their belief-forming abilities through altering their doxastic dispositions. In so doing, one can affect one's beliefs, but neither directly nor specifically" (p. 450). This variant of epistemic agency is not directly connected to belief fixation and qualifies as indirect doxastic voluntarism.

The second type of restricted epistemic agency avows agency only for a specific class of beliefs or, in the case of a view that I will discuss here, for a specific type of knowledge. Sosa is one of the main proponents of such a view, which he elaborates by utilizing a distinction between animal and reflective knowledge. "[A]nimal knowledge does not require that the knower have an epistemic perspective on his belief, a perspective from which he endorses the source of that belief, from which he can see that source as reliably truth conducive. Reflective knowledge does by contrast require such a perspective." (Sosa 2009, p. 135). Proper epistemic agency with a deontic evaluation of epistemic outcomes is applicable only to the latter variety of knowledge. At the level of animal knowledge, epistemic agency is restricted. "When we have animal knowledge, that is, when we form our beliefs *unreflectively*, our beliefs are arrived at *passively*. Unreflective beliefs are merely *produced in us*; we play *no active role* in their formation" (Kornblith 2016, p. 167). More recently, Sosa (2015) amended his view by distinguishing between different kinds of (epistemic) agency. The first one is free epistemic agency, which is associated with freely determined and intentional judgment. Such judgments can also be deontically evaluated and are associated with (epistemic) reactive attitudes like praise, blame, resentment, etc. But besides this full-fledged epistemic agency, Sosa allows for another kind of epistemic agency, which is not related to our free endeavors but pertains to functionings (as functionally assessable states). Sosa uses an example of forming a belief about the length of lines in the Müller–Lyer illusion as based on epistemic seemings and describes it as a quite involuntary process that involves no pondering or decision. Nonetheless, it is a process that can be assessed in terms of proper epistemic functionings and associated with an attitude of approval or disapproval. According to Sosa, judgments are governed by voluntarily chosen and adopted evidential policies, commitments, etc., as opposed to animal beliefs that are acquired through unfree, "automatic" proper functioning of our cognitive mechanisms. Reflective judgment involves an affirmation that is "as plausibly free and relevantly will-dependent as are ordinary choices and actions" (Sosa 2016, p. 26). Although there is much that my own proposed account will share with Sosa's work, I have some reservations. From the general perspective, my proposal will be simpler in that it will not posit a distinction between two different types of knowledge and two types of epistemic agency. And my proposed account will not limit epistemic agency to judgment as a subset of beliefs.

Before proceeding, from the point of epistemic theodicy, none of the options above seems very promising. Epistemic voluntarism has a host of its own problems and cannot easily be defended in its own right. Versions of the view on epistemic agency that defend

restricted epistemic agency are much more plausible but cannot deliver the proper support for the responsibility-based argument since they only pertain to a subset of our cognitive endeavors and would thus only accommodate merely a part of the problem of epistemic evil. A flat-out denial of epistemic agency is also not what is required for the responsibility-based approach to epistemic theodicy since the automaticity of belief fixation excludes important aspects of responsibility.

I propose a view according to which belief fixation is not voluntary but is nevertheless agentive in a broad sense since it consists of one's exercising competence in rational evidence appreciation and capacity to become gripped by belief on the basis of pertinent evidence. This view gets its support from the phenomenology of belief. In short, one experiences one's beliefs not passively (i.e., not as passively undergoing a state-causal psychological process) but instead as a result of their epistemic competence and ability to appreciate epistemic reasons, i.e., capability to form and maintain beliefs because of pertinent evidential import.

Although belief fixation is not experienced as voluntary and hence lacks the phenomenological aspect of optionality, nevertheless, it does possess phenomenological features matching many other experiential aspects of ordinary practical agency. Because belief fixation is phenomenologically similar to the phenomenology of practical agency, it is a species of agency. In forming or maintaining a belief that P, one experiences this belief as having arisen within oneself *qua* epistemically rational agent—as one's having been (non-voluntarily) settled into belief by one's awareness and grasp of the categorical epistemic authority of considerations that one experiences as evidentially favoring P. I call this species of agency credency or credentive agency (Horgan et al. 2018). Since belief fixation involves agentive experience as-of exercising one's credency, it is phenomenologically quite different from experiences as-of a psychological state-causal process unfolding by itself within oneself (e.g., blushing from embarrassment or uncontrollably sneezing).

Consider the phenomenology of occurrent-belief formation. Generally, the inception of an occurent belief lacks the conscious sense of this being optional. In this context, I am referring to the experiential aspects of the process of forming beliefs. For instance, when observing a car approaching the house through a window, one spontaneously forms a belief that the car is moving toward the dwelling. However, even though these instances of belief formation are experienced as not subject to our immediate control, they do not fall into the category of being completely involuntary, as that would be the polar opposite of voluntariness. Instead, they fit into a distinct phenomenological category: the experience of actively engaging one's capacity for forming beliefs or exercising credency. The phenomenology associated with forming beliefs includes the discernment and assessment of reasons, specifically epistemic reasons that consist of available evidence. These reasons are perceived as considerations that strongly support the belief being formed, and the resulting belief is experienced as well-supported by this evidence. Furthermore, this process bears a resemblance to the phenomenology of voluntary agency, as it involves the motivational influence of recognized reasons. In this case, it entails being drawn toward believing by virtue of one's appreciation of the evidence. This motivational impetus is experienced as independent of one's desires. In essence, this perspective highlights that while belief formation often feels automatic, it is not entirely beyond our control; instead, it involves a nuanced and active process that integrates the assessment of evidence. Furthermore, the credentive phenomenology of belief formation shares similarities with the experiential features associated with voluntary agency. It is important to note that this aspect is not about passively undergoing a state where one's appreciation of evidence directly causes the emergence of belief. Instead, it pertains to the experience of autonomously (albeit non-voluntarily) utilizing one's capacity for appreciating epistemic reasons. We do not just end up with our beliefs out of the blue. This aspect thus includes believing for a reason and being able to respond properly to questions about a particular belief. Belief formation is experienced as purposively employing one's epistemic agency. The above-described aspects of the phenomenology of belief fixation are tightly intertwined with the experience of epistemic agency as a whole (Horgan et al. 2018).

From the perspective of epistemic agency and epistemic agent, one can employ the metaphor of being situated in the space of reasons, i.e., being capable of appreciating epistemic reasons and being in the grip of the authority of epistemic reasons and recognizing and experiencing oneself believing in light of these reasons. This also includes being able to respond to challenges regarding a belief and exercising one's epistemic agency in relation to some epistemic end (e.g., truth). Such a use of the phrase "being situated in the space of reasons" is Sellarsian, at least in spirit. Sellars used it in relation to the concept of knowledge by stating that "in characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (Sellars 1956, §36).

## 4. Experiential Rationality, Error, and Epistemic Virtuousness

In line with the proposal on how to understand epistemic agency and the introductory remarks, I sketch a corresponding account of epistemic rationality that further figures in a response to the problem of epistemic theodicy. First, belief can be understood as a doxastic state, which includes a commitment to the content of this state. As a result, the belief has a minimal constitutive *telos* or *goal,* which is truth; if we hold a particular belief, then it aims for truth. Belief can also have other epistemic goals, such as knowing, understanding, and believing according to epistemic virtues. However, the minimal constitutive *telos* is truth and forms a basis for a more detailed structure of epistemic means and ends of belief. As epistemic agents, we are situated in the world according to (i) the evidence available to us and (ii) our own deep epistemic sensitivity to what is true. Such embeddedness, together with the fact that belief has a constitutive goal of truth, creates a nested hierarchy of constitutively related epistemic means and goals (Horgan et al. 2018; Strahovnik 2022). At the very top, there is what I will call reliable veridicality, and here, the goal is to form and maintain true beliefs by deploying a reliable process of belief fixation. Human epistemic agents all fall short of this goal. One level below is the level of objective rationality. It consists of forming beliefs through comprehension of the objective significance of one's evidence and believing just what is objectively likely to be true. If our epistemic standards were always the ones that were objectively correct, we would be able to achieve this level. Subjective rationality is the level below this. It consists of comprehending the significance of one's evidence and believing what is subjectively likely to be true based on subjective epistemic sensibility. The level of experiential rationality is the very lowest. At this level, one believes what is consistent with their epistemic seemings and bases their beliefs on these seemings. An epistemic seeming, with regard to a proposition p, refers to a mental state such that p appears to be true.

Moreover, the descending levels within this four-level hierarchy are inherently interconnected with the levels above them. This interconnection arises from the fact that, as an epistemic agent situated within their own unique perspective, one cannot transcend their immediate epistemic standpoint or perspective. This epistemic perspective contains one's epistemic seemings (evidence) and one's deep epistemic sensibility. Considering this, we can now establish that the individual must form and maintain beliefs in a way that follows the best available means to reach the truth as a constitutive goal of belief. Given the nested structure of levels described above, experiential rationality is revealed as the best means; that is, the individual must form and maintain beliefs that are in accordance with the balance of epistemic seemings and existing epistemic sensibility in each moment. Thus, given our epistemic situatedness, it is epistemically responsible to form beliefs based on the seemings and sensibility one has at the time. One's best means to being a rational epistemic agent is relying on their experiential best take on the import of evidence for belief. Epistemic responsibility requires that one exercises epistemic good faith (believes when the evidence is there) and eschews epistemic bad faith (suspends belief in cases of insufficient evidence) (Horgan et al. 2018).

But all of the above pertains merely to the synchronic perspective of belief fixation (and credentive agency). From a *diachronic* perspective, epistemic agents must pursue diachronic epistemic responsibility and core epistemic virtuousness. Here, the aspects of voluntary epistemic agency are at the forefront and pertain to the cultivation of epistemic sensibility and epistemic standards that would approach the level of objectively correct standards. Habits of mind pertinent in relation to this can be labeled as ancillary epistemic virtues. Their role is to help to align the above-mentioned levels of rationality. Ancillary epistemic virtues include things like impartiality, intellectual sobriety, intellectual courage, synoptic understanding, sense for alternative points of view, grasp of salience, focus, practical wisdom, epistemic conscientiousness, humility, etc. (Montmarquet 1987; Eflin 2003; Centa and Strahovnik 2020). Their unifying aspect is epistemic responsibility. And if, on the other hand, epistemic irresponsibility is exhibited through one's past in a specific pattern (perhaps as interrelated with other aspects of one epistemic character), it merits the label of specific ancillary epistemic vice, e.g., arrogance, closed-mindedness, dogmatism, intellectual cowardice, sloppiness, and intellectual snobbism. Because of the successive levels of rationality and core epistemic virtuousness that are embedded, one cannot synchronically improve the overall quality of one's belief fixation by not taking into account experiential rationality. Nonetheless, there is a host of ways that ancillary epistemic virtues can improve the overall quality of an epistemic agent's belief fixation, thereby rendering it more effective in the pursuit of true beliefs and knowledge.

What emerges is a view that encompasses at least two aspects of epistemic responsibility. The first one consists of synchronic experiential rationality and includes credentive epistemic agency. The second aspect concerns the diachronic epistemic perspective and the cultivation of ancillary virtues. This is consequently relevant for the understanding of human error in the context of the debate on epistemic theodicy, to which I turn in the Section 5.

## 5. Conclusions

One plausible rejoinder to the problem of epistemic evil invokes the aspect of epistemic responsibility and thus attributes such evil to human error as a consequence of such responsibility. However, in order for such a response to succeed, it needs to be joined with a robust account of epistemic agency that would allow humans to be responsible for error. Epistemic responsibility plays a significant role, as it further involves ethical considerations related to how individuals form and maintain their beliefs in the face of questions and challenges regarding the existence of God and the problem of evil. In the two sections above, I have put forward an account of epistemic agency and rationality that supplements this line of response to the problem of epistemic evil. It locates error in the epistemic agent's failure to be aptly responsive to reasons but is at the same time not overly intellectualistic or demanding in terms of what is rational for an agent to believe in a particular epistemic situation since it posits experiential rationality as the basis for rationality in general. It also includes both synchronic and diachronic aspects of epistemic responsibility, forming a robust basis for overall epistemic responsibility.

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